

# East Village Magazine

October 2022



Photograph By

*Edwin D. Curtis*



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Commentary
What's at stake on the Nov.8 ballot?

By Paul Rozycki

It's common to refer to every upcoming election as "the most important election" of our times. Most of the time that's just political rhetoric to get people out to vote.

Yet, this Nov. 8 mid-term election may be the exception to that old rubric. Yes, it's just one more mid-term election, but there is a lot at stake this year. To make things even more complex, this is the first election after the redistricting process at the start of the decade. Thus, many voters and candidates will be in different districts than those in the past decade.

What's at stake this year?

National elections

On the national level the control of Congress is at stake. All 435 members of the house are up for reelection, and 34 of the 100 Senate seats are on the ballot this year. Over the last 50 years the party in the White House typically has lost 35 or more seats in the House and several Senate seats as voters turn on the party in power.

A loss of just five seats or more by Democrats in the U.S. House will give the Republicans the majority for at least the next two years. In the U.S. Senate the parties are split 50-50 with Vice-president Kamala Harris breaking any tie votes. This year 20 Republican senators and 14 Democratic senators are facing the voters. While the chances are slim for the Democrats to hold the House, they have some hope of keeping or expanding their working majority in the U.S. Senate.

A Republican majority in the House would certainly mean the end of the Jan. 6 Committee hearings and could lead to attacks on the Department of Justice as they pursue criminal charges against those involved in the Jan. 6 riots. Other key issues next year will be possible legislation on abortion

and the legitimacy of the 2020 election.

State elections

On the state level, Michigan will be electing a governor, secretary of state, and attorney general, as well as members of the state House of Representatives, state Senate, state school board, university boards, and a number of judicial positions.



Protestors at a Defend Roe March in downtown Flint on Saturday, May 14 (Photo by Tom Travis)

Most significant is the fact that several of those running for state-wide office are "election deniers" who claim, without evidence, that the 2020 election was stolen. That doesn't augur well for creating trust in future elections as we approach the 2024 contest. Nationwide, 36 of the 50 states are electing governors, 30 are selecting attorneys general, 27 are voting for the secretary of state, and more than 6000 legislative races are on the ballot.

Michigan ballot proposals

In addition, voters will decide three major proposals that would amend the Michigan Constitution.

Proposal 1

Proposal 1 combines two distinct issues: term limits and financial

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Cover: Michigan Renaissance Festival in Holly



**Photo of the Month: Costumed Michigan Renaissance Festival regulars dancing (Photo by Edwin D. Custer)**

## Education Beat ***Chaotic Ed Board meetings in September draw ire from Flint Schools staff***

*By Harold C. Ford*

*“The whole is less than the sum of its parts.” – from Edgar Morin’s La Methode La Nature de la Nature, 2017*

Only 55 seconds into the Flint Board of Education’s (FBOE) first of three September meetings – a Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting on Sept. 14 – the first parliamentary interjection, a point of information, was made by Trustee Laura MacIntyre. MacIntyre contended that Carol McIntosh, FBOE President, had not read Trustee Joyce MacNeal’s name during a roll call to open the meeting.

Initially, McIntosh ignored MacIntyre’s point of information. “You were supposed to recognize me,” MacIntyre insisted.

“Go ahead,” McIntosh finally replied. MacIntyre repeated to McIntosh that MacNeal’s name had been omitted from the roll call.

“I called her name,” McIntosh insisted.

Eventually, after nearly 90 seconds of meeting time, McIntosh called MacNeal’s name and the roll call was completed.

And so it went for nearly 12 hours at three FBOE meetings on Sept. 14, 20, and 21. Board members stumbled into and through hundreds of parliamentary interjections, public displays of intemperate behavior, and walkouts by FBOE members.

Meanwhile, 15 candidates have announced their intent to run for five available seats on the board in the upcoming Nov. 8 election. Candidates are listed at the website of the Genesee County Clerk’s office. (See detail below).

The tempestuous nature of the meetings resulted in an increased presence by the Flint Police Department at the board’s third September meeting. Two police cruisers – conspicuously at the ready, engines running – greeted attendees at the public entrance to the Sept. 21 meeting at Accel-

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## Education ...

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erated Learning Academy, 1602 S. Averill, Flint.

And, after months and months of chaotic school board meetings, the district's employees appear to have had enough. A raucous, larger-than-normal audience of about 50, mostly district employees, unleashed their ire on FBOE members during a time set aside for public commentary at the Sept. 21 meeting.

### Sept. 14

Amid the chaos of a meeting that extended past five hours, the FBOE responded affirmatively to the passionate pleas of its paraprofessional staff for improved compensation.

Several members of Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Local 517, pleaded with the board to reopen their contract.

"We are a valuable asset to any classroom," declared Elizabeth Peoples, a paraprofessional with 28 years of service to the district. "We provide instruction, we understand the needs and desires of our students, we nurture their greatness and their growth ... We open up classrooms as lead teachers, we sub in different classrooms, we use technology, we do whatever we are asked to support the scholars. ... It is really disheartening to realize that someone who works at a gas station, a grocery store, or a restaurant makes more than paraprofessionals."

"I earn \$12,000 a year,"



**FBOE Vice-President Chris Del Morone**

(Photo by Tom Travis)



**FBOE member Allen Gilbert**

(Photo by Tom Travis)

another paraprofessional stated. "Even with a stipend, I still could qualify for welfare."

**Eventually, the board voted unanimously 6-0 to reopen contract negotiations with its paraprofessionals. Voting in favor: McIntosh; MacIntyre; McNeal;**



**Flint Board of Education (FBOE) in session during the September meeting**

(Photo by Tom Travis)

**Chris Del Morone, vice president; Linda Boose, secretary; and Allen Gilbert, trustee.**

At the one-hour mark, after a clash with MacIntyre, McIntosh

threatened to have MacIntyre removed from the meeting. Deterioration of the meeting's decorum was thenceforth punctuated by frequent parliamentary interjections, shouting, and loud banging of the board president's gavel.

"We're not hogs, we're not dogs," McNeal protested. "You don't have to bam like that. ... It's offensive."

At the 1:48 mark McIntosh threatened to have both McNeal and MacIntyre removed. By a 5-1 vote, FBOE members overrode McIntosh's attempt at removal.

McNeal and MacIntyre had launched broadsides at members of the FBOE that removed them from their treasurer and president positions respectively at the Aug. 17 meeting.

MacIntyre read from a prepared statement: "They [McIntosh, Gilbert, Del Morone, and the now-removed Green] do not have the best interests of the Flint Public Schools in mind." She said their conduct was "unethical, reprehensible, and a breach of public trust" and that she was a target of "slander, threats, and harassment." Referencing McIntosh, MacIntyre said she "collaborated and conspired a hostile takeover of this board," calling it "dubious at best, illegal at worst."

McNeal called the Aug. 17 removal of her and MacIntyre "illegal ... a coup."

An officer of the Flint Police Department, seated near the FBOE members, rose from her chair more than once, poised to take necessary action.

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## Education ...

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During 2:07 of meeting time – minus one hour of public comments from paraprofessionals and two hours of presentations by outside agencies – 109 points of order and 22 points of information were declared by FBOE members. That’s 131 parliamentary interjections in 187 minutes.

“I think the whole board is out of order,” Boose observed.

A 15-minute recess was declared at about 11:30 p.m. to allow tempers to cool, but the infighting continued on the meeting stage in front of the public and raised voices were audible from a room behind the meeting area as well. Several members left the building, denying the quorum needed to continue; the unfinished COW meeting was reconvened six days later.

### Sept. 20

Infighting and parliamentary interjections slowed the transaction of FBOE business once again at its second September meeting.

In a meeting that lasted for 3:38, 87 points of information and 61 points of order were declared by members of the board – 148 parliamentary interjections during 218 minutes.

An attempt to return MacIntyre to the vacant treasurer position failed by a 3-2 vote, with four affirmative votes needed for approval on a seven-person panel.

Danielle Green recently vacated the treasurer position and her seat on the board per an edict issued by Herman Marable, 67th District Court judge, in response to the alleged Mar. 23 assault by Green upon MacIntyre.

Voting for MacIntyre were:

MacIntyre; McNeal; Boose. Voting against: Del Morone; Gilbert.

“I feel I’ve been unfairly punished and prosecuted,” MacIntyre said.

MacIntyre’s subsequent motion to remove McIntosh as board president failed by a similar 3-2 vote.

MacIntyre charged the absent McIntosh with “holding this board and this district hostage. ... She [McIntosh] was going to take this district down.”

The board then voted 4-1 to rescind a motion passed in August to provide financial assistance for Green’s legal fees stemming from the alleged assault upon MacIntyre



**FBOE member Laura MacIntyre**  
(Photo by Tom Travis)



**FBOE President Joyce Ellis-McNeal**  
(Photo by Tom Travis)

in March. Voting to rescind were: MacIntyre; McNeal; Boose; Del Morone. Voting against rescission: Gilbert.

“If you’re going to pay her [MacIntyre’s] legal fees, former Trustee Green’s fees should be paid as well,” Gilbert argued.

MacIntyre said she deserved the district’s financial support as she was assaulted while carrying out

her duties as the board’s treasurer.

### Sept. 21.

After only 10 minutes of the Sept. 21 meeting, MacIntyre and McNeal walked out during an attempted presentation by Charis Lee, an attorney that had been doing legal work for the district for about a year.

Lee began her report by saying her firm had been paid \$57,960.27 in its first year of service to the district, from Sept. 2021 to Aug. 2022; The Williams Firm, previously employed by the district, had been paid \$429,932.41 in the prior year, July 2020 to June 2021.

Parliamentary interjections were launched at a fast and furious pace – 40 in all during the first 10 minutes of the meeting – an average of four during each minute of meeting time; all but seven interjections were made by MacIntyre and McNeal.

MacIntyre and McNeal insisted that the report by Lee was inappropriate. “It’s very disrespectful for you to bring this person [Lee] here,” McNeal charged.

After heated exchanges with McIntosh, MacIntyre and McNeal walked out of the meeting. The two were roundly booed by many members of the audience as they left the meeting.

Lacking four members required for a quorum to conduct business, the meeting was temporarily suspended.

“This is a circus!” shouted one member of the audience. “You should be ashamed of yourselves!” yelled another. “You are holding this district hostage!”

“We can go outside,” Gilbert said to an audience member. “I’ve

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## Education ...

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got something for you.”

Trustee Linda Boose then arrived at the meeting. A quorum thus established, the meeting continued with Lee making her report to the board.

Lee presented documents defending her billing practices that had been the target of ongoing criticisms from MacIntyre and McNeal. “Over the past year I have tried tremendously to make sure that the billing that you receive ... is well within what you need, not excessive,” Lee said.

Lee left the meeting at the end of her report. MacIntyre and McNeal then reentered.

### “You are the problem”

About halfway through the



**Dr. V. Stewart, Flint educator**

(Photo by HC Ford)

Sept. 21 meeting [at the 1:50 mark of the YouTube recording] during time set aside for public comment, the anger toward the board’s stumbling leadership was unleashed by district employees:

• Karen Christian, United Teachers of Flint (UTF), president: “I’m so disheartened by the conduct of this board. ... Every time we come to a meeting, there’s ridiculousness that happens – calling each other names, committing assaults, personal

political agendas, and not doing the work of the district for our students. ... I’m embarrassed and ashamed of the conduct here. The teachers would not tolerate this behavior from our students. ... This board is micromanaging everything that the administration is doing. ... It seems that you are the problem that’s keeping teachers from coming into this district. ... You don’t get to be disciplined; you get to be voted out. ... We’ve had enough.” Christian gave a Robert’s Rules of Order for Dummies book to each



**Heather Nassar, Flint educator**

(Photo by HC Ford)

FBOE member.

• Dr. V. Stewart, school psychologist, 30-year FCS employee: “Up until this point, I have been pretty proud of the Flint schools. ... My concern is that with your behavior you are driving children, teachers, and families away from Flint. ... When a fight breaks out at a football game, they can say,



**Flint educator Felicia Naimark**

(Photo by HC Ford)

‘Oh, we’re just acting like the board.’ ... It is critical that you

represent the best of us, not the worst. ... Please do better; it is critical for our survival. ... It’s not the water that’s hurt us as much as you are. ... Psychologically, you’re killing us.”

• Heather Nassar, teacher, 24-year Flint Community Schools (FCS) employee called the board’s behavior “unacceptable and unprofessional.” She said the board’s response to infrastructure needs was slow, inadequate, and detrimental to staff and students.

• Felicia Naimark, speech pathologist, FCS employee: “I have never seen a board or meetings run as horribly as these are. The time that it takes to get nothing done is unbelievable.” Naimark called the Sept. 19 meeting a “travesty; board members walking out, infighting, arguing between people, points of order, points of information improperly used. ... This is wasting the time of our community.” Naimark said the payment of legal fees for board members would be better spent on the district’s staff and students.

• Bruce Jordan, union official who represents teachers in 10 Genesee County districts, called Flint board meetings “a public travesty, a sham ... a complete embarrassment ... a laughing stock.” He advised those in attendance: “If you want a change, Nov. 8 is coming, Vote.”

The three September meetings of Flint’s public-school board ended after a total of nearly 12 hours.

### 15 running for FBOE seats in Nov. 8 election

Fifteen candidates have announced their intent to run for five available seats on the Flint’s school board in the upcoming Nov. 8

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# Commentary ...

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**disclosure.** The first part of the proposal would change the current term limits and allow state lawmakers to serve a total of 12 years either in the House or the Senate. Currently lawmakers are limited to three two-year terms in the House and two four-year terms in the Senate. A second part of Proposal 1 would require the governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state, attorney general and all state House members and Senators to file annual reports disclosing their income, assets, liabilities, and positions held outside of government.

Michigan is one of only a few states lacking significant financial disclosure laws.

## Proposal 2

**Proposal 2, called Promote the Vote, would require a number of actions to make it easier to vote.** It would require nine days of early in-person voting, provide state-funded absentee drop boxes throughout the state, (one for every 15,000 voters), provide postage for absentee ballots and applications and allow military and overseas ballots to be counted if they were postmarked by Election Day. It would also bar harassment at the polls, allow private donations to fund election operations, as long as they are disclosed and it would require that post-election audits be conducted only by election officials.

## Proposal 3

**The proposal getting the most attention is certainly Proposal 3, which would provide a constitutional guarantee of a women’s right to an abortion and “a fundamental right to reproductive freedom.”** It would repeal the 1931 law that made it a felony to provide an abortion to a woman. After the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe

v. Wade a few months ago, this proposal has garnered over 750,000 signatures, a record number, and many expect it to be a major factor in driving up turnout on the midterm elections. The Supreme Court’s action on abortion has become a major issue in many campaigns nationwide; Proposal 3 makes it even more significant in Michigan’s election this year.

## Local elections

On the local level, Flint will elect a mayor and voters in Genesee County will choose nine county commissioners, as well as township officials, judges, city council members, school board members and a number of millages and proposals.

## The Flint mayoral race

In Flint the major contest is non-partisan and will elect a mayor for a four-year term. It’s the first full term under the new city charter. After a three-person primary, this year’s election is a rematch pitting incumbent Mayor Sheldon Neeley and former Mayor Kar-



Campaign signs for former Mayor Karen Weaver and incumbent Mayor Sheldon Neeley

(Photo by Paul Rozycki)

en Weaver against each other.

Three years ago Neeley beat Weaver by a margin of just 205 votes, and expectations are that this year’s contest may be equally close.

In addition to the charges about who could best handle the water crisis, crime, or blight, Neeley has been accused of boosting his resume, claiming that he had earned a college degree from Saginaw Valley State University, when in fact he hadn’t. He blamed the error on a staffer, and it remains to be seen how large a role it may play in the election.

## What else is on the ballot?

There’s a lot to vote on this year, but here’s a brief outline of what will be on the ballot Nov. 8.

## Governor: Gretchen Whitmer (D) v. Tudor Dixon (R)

Though Michigan has not failed to give a governor a second term for more than forty years, the partisanship of our times and the turmoil over the governor’s response to the pandemic, along with controversy about Roe v. Wade could still make this a competitive race.

Incumbent Democrat Gov. Gretchen Whitmer is facing Republican Tudor Dixon, who won her party’s nomination in August. Dixon defeated four other candidates handily after getting a last-minute endorsement from former president Donald Trump. At one point there were as many as 10 candidates seeking the Republican nomination, but five were disqualified prior to the August primary for invalid signatures. At the

moment polls give Whitmer a lead and she has a significant advantage in campaign funds.

Also running are minor party candidates; Libertarian Party, Mary Buzuma; U.S. Taxpayers Party, Donna Brandenburg; Green Party, Grant Hogan; and

Natural Law Party, Daryl Simpson.

## Secretary of State: Jocelyn Benson (D) v. Kristina Karamo (R)

Incumbent Democrat Jocelyn Benson is facing Republican Kristina Karamo, who has often claimed that the 2020 election was invalid and fraudulent. Also running are minor party candidates, Libertarian Gregory Stempfle; U.S. Taxpayers Party, Christine Schwartz; Green Party, Larry Hutchinson Jr.

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# Commentary ...

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## Attorney General: Dana Nessel (D) v. Matthew DePerno (R)

Incumbent Democrat Dana Nessel is being challenged by Republican Matthew DePerno in the race for attorney general. Like Karamo, DePerno has often



**Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer**

(Photo by Tom Travis)

argued that the 2020 election was fraudulent; also, he faces potential criminal charges over his actions following the election. The minor party candidates running for the attorney general position are; Libertarian Party, Joseph McHugh Jr., and U.S. Taxpayers Party, Gerald Van Sickle.

## U.S. Representative: Dan Kildee (D) v. Paul Junge (R)

In the 8th Congressional District, Democratic incumbent Dan Kildee is running for his sixth term and is facing Republican Paul Junge. The newly created 8th Congressional District runs from Genesee County up to Bay County and includes parts of Midland County. Based on past voting results it leans more Republican than the old 5th District that was Dan Kildee's base for most of the last decade, and it may be the most competitive race Kildee and the Democrats have seen. Both candidates have invested heavily in media campaigns.

The minor party candidates running in the 8th District are, Libertarian Party, David Canny, and Working Class Party, Kathy Goodwin.

## Michigan State Senate

There are 38 members of the Michigan State Senate. They serve four-year terms and are limited to two terms.

### **27th State Senate District: John Cherry (D) v. Aaron Gardner (R)**

The newly drawn 27th State Senate District includes the northern two-thirds of Genesee County, including the City of Flint, Flushing, Swartz Creek, and Burton. Incumbent Democratic Senator Jim Ananich is term-limited. Incumbent Democratic state Representative John Cherry is facing Republican Aaron Gardner for Ananich's Senate seat.

## Michigan House of Representatives

There are 110 members of the Michigan State House. They serve two-year terms and are limited to three terms.

### **The 68th state House District: Cheri Hardmon (D) v. David Martin (R)**

The newly-drawn 68th state House district includes much of south-eastern Genesee County, Burton,



**Congressman Dan Kildee speaking at a press conference Flint**

(Photo by Tom Travis)

Davison, and a part of northern Oakland County. Democrat Cheri Hardmon is challenging Republican incumbent David Martin.

### **The 69th State House District: Jasper Ryan Martus (D) v. Jesse Couch (R)**

The newly-drawn 69th District covers much of northwest Genesee County

Democrat Jasper Martus is facing Republican Jesse Couch for the state House seat. Libertarian Adam Childress is also a candidate in the 69th District.

### **The 70th state House District: Cynthia Neeley (D) v. Tim Butler (R)**

State House District 70 includes all of the City of Flint.

In the heavily Democratic City of Flint incumbent Democrat Cynthia Neeley is facing Republican Tim Butler.

## State Supreme Court

Voters will be electing two justices to the State Supreme Court for eight-year terms. Incumbents Richard Bernstein and Brian Zahra are facing challenges from Kyra Bolden, Paul Hudson and Kerry Morgan.

## State Board of Education and University Boards

Voters will also be electing two members to the State Board of Education, as well as the governing boards of the University of Michigan, Michigan State University, and Wayne State University.

## Genesee County Commission

There are nine members on the Genesee County Commission and they serve two-year terms.

**District 1:** (north east Flint city), Incumbent Democrat Bryant Nolden, is facing Republican Steven Cousino.

**District 2:** (central and south Flint city) Democratic incumbent Charles Winfrey

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# Commentary ...

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is running against Republican Lynette Robinson.

**District 3:** (Burton, Davison Township) Democratic incumbent Ellen Ellenburg is facing Republican Nicholas Goyette.

**District 4:** (Mundy Township, Grand Blanc Township) Democratic incumbent Domonique Clemons is facing Republican Amy Miller.

**District 5:** (Grand Blanc City, Atlas Township) Incumbent Democrat James Avery is facing Republican Teri Lynn Chambers.

**District 6:** (Gaines, Argentine, Fenton Townships) Incumbent Republican Shaun Shumaker is the only candidate in the race. There is no Democratic candidate.

**District 7:** (Montrose, Vienna, Thetford, Mt. Morris Townships) Democrat Martin Cousineau is running against Republican Lynn Culver. The incumbent commissioner, Debra Newman did not file for another term.

**District 8:** (Flushing, Clayton, parts of Flint Townships) Republican incumbent Meredith Davis is being challenged by Democrat Dale Weighill.

**District 9:** (Genesee, Forest, Richfield Townships, Davison city) Democrat Michelle Davis is facing Republican Sue Hopper. Incumbent Democrat Gary Peppin is not running.

## Judicial elections

Voters will also be electing a judge for the 7th Circuit Court District in a non-partisan race. Circuit Court judges serve six-year terms. Those running are Mary Hood, and Dawn Weier. Several other judges are running unopposed for their positions.

## School Board elections

Most area school boards are electing members as well. In Flint five members are to be elected and 15 candidates have filed to run for the Flint Community School Board, which has faced much turmoil and conflict recently. School boards used to be quiet, non-controversial elections, but conflicts over Critical Race Theory, gender roles, and the pandemic have often made them the center of controversy.

In a number of the local races slates of candidates have come together with the hope of being elected as a team. Some are backed by the Democratic Party, some by the Republican Party, others simply geared towards working together.

In Flint Michael Clack, Emily Doerr, Melody Releford, Terae King Jr. and Dylan Luna are running together as a team.

The others running in Flint are: incumbent Linda Boose, Claudia Perkins, Lakeisha Tureaud, incumbent Carol McIntosh, incumbent Chris Del Morone, Audrey Young, Leslie Haney, Casey Calvert, incumbent Allen Gilbert and Donyele Darrough.

## Mott College Board

Mott Community College is also electing trustees. Incumbents Art Reyes and Anne Figueora are facing challenges

from Wendy Wolcott and Art Marden, for a full six-year term. Rebecca Garske, Jeffrey Swanson, and Beth Cooper are running for a two-year term.

## Township elections and city elections

Elections are also being held for several positions in Flint, Mt. Morris, Richfield and Vienna Townships. The cities of Linden, Montrose, Mt. Morris, Swartz Creek and Davison, are holding elections for city council or mayoral elections. The villages of Otter Lake, Otisville, Lennon, Gaines and Goodrich are also electing local trustees and council members.

## Ballot proposals

In addition to the three state-wide proposals, many Genesee County governments and school districts will have millages and proposals on their local ballots. In Flint, voters will be voting on renewing a 2 mill police services millage, and Genesee County voters will be voting to renew a .09 mill veteran's service millage.

## Where to learn more

Voters can register to vote, view sample ballots, locate their polling place, and find more information with Voter Information Center at the Michigan Secretary of State's website [www.Michign.gov/sos/resources](http://www.Michign.gov/sos/resources). Information is also available at the Genesee County Clerk's website, or at the League of Women Voters [Vote411.org](http://Vote411.org) website.

**There's a lot at stake this year. Take the time to vote and make your voice heard.**

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



Voters lined up at Flint City Hall on election day

(Photo by Tom Travis)

THERE WILL BE 5 OPEN SEATS ON THE FLINT SCHOOL BOARD IN 2022,

These 5 Flint residents are working as a team to bring quality leadership back to our schools!



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# “Game changers” for City of Flint: Mayor touts blight, ARPA funds, proposed water credit, infrastructure

By Tom Travis

Hot topics for Flint residents are city employees’ pension fund, blight elimination, and the spending of ARPA (American Rescue Plan Funds) funds on Flint’s crumbling infrastructure. One plan for ARPA money distribution includes a \$300 water credit for residents, a proposal awaiting City Council consideration.

In a press conference Sept. 22, Mayor Sheldon Neeley addressed each of these items to a standing-room only crowd in the Dome, behind City Hall.

Neeley delivered a litany of accomplishments. Neeley, along with Director of Public Works (DPW) Director Mike Brown and Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Rob Widigan explained the accomplishments and future plans to tackle these critical areas.

## **\$220 million from the State will relieve threat to city coffers**

“We’ve changed the game inside the city of Flint,” Neeley said, referring to \$220 million from the State of Michigan budget towards city employees pension fund that was quickly bankrupting the city. Neeley referred to the underfunded pension fund as “the ‘grim reaper’ over the city of Flint.”

With the additional \$220 million from the State Treasury, the city will be able to allow critical city services to continue, Neeley explained. Without the infusion of State funds many critical services would be affected because the city would be required to pour funds into the mandated pension payment. CFO Widigan explained that the city has “a moral” and “a constitutional mandate to fulfill our promise to retirees,” as reported by East Village Magazine in an Aug. 8, 2022 article.



**Flint Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Rob Widigan addressing Sept. 22 Flint City Council meeting Mayor Neeley at right**

(Photo by Tom Travis)

Flint’s pension funding has been a problem for more than fifteen years, Widigan began. “The \$220 million will move the city from crisis to recovery,” he said. This has been made possible “through prayer, planning and partnership,” he added, explaining a “structural deficit” is when a city spends more than it brings in in taxes.

Displayed on a screen behind Widigan was the projected “structural deficit” numbers Flint would have endured if not for the \$220 million from the State. In 2019 the revenue was \$56 million with \$52 million in expenses rising to \$58 million in revenue to \$71.1 million in 2022.

Projected for 2024 was \$56 million in revenue and \$76 million in expenses. “The Emergency Managers (EM) kicked the can down the road and they made no attempt to address this issue for the residents,” Widigan asserted, referring to the city’s period of state fiscal control by four emergency managers over seven years including the water crisis era.

Initially the state budget called for \$170 million to fund Flint’s growing pension budget, but state legislators worked to add \$50 million.

bringing the total to \$220 million. The added \$50 million is specifically designated for all municipalities in Genesee County, including Flint, to help them reach a 60 per cent funded ratio. Previously Flint’s pension budget was funded at 26 per cent.

The influx of the \$220 million from the State will lower Flint’s annual pension payment to \$18 million from \$32 million annual payment.

## **Pipe replacement “90 percent finished”**

According to the city’s website 28,500 lines originally needed to be replaced and 27,000 have been completed. Neeley said the lead line replacement is 90 per cent complete. “There are crews on the ground now working to replace lead lines.” LGC Global of Detroit has contracted with the city of Flint for \$17.8 million to complete the lead line replacements and restorations.

Lead line replacements and restorations began in 2016, two years after the Flint Water Crisis emerged. A line of contractors have been involved with lead line replacement in the ensuing years, including Rowe Engineering beginning in 2016, Rowe was replaced by retired National Guard General Michael McDaniel in 2017. Finally, the embattled AECOM was contracted at the end of 2017. According to DPW Director Brown restorations are set to begin this week, September 26.

The city’s website claims the lead level is at 7 ppb (parts per billion) far below the acceptable federal level of 15 ppb. A full progress report on the Flint water can be viewed at this link:

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# Game Changers ...

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[www.cityofflint.com/progressreport](http://www.cityofflint.com/progressreport).

DPW Director Brown explained that the testing of water that is presently being conducted by the city is only on unreplaced lines, lines that are still lead, not copper. "If you have copper lines they're not being tested," he said, adding that both businesses and households are being tested.

## Secondary line brings Flint water from Lake Huron

Touting the completion of a secondary water line, Brown noted the recent GLWA (Great Lakes Water Authority) water line break necessitated the Flint Water Department to use the newly completed water line. The new secondary water line pulls water from Genesee County Drain Commission, which gets it from Lake Huron.

The Mayor presented a video, also available on the city's website, which depicts the process of how Flint receives water from Lake Huron. The video can be viewed at this link: [www.cityofflint.com/no-boil-water-advisory-for-city-of-flint-thanks-to-secondary-water-source](http://www.cityofflint.com/no-boil-water-advisory-for-city-of-flint-thanks-to-secondary-water-source)

Flint's secondary water line was approved back in 2018 by EGLE and the EPA. The approval of the contract was embattled between city administration officials and city council until 2021. The completed secondary line involves nearly seven miles of pipe in northeastern Genesee County, from Frances Road to the new Chemical Feed Building on the Flint Water Plant campus at 4500 N. Dort Hwy.

The city of Flint's main source of water is through GLWA. In 2017 the city council approved, by a 5-4 vote, a 30-year contract to purchase water

through GLWA, until the year 2047. The GCDC provides a secondary water source to the city through the newly completed secondary water line. Both GLWA and GCDC's initial source of water is Lake Huron.

## ARPA funds are "a game changer" for Flint – Mayor Neeley

Neeley touted the federal ARPA funds are a "game changer" for Flint. He announced community input from residents is being considered as a spending plan developed for the ARPA funds.

The federal government announced in April 2021 that Flint, along with many other municipalities across the country, would receive \$94.7 million in stimulus funds. The city of Flint has received more than \$47 million in two payments since



Mayor Sheldon Neeley addressing Sept. 22 Flint City Council meeting

(Photo by Tom Travis)

2021 and has set out to allocate how those funds should be spent.

In January 2022 city council approved a one-year, \$1.150 million contract with Detroit compliance firm, Ernst & Young. Ernst & Young will assist the city in assuring it meets the criteria for using the ARP funds. Guidelines have been detailed by the federal government but leave some room for interpretation.

In June 2022 the Mayor's plan for how to use the money was presented to City Council. The Mayor's plan calls for \$16 million ARPA funds to be used for blight removal with an additional \$8 million coming from Genesee County coffers.

According to Michael Freeman, CEO of Genesee County Land Bank, additional funds for blight elimination will be leveraged from philanthropists/foundations, state, federal and land bank contributions amounting to \$45 million towards blight elimination. Freeman spoke with EVM after the press conference by text message.

The Mayor's ARPA spending plan includes, according to CFO Widigan: \$400,000 for equipment used in blight elimination, \$2.7 million for premium pay for Flint's essential workers, \$450,000 for Community Help Center "to ensure water and food distribution."

Widigan added that Hasselbring and Brennan Community centers will receive, in total, \$1 million with an additional \$750,000 in funding from the C.S. Mott Foundation. Hasselbring Center will receive \$450,000 and the Brennan Center will receive \$300,000 from C.S. Mott Foundation grant. Also, the water line replacement along Miller Road, in Flint's Eighth Ward, will use \$2.2 million from ARPA funding, Widigan announced.

The ARPA spending plan also calls for a \$300 water credit for each Flint water customer. This credit would total \$8.6 million of the ARPA's \$94 million funds. The credit was approved by city council at its last September meeting.

The complete ARPA spending plan can be viewed at [www.cityofflint.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Flint-MI-ARPA-Pre-sentation.pdf](http://www.cityofflint.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Flint-MI-ARPA-Pre-sentation.pdf).

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## Education ...

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election. Candidates are listed at the website of the Genesee County Clerk's office.

Nine candidates are running for three spots; all are full six-year terms: Linda Boose; Chris Del Morone; Emily Doerr; Dylan Luna; Carol McIntosh; Claudia Perkins; Melody Relerford; Lakeisha Tureaud; Audrey Young.

Four candidates are running for a one spot, a partial term ending December, 2024: Kasey Calvert; Michael Clack; Allen Gilbert; Leslie Haney.

Two candidates are running for one spot, a partial term ending December, 2026: Donyele Darrough; Terae King.

EVM has reached out to all 15 candidates to provide information for candidate profiles. Readers can expect online profiles in about two weeks by mid-October.

\* \* \* \* \*

The remaining announced meetings of the Flint Board of Education in 2022 are Oct. 12 & 19, Nov. 9 & 16, Dec. 14 & 21. Meetings can be viewed remotely or in person. Meetings start at 6:30 and are held at the ALA building, 1602 S. Averill, Flint, MI 48503. Additional details are available at the district's website: [www.flintschools.org](http://www.flintschools.org).

Editor's Note: Any descriptions of Flint school board meetings by East Village Magazine, past or present, can be verified by accessing audiovisual recordings available at YouTube.

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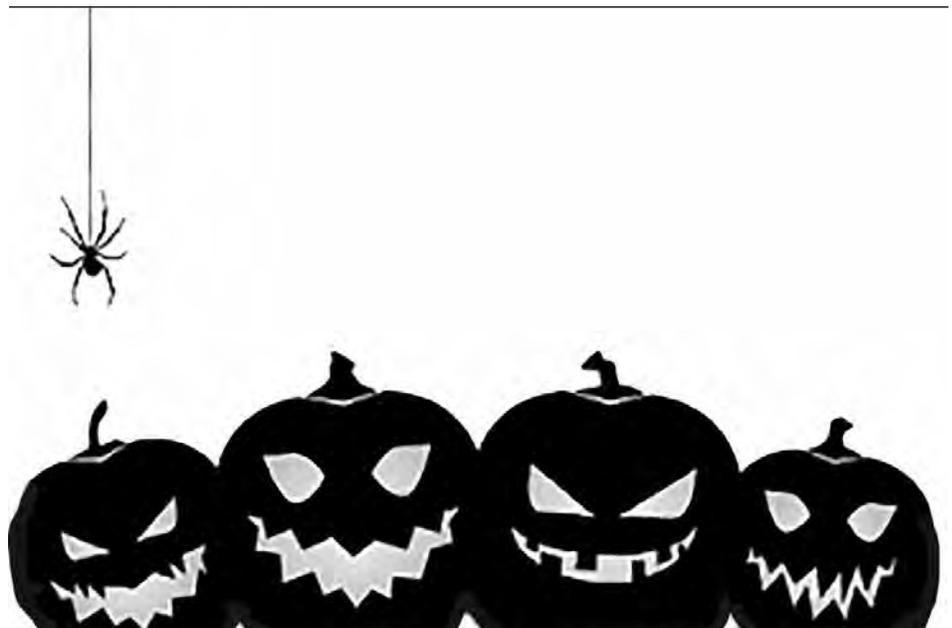
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**Tickets at [www.SloanLongway.org/AfterHours](http://www.SloanLongway.org/AfterHours)**



## Game Changers ...

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### New council president supports \$300 water credit

EVM spoke with new city council president Dennis Pfeiffer (Ward 8) after the press conference about the \$300 water credit proposed by the mayor and still needing council's approval.

"I don't know where the council stands on it, but I am for it," Pfeiffer said. "One thing that many are talking about is the rising cost of many necessary items including natural gas. This money is pandemic-related, the inflation is pandemic-related, so this will help the community." He added, "I wish it was more."

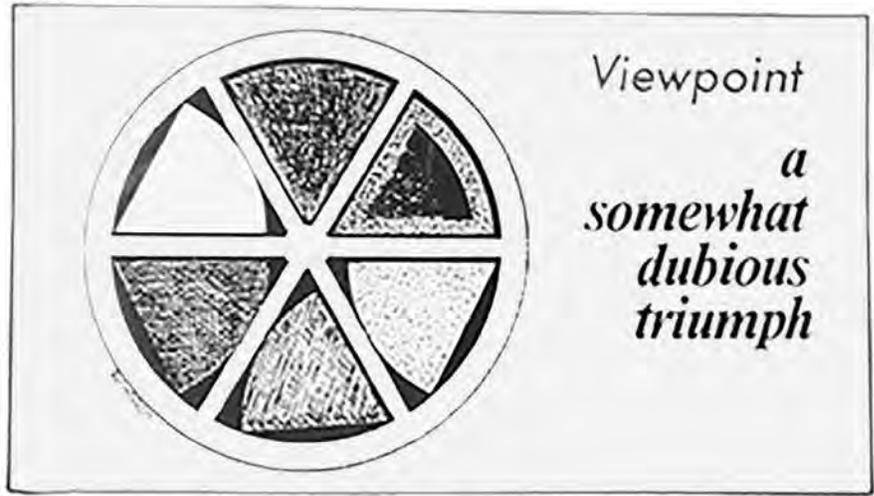
Council vice-president Allie Herkenroder (Ward 7) had been chairing city council meetings since City Councilperson Eric Mays (Ward 1) was removed by his council colleagues as president earlier in 2022. At last week's council meeting Herkenroder announced she is taking on a new job and will no longer be able to chair council meetings. Herkenroder will remain on the council and will remain vice-president. After her announcement the council elected Pfeiffer as council president.

"I hope to bring a level of leadership to move the city forward. I'm humbled to serve," Pfeiffer said.

### Jackson, MS and Benton Harbor join the ranks of municipal water being poisoned

In a poignant moment, Neeley suggested that Flint has prayers, guidance and support to both Jackson, MS and Benton Harbor, MI who have recently experienced water infrastructure catastrophes. He recalled the progress in Flint's water crisis but noted that it's not complete yet.

EVM Managing Editor Tom Travis can be reached at [tomtravis@gmail.com](mailto:tomtravis@gmail.com).



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triumph

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# Review

## **Flint Repertory Theatre kicks off 2022-23 season with *Death of a Salesman***

*By Patsy Isenberg*

Arthur Miller's 1949 *Death of a Salesman* opened Sept. 23 to a full house of enraptured theatergoers at Flint's Repertory Theatre (The Rep). For this opening night of the new season food and drinks were served before the play began and a champagne toast was offered afterward -- perhaps to help salve the gloomy effect of the plot.

At the least, the play was powerfully delivered with expert directing by the Rep's Artistic Director Michael Lluberes, and acted superbly by Lewis Stadler as Willy Loman; Carolyn Gillespie as Willy Loman's wife; Michael Lopetrone as Loman's elder son Biff; and Kevin O'Callaghan as Happy, the younger son.

What is the significance of Willy Loman's troubled character that speaks so poignantly to us today, 73 years later?

It's a play the viewer might want to look away from, in this era of despair and "quiet quitting." Is it because it reminds us of a step toward society's current state in which many of us feel futile?

Is it that Loman seemed to be headed into senility? The term "dementia" wasn't common at that time and it's not mentioned in the play. But the confusion Loman experiences is so well dramatized here and his many flashbacks and going off mentally from the conversations that are actually taking place indicate possible dementia. Or is it more? Is he tormented by the depression, by the meaningless of life, by the seeming uselessness of effort? Or was Loman's inner life as portrayed in the play just a way for Miller to allow the audience or reader to get into his head and his past?

Certainly *Death of a Salesman* suggests more than simply the choice to show how difficult it is to work as a salesman, and Loman's obsession to succeed at it, but eventually failing. Still, Arthur Miller avoided more symbolic interpretations. In a quote included in the Rep's program, Miller wrote in the introduction to his "Collected Plays" (Cresset Press,



**Lewis J. Stadler as Willy Loman and Carolyn Gillespie as Linda Loman**

(Photo by Mike Naddeo courtesy of The Rep)

1958) "Probably the most succinct reaction to the play was voiced by a man who, on leaving the theatre, said 'I always said that New England territory was no damned good.'"

But you may need to see the play again to really get what Willy Loman means to us in 2022.

Director Lluberes says it has "been a tremendous joy to work on one of the greatest American plays of all time with this group of extraordinary artists. Arthur Miller's timeless masterpiece is as relevant today as it ever was, and we're so thrilled to share it with you."

The play opened on Broadway in 1949 and continued for 742 performances. It won the Tony Award for best play, a Pulitzer Prize for Drama, and the

New York Drama Critics' Circle Award. The supposed "anti-American" tone in its plot prompted the House Committee on Un-American Activities to call upon Miller to testify.

Miller said in his testimony "I am not a fictionalist. I reflect what my heart tells me from the society around me. We are living at a time when there is great uncertainty in this country ... I am devoted to what is going on. The hardest thing to do is to tell what is going on."

This reviewer saw one of the many screen versions years ago and again tried watching the Dustin Hoffman portrayal of the main character, Willy Loman, again a few days before the Flint performance.

But I abandoned it halfway through being easily distracted. Seeing it on-stage is probably best. This is especially true at The Rep's Elgood Theatre. The set and the actors are just a matter of feet from the

audience. The sound is clearer, you see the actors' shadows and movement of the costumes, and even hear their footsteps. No piece of dialogue is missed.

Despite the small footprint available at The Elgood, the set built for this production under the direction of Shane Cinal (Scenic Designer) worked exceptionally well.

The play moves through several scenes, but lighting and sound by Chelsie McPhilimy (Lighting Designer) and Matt Coggins (Sound Designer) allow for the quiet and quick rolling in of pieces of furniture with hardly a break in the viewer's attention. Stage Manager Melissa Nathan, was probably challenged with that action. Choosing

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## Review ...

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to have the actors look in a different direction works as a signal to the audience that the location has changed. The main set manages to show several different rooms in the Loman house and even the neighboring buildings in New York as a backdrop, suggesting where the characters live.

Main character, Willy Loman, is played by Lewis J. Stadlen whose resume includes many Broadway roles, Tony Award nominations, and award wins such as Drama Desk, Outer Critic Circle and *Irish Times*. He also has acted on screen in such works as *The Verdict*, *To Be or Not To Be*, *In & Out* and as Dr. Fried on *The Sopranos*.

Willy Loman was a challenging role that Stadlen always hoped to play. He inhabited the character extremely well.

The three other primary roles were also cast well. They must have found this emotional drama quite challenging.

Carolyn Gillespie as Willy's wife Linda Loman has Flint connections. Gillespie is professor emerita of University of Michigan - Flint, having been on the theater faculty from 1987 to 2011. Her resume includes a nomination for a Michigan Distinguished Professor award in 2008. She has directed and acted in many plays over the years. In fact, as the program notes, 40 years ago Gillespie made her directorial debut with *Death of a Salesman*. Gillespie also holds an MFA in Acting from Stanford University.

Lopetrone, as Loman's elder son Biff, is a familiar face at The Rep because he played Tom in The Rep's *The Glass Menagerie* in April of 2019 and Randle P. McMurphy in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* in March of 2020. Both were major characters in the plays.

Happy, the younger son, was played by award-winning actor director, teacher and producer Kevin O'Callaghan. Currently O'Callaghan is teaching acting at Lansing Community College, but he's worked and studied in many other parts of the country.

Another very familiar face in this production is Rico Bruce Wade as Uncle Ben. This character appears to Loman often in the play and looks striking in a white suit (one of the many fine costumes created by Costume Designer Brandon R. McWilliams) as though in a dream, offering Loman advice; after all, the Uncle Ben character had died many years prior. Wade has been in many Rep productions including *The Boatman*, *Into the Woods*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and his most recently in *Happy Days*. Rico's film work includes *Sincerely*, *Brenda*, *FOUR-NINETY*, and *Songs for My Right Side*. He's also an instructor at Wayne State University and a teaching artist with several theatrical teaching organizations.



Michael Lopetrone as Biff and Kevin O'Callaghan as Happy

(Photo by Mike Naddeo courtesy of The Rep)

Detroit's Craig Ester has two roles in the play. A graduate of Cass Technical High School, Ester plays Howard Wagner (Loman's boss) and Stanley (the waiter). In high school he studied with Tony-award-winning Marilyn McCormick. Ester has a BFA from the Acting Program at Ball State University and the Mosaic Youth Theater of Detroit's Acting Company. He's had numerous roles prior to this current one mostly, but not all, in Shakespeare works. Ester is also Founder and Artistic Director of Break the Chain Theatre Company. This is his Flint Rep debut.

Actor David Wohl plays Loman's neighbor and business associate Charley. Willy and Charley have a difficult relationship due mostly to Willy's envy of Charley's success. Wohl has had roles on and off Broadway as well as Los Angeles. Wohl wants to thank "Lewis J Stadlen, Michael Lluberes and the Flint Rep, true believers all, for

carrying the torch."

Scott Anthony Joy plays Charley's son Bernard. Joy has also been in several Rep productions. He played the Balladeer and Lee Harvey Oswald in the one of The Rep's musicals, *Assassins*. He was also in *The Glass Menagerie*, *The Moon and the Sea* and read a role in *Tower: The Album* at a Rep New Works Festival. Joy's resume also includes several other roles around the country.

Three women cast in smaller but important roles in *Death of a Salesman* are:

School social worker in the Rochester School District, Sarab Kamoo, who shined as The Woman. Kamoo has many other roles to her credit in live theatre as well as parts on episodes of *Chicago Fire* and *Chicago P.D.* (two successful NBC series).

Marie Muhammad played Miss Forsythe, the lovely woman in the restaurant who captured the attention of Happy. Muhammad has to her credit roles in *Dreamgirls*, *The Odd Couple*, *The Scarlet Letter* and more staged and streaming productions.

Another cast member who plays two roles is Laura Nguyen. She plays both Jenny (Charley's secretary) and Letta (the other lovely woman that captured Happy's attention at the restaurant). Nguyen is currently a student at Lansing Community College and in the past has played in two Shakespeare works, *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet*. She also had a role in *Women Playing Hamlet* at Lansing Community College.

*Death of a Salesman* is sponsored by Nartel Family Foundation.

Performances of *Death of a Salesman* will continue at The Rep on Fri., Sat. and Sun. through Oct. 9. For more info visit [flintrep.org](http://flintrep.org). To purchase tickets visit [tickets.thewhiting.com](http://tickets.thewhiting.com).

EVM theater reviewer Patsy Isenberg can be reached at [pisenber@gmail.com](mailto:pisenber@gmail.com).

EVM consulting editor Jan Worth-Nelson contributed to this review. She can be reached at [janworth1118@gmail.com](mailto:janworth1118@gmail.com)

# THIS MONTH IN THE VILLAGE

A selection of events available to our readers is highlighted — beginning after our publication date of Oct. 2. It's a sampling of opportunities in the city. To submit events for our Nov. issue, email info about your event to [pisenber@gmail.com](mailto:pisenber@gmail.com) by Oct. 26.

## St. Cecilia Society of Flint Concert

Sun., Oct. 9

Introducing six new performing members: Clayton Stoker, organ, Andrew Cramer, piano, Amanda Rodman, voice, Ling Lo, piano Janet Walworth, piano, Michael Abbasspour, guitar

Free and open to the public, with reception to follow the performance.

MacArthur Recital Hall at the FIM

2025 E. Kearsley St., Flint

For more info contact Larry MacDonald, Director of Communication at 810-767-0418 or email [larnacd@yahoo.com](mailto:larnacd@yahoo.com).

## Death of a Salesman

Fri., Sat., and Sun., now through Oct. 9 (final performance) Evening performances (Fri and Sat.) at 8 p.m., matinées are at 2 p.m.

This production features Tony Award nominee Lewis J. Stadlen as well as local talent.

Tickets: \$20 to \$25 with 30% discount for Genesee County residents.

Flint Repertory Theatre's Elgood Theatre

1220 E. Kearsley St., Flint

For more info visit [flintrep.org](http://flintrep.org) or call 810-237-1530.

For tickets visit [tickets.thewhiting.com](http://tickets.thewhiting.com).

## Auditions at McCree Theatre

Tues. and Wed., Oct. 11-12, 7 p.m.

Casting for 'Living Fat,' Macree Theatre's upcoming production, includes roles for three males and three females, ages teen to adult. Opens Dec. 1 and will run each weekend through Dec. 17.

Please call 810-787-2200 with questions.

McCree Theatre

4601 Clio Rd., Flint

## Damouni Farms

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A large variety of you-pick or already picked apples, pumpkins, mums and cider are available

Damouni Farms Apple Orchard

2391 Reid Rd., Flint

email: [damounioffice@gmail.com](mailto:damounioffice@gmail.com)

## The Rocky Horror Picture Show

Thurs. Oct. 13, 8 p.m.

The 47th Anniversary Spectacular Tour will feature original cast member, Barry Bostwick. A shadow cast, audience participation and memorabilia display will be part of this special unedited screening.

Tickets: \$30-\$155 with V.I.P. Meet a7 Greet Add On, \$100. For more info visit [capitoltheatreflint.com](http://capitoltheatreflint.com) or call 810-237-7333.

For tickets visit [tickets.thewhiting.com/9754](http://tickets.thewhiting.com/9754).

## Fall Color Rides

Sat., Oct. 15, 10 a.m. to 12: p.m.

Enjoy a guided colorful tram ride through the For-Mar Arboretum and Nature Preserve sharing fall nature facts and history of the property. The tram is

wheelchair accessible and for all ages and abilities.

Pre-registration required by Oct. 10.

To register call 810-736-7100, ext. 6

Cost: \$5 per person, kids 2 and under are free.

For-Mar Nature Preserve & Arboretum

2142 N. Genesee Rd., Burton

## Halloween Tour

of Glenwood Cemetery and Arboretum

Sun. Oct. 16, 2 p.m.

Family-friendly costumes are encouraged.

For more info contact

Russ Buster Roberts, Director at 810-240-2759.

Glenwood Historical Cemetery & Arboretum

2500 W. Court St., Flint

## Faculty Concert—"This is Halloween"

Fri. Oct. 21, 7 p.m.

Harpist Brittany DeYoung will play a haunting solo and chamber pieces to celebrate Halloween.

Chilling music, traditional funeral marches, fall favorites, and music inspired by the works of

Edgar Allen Poe will be featured.

For ticket info, visit

[thewhiting.com/events/box-office](http://thewhiting.com/events/box-office).

MacArthur Recital Hall

1025E. Kearsley St., Flint

## Halloween at the FIA

Sat., Oct. 29, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Activities for kids will include going on a spooky scavenger hunt, trick-or-treating in the galleries,

and joining the teaching artists in the Art School.

Flint Institute of Arts

1120 E. Kearsley St., Flint

For more info call 810-234-1695

or visit [flintarts.org/event/12822](http://flintarts.org/event/12822)



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

## Village Life ...

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put up with my inept splashing of red paint all over everything.

An herb garden with six-inch deep fertile soil, now populated by (yes) parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme (and French tarragon and basil) Birds aplenty at three feeders: nuthatch, cardinal, chickadee, blue jay, mourning dove, titmouse, finch, woodpecker.

A neighbor who makes gorgeous bowls out of “reclaimed” blowdown trees – I love the concrete AND the metaphorical grace. He made one for us from a Bradford pear that toppled in our own back yard.

When we got COVID, one neighbor picked up our drugs at RiteAid. Another took care of our trash. Everybody kept in touch.

When that same neighbor’s power went out, he and his daughter came over and spent the night in our slant-ceilinged guest room, and it felt so good to have them here.

Sometimes I hear that same child practicing piano, and when she gave a recital at the Flint Institute of Music, I attended and sat beaming in the front

row. AMAZING kid!

We share tomato starts and dole out our successes: Juiettes, Romas and Early Girls, going from house to house as our bounties overwhelm.

We share dismay about groundhogs rude tunneling. Trying to capture one in a live cage, we caught a skunk instead, and in the midst of moderate hilarity, Larry cautiously freed him. And later, thank you Google, contributed human urine to the groundhog hole. How brilliant! That did it! No more groundhogs.

Kids actually ride bikes up and down the street on summer days and evenings.

A bunch of us rallied to clean up Gilkey Creek, which winds through and around the neighborhood and our resurrecting Pierce Park. After we cleared out crappy litter, styrofoam and syringes, we celebrated the herons and ducks, the minnows fluttering in the shallows, the 10 or 11 deer, the snapping turtle seen depositing eggs on the banks.

About a hundred of us sat on blankets and in our folding chairs at Pierce Park four Thursdays in August, enjoying live music and eating popsicles.

The other day, the first cool

autumn night the week after the cleanup and after Jazz on Wheels at the old Farmers’ Market, one of our neighbors invited us across the street to their back yard.

It’s a little piece of heaven, seasoned pine logs crackling in the “fire vessel” Larry calls a chiminea. I took a bottle of red wine and we doled it out into Ann’s beautiful pottery goblets. Cat Stevens soothed us quietly from a garage speaker, and we relaxed into a roaming conversation in the fragrant darkness, sharing gossip and laughs about life’s loveliness, heartaches and absurdity.

That night brought me full circle. Regardless of what I understood about life when I got to Flint in 1981, there is nothing richer or more affirming than the love and generosity of good neighbors, of relationships steeped in shared history and nurtured in understanding. This is what I know now about what matters in life – and what Flint has given. So when I die, I think there will be no bitterness: I lucked out when I landed in Flint.

EVM consulting editor Jan Worth  
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# Village Life

## ***Romance of city life sometimes falls short, but neighborly life can be full of grace***

*By Jan Worth-Nelson*

**W**hen I'm dying, will I be able to mutter to my grieving loved ones, hey! I'm glad I lived in Flint?

I know, I know, macabre thought ... but as fall crisps in with its inevitable melancholy reminders of the cycle of life and death, I find myself ruminating on mortal matters.

And this column seems to want to be about two answers to my big end-of-life question: first, the evolution of romantic illusions about city life; and second, my most cherished discoveries about what I love here now, in a very rich and satisfying present.

I always wanted to love the city I live in. It hasn't always worked here. Anybody who's lived in Flint for more than a decade understands the ongoing exasperations and – to be fair - hard-won rewards of trying to love this place.

Back in the 80s, when I arrived as a single woman with persistently romantic notions about city life, I was broke and attracted to the downtown arts scene that thrived amid the demolition of old edifices and the ruination of familiar landmarks. We were mostly all poor and drank way too much: I lived in a walkup on Avon Street, making do with my meager social worker pay and writing poems delivered in boozy backrooms of bars that no longer exist. So far so good, eh?

Now some of the Flint kids born during that searing era are grownups themselves writing about it: Kelsey Ronan, Connor Coyne, Sarah Carson, Tim Lane, Cat Batsios, among others. Four of those five recently performed their work, (with a dozen huge splay-legged nudes behind and around them – am I the only one not cosmopolitan enough to note how distracting – and interesting -- that was?) at Buckham Gallery.

I felt exceedingly old, but fascinated, listening to their thrilling, vivid take on how Flint's fractured, often violent, haunted and haunting years of the late 1900s and early 2000s imprinted themselves on these observant Flint natives.



**Jan's back yard herb garden**

(Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

What they took out of their Flint childhoods, as I was careening from bar to bar with my sheafs of erotic angst, marriages and love of trees, is something quite different. Some of them are annoyed anti-capitalists and just coming to terms with neighborhood-based PTSD. But also they are deeply, deeply attached to their material. The adults raising them weren't always reliable ... the realities of their environments were wrenching – but also, these kids were free range survivors, exploring abandoned corners of arsoned schools, the back doors of tagged railroad cars, the weeds and racoons around the river.

There's a sense of relishing the entropy and rot, which imbued some of them with brash realism and self-reliance. Some of them, like Connor Coyne, transformed that world of abandonment into something portentous and almost magical. Their Flinty cynicism is not evil but instead, endearingly honest and compassionate. And funny: Tim Lane's fictionalized accounts, in the Ben Hamper tradition, for example, are raucous and hilarious – and authentic. Somehow these writers have emerged with a big old streak of love and hope – for themselves, for the often screwed-up adults of their childhood, and for the wearied old city itself.

Meanwhile, I'm still here too, and I sat restlessly in my folding chair at the gallery, looking and then trying not to look at the formidable nudes, savoring just another Flint juxtaposition, among so many. It's almost too much, the material Flint has injected into me., dripping from the city's IV bag, so to speak, into my veins while I've aged and, let's assert, accepted the cure.

So here's the second part of my column. This is a celebration of neighbors.

I have gradually moved from that walkup, a reverse mecca from my origins, to a blessed block on a blessed street in a blessed neighborhood. Somehow, without having to leave the city I did not love, I found love anyway. The Fates sometimes laugh at me: SURPRISE!

So consider this partial list of my ongoing joys:

A compost pile now rich with humus, which my neighbor has taught me how to turn and season.

A newly painted front porch, implemented by that same neighbor who

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