

East Village Magazine

March 2024



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Commentary *Is Donald Trump a Marxist? Maybe, but which one?*

By Paul Rozycki

Trump and Karl Marx?

After several presidential primaries, it looks like the 2024 election will likely be a rerun of the 2020 contest between Democratic President Joe Biden and former Republican President Donald Trump. But while the candidates are familiar, their campaign rhetoric seems even more intense this time around.

One of Trump's common attacks is to claim that his opponents are Marxists or Communists. The charge resonates with his most avid supporters as he slams Democrats, liberals, social activists, establishment Republicans and many others with the label.

After one of his criminal indictments last year he was quoted as saying, "If the Communists get away with this, it won't stop with me. They will not hesitate to ramp up their persecution of Christians, pro-life activists, parents attending school board meetings, and even future Republican candidates."

And at a later Veteran's Day rally, Trump continued on the theme.

"We pledge to you that we will root out the Communists, Marxists, fascists, and the radical-left thugs that live like vermin within the confines of our country that lie and steal and cheat on elections," he said.

His most ardent supporters, such as Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA), have also echoed such sentiments. Yet, I suspect that Trump may be more than a little bit of a Marxist himself. The only question is, which one?

"The history of all previous societies has been the history of class struggles...Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes, directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat...Workingmen of all countries unite!"

— The Communist Manifesto"
by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

In many ways Trump's appeal follows the class warfare of Karl Marx, outlined in *The Communist Manifesto* of 1848. There Marx wrote, "The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains," as the working class, the proletariat, clashed with the upper class, the bourgeoisie.

Much of Trump's support comes from the working class, those without college education, rural voters, and those who feel dismissed by "the elite." That support is often led by Trump's attacks against the media, celebrities, universities, establishment Republicans like Mitt Romney, civil service government employees, and the "deep state."

How does one explain Trump's support from some union members, evangelical Christians, women, and a growing fraction of Hispanic and African-American voters, when much of his policies and personal qualities are in direct conflict with their values and interests?

Trump's support from those groups comes from divisions and

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Cover: The Cornwall Building, built in 1870, is the former home of Er Milner, a Flint businessman and one of the pioneers of lumbering in Michigan. The building sits at 624 S. Grand Traverse St. and currently houses multiple law practices. (Photo by Edwin D. Custer)



Photo of the Month: A new building goes up at Harrison and Third Streets. The structure will house apartments, offices, and a new YMCA location.
(Photo by Edwin D. Custer)

Education Beat ***Passed over by state in December, Flint public schools seek debt relief***

By Harold C. Ford

“Change must happen in Flint Community Schools, but we cannot do it alone.”

– Kevelin Jones, superintendent, Flint Community Schools, Jan. 26, 2024 press statement

Six financially distressed school systems in Michigan stand to benefit from debt relief legislation passed by the state legislature and signed into law by Governor Gretchen Whitmer in December 2023, but Flint Community Schools (FCS) is not among them.

Late last year, Michigan’s lawmakers approved \$114 million from the state School Aid Fund to pay off the legacy debts of several current and former school systems that faced serious financial distress. Districts in Pontiac, Benton Harbor, Muskegon Heights, and Ypsilanti will receive substantial help. Additionally, taxpayers in the former Willow Run and Inkster districts will get tax relief from the public indebtedness that remained after school closures in



Kevelin Jones, Flint Community Schools Superintendent

(Photo by Tom Travis)

those communities.

In a press statement on Jan. 26, 2024, FCS superintendent Kevelin Jones responded to being overlooked by the state.

“The situation in Flint Community Schools, with approximately \$56,093,404 in debt, with an operational deficit of \$14,420,492 ... serving 2,980 scholars, and roughly 900 with IEP’s (Individualized Education Programs for special needs students), is undoubtedly challenging,” he said, noting debt relief would bring “significant benefits” to the community and district. “First and foremost, debt relief would alleviate the financial burden on Flint Community Schools, enabling us to allocate more resources towards providing quality education and essen-

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tial services to the scholars we serve.”

Debt relief totaling \$114 million for six school systems

The debt relief package passed along party lines with unanimous support from Democrats and near-unanimous opposition from Republicans.

The Michigan House of Representatives passed the bill with a 56-54 vote strictly along party lines, and the bill passed in the Senate with a 21-17 vote. Only Senator Mark Huizenga (R-Walker) voted with the Dems.

Debt relief amounts will be made available to the six school systems starting Feb. 13 for the purposes listed below:

- Muskegon Heights School District: \$31.3 million for miscellaneous debts including an outstanding emergency loan balance and outstanding district bond debt;
- Pontiac City School District: \$18.4 million for an outstanding emergency loan balance;
- Benton Harbor Area Public Schools: \$10 million for an outstanding emergency loan balance;
- Ypsilanti Community Schools: \$5.5 million for an outstanding limited tax debt;
- Willow Run Community Schools (now closed): \$19.4 million for outstanding school bond loan balance or school loan revolving fund balance;
- Inkster Schools (now closed): \$12.1 million for outstanding school bond loan fund balance or school loan revolving fund balance.

The debt forgiveness awarded to the six school systems comes with stipulations, however. Within 12 months of receiving

the funding, the affected school systems must do the following:

- Develop and implement a plan for recruitment and retention of students;
- Develop and implement a capital improvement strategic plan for upgrade of infrastructure;
- Develop and implement a strategic plan to recruit and retain teachers;
- School board members are to participate in three training sessions annually that focus on school finances;
- Identify and implement strategies, in cooperation with the local intermediate school district (ISD), to reduce dropout rates and increase graduation rates;
- Also in cooperation with the local ISD, develop strategies to improve attendance rates and reduce the number of students who are chronically absent;
- Document by Sept. 30, 2024 that the aforementioned requirements have been met.

Why not Flint?

In January and early February, East Village Magazine (EVM) reached out to more than a dozen local and state officials with the following query: “Why was FCS not included in the debt relief package which became law in December?”

By press time, only one direct response to EVM’s inquiry was provided. Michael Rice, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, said in part:

For many years, the state inadequately and inequitably funded school districts, particularly those with disproportionately large percentages of poor children, students with disabilities, and/or English learners. There have been several school finance studies in the last decade that have said the same

thing ... While we have made significant strides to address this 10-year period of underfunding, particularly in the very strong state education budgets of the last two years ... we have a long way to go before our districts are adequately funded.

Rice also noted that the district’s “bonded debt reduces the extent to which the district can fund capital expenditures” like

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Ed Beat ...

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new roofs, boilers, chillers, and new schools.

“To permit Flint Community Schools to get a fresh start and to potentially increase resources for Flint students and staff, the debt should be eliminated, as it will be, and should be,” he concluded. He did not comment on how that debt elimination would happen.

While Superintendent Jones’ Jan. 26 press statement did note the administration was



Flint Board of Education Trustee Melody Relerford

(Photo by Tom Travis)

“not sure why FCS was not considered for debt relief,” no direct response was received from him or the district’s communication specialist, who said only that the superintendent would be out of town until Feb. 9.

Steve Tunicliff, superintendent of Genesee Intermediate School District (GISD), which provides support services for FCS, replied, “The decision around debt relief was made at the state level – I cannot speak

to ... why Flint Community Schools was not included.”

EVM otherwise received no direct responses from Governor Whitmer, State Senator John Cherry, State Representative Cynthia Neeley, nor seven other elected officials who voted in favor of the bill and commented in other publications.

Flint Schools Board of Education (FBOE) response

While state-level rationale for FCS exclusion from December’s debt relief package remains somewhat unclear, the Flint Board of Education seemed to suggest at least part of that exclusion had to do with the district’s oversized infrastructure.

During the Board’s Finance and Operations Committee on Feb. 1, trustees held considerable discussion on the district’s many vacant or underutilized properties and its desperate deficit-debt financial profile.

FBOE Vice President Michael Clack said the district is holding on to buildings it has “got to get rid of,” while Treasurer Dylan Luna equated the Board and administration to “slumlords” and said “the status quo is unacceptable.”

Trustees Melody Relerford and Terae King echoed that the Board needed to offload some of the district’s many vacant properties.

“We have an obligation to make sure we’re in the [financial]

black,” King said.

Laura MacIntyre, the Board’s assistant secretary-treasurer, dissented, saying instead that FBOE members were being “badgered” and “bullied” by “one or two” other unidentified board members who were “petty and petulant” and “beating a dead horse” about school closures.

“I don’t agree with closing buildings just to close buildings,” she said.

Despite MacIntyre’s statements, other education officials outside the Board have also warned FCS to “right-size” its building profile in the past year.

Nicole Blocker, senior vice president of commercial real estate consulting firm Plante Moran Realpoint (formerly Plante Moran Cresa), said “you only need half of the [existing] buildings” in a May 2023 appearance before the Board. Brian Jones, former FCS interim chief financial officer, told the trustees in October 2023: “Once that [COVID-relief] money dries up, if careful adjustments are not made, the district could be facing a financial cliff.”

Ultimately, the Board did not vote to close or sell any of the district’s properties during its Feb. 1 meeting, though it did vote to close Accelerated Learning Academy (formerly Scott School) in the 2026-27 school year during another meeting on Feb. 14.

According to reporting by the Detroit News, Superintendent Jones has asked state lawmakers to consider \$56 million in “emergency debt relief” for FCS in the next state budget.

Flint City Councilman Eric Mays dies at 65

By Kate Stockrahm



Councilman Eric Mays (Ward 1) speaks at a Mayoral Forum event in July 2022.

(Photo by Tom Travis)

Flint City Councilman Eric Mays has passed away at age 65.

The City of Flint confirmed the 1st Ward councilman's death late on Feb. 24, 2024 in a press statement that also noted the Flint City Hall flag would be lowered to half-mast in Mays' honor beginning Feb. 26.

"I am so going to miss My Colleague, My Friend," Councilwoman Tonya Burns posted to Facebook after the news broke. "The City of Flint lost the 'Real-est Councilman' in the world who spoke up and advocated for the least of these."

Mays was in his third term at the time of his death, winning

his council seat in 2013, 2017, and again in 2021.

The late councilman was well known for being an outspoken supporter of his ward, which sits at the northwest corner of the city and is home to some of Flint's lowest income residents, though he was also known for his boisterous behavior both within council chambers and without.

Following his first election win, Mays was arrested for alleged drunk driving and marijuana possession, with police reportedly finding him changing one of four flat tires while facing the wrong direction on Interstate 475. In his most recent term, Mays was elected

and removed from the council presidency, found guilty of disorderly conduct, amassed over 220,000 followers on TikTok, and passed away while fighting a three month suspension from his seat in court.

"Councilman Mays was not only a dedicated public servant but also a tireless champion for the people of Flint," Flint City Council President Ladel Lewis said in a Feb. 24 statement. "His unwavering commitment to the betterment of our community has left an indelible mark, and his absence will be deeply felt by all who had the privilege of knowing him."

Rozycki commentary ...

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resentment between those classes outlined by Marx.

During and after the 2016 election, Trump supporters expressed anger over Hillary Clinton calling them “a basket of deplorables” in a September 2016 campaign speech.

Despite the fact that few of Trump’s policies were aimed at helping the working class, resentment over that unfortunate phrase caused Trump supporters to rally around him in cult-like fashion, as they felt he was being attacked by “the elite establishment” of the media, the courts, and career politicians.

So is Donald Trump really a closet Bolshevik trying to rally the working class to shake off their chains as they challenge the oppressive elite capitalists? I doubt it. Most of the policies of this gold-plated, bombastic billionaire are aimed at helping people like himself, boosting his own ego, or keeping him out of jail rather than aiding any of the workers who support him.

But he may be a Marxist of a different stripe.

Trump and Groucho Marx?

It was Groucho Marx as Professor Quincy Wagstaff, in the 1932 movie “Horse Feathers” who sang:

*Your proposition may be good
But let's have one thing understood:
Whatever it is, I'm against it
And even when you've changed it
or condensed it
I'm against it*

The list of things that Trump has come out against is long and gets longer with every new tweet: Democrats, establishment Republicans, people with college degrees, the FBI, the Justice Department, a number of judges and courts, women, gay people, people with disabilities, the media, the election system, his own vice-president, The

Affordable Care Act, Social Security, Critical Race Theory, COVID vaccines, wind farms, solar energy, electric cars, immigrants, Mexicans, Muslims, NATO, veterans who are POWs, Taylor Swift, Nikki Haley, and almost anyone who is critical of him.

But there is one thing on his list that is deeply significant for this year’s election. Trump’s denial of the 2020 election results and his role in trying to overturn that election also highlight one more thing he is against: democracy.

On more than a few occasions Trump has shown a willingness to ignore the most basic elements of the Constitution, especially those that place limits on a president’s power, and ignore the traditions that have led to a peaceful exchange of that power for over 200 years.

He has said that he would be a “dictator for only one day” in a second term, but the events of Jan. 6, 2021 demonstrate the lengths he would go to in order to keep power, in spite of the law and the Constitution. They are an ominous warning of what a second Trump term could look like.

In the end, Groucho Marx may offer another insight for this year’s election.

Following his movie career, the comedian and actor hosted a televised quiz show called “You Bet Your Life” in the 1950s. That title may now be a perfect label for the 2024 election.

Whatever your views on the candidates this year and whatever misgivings you may have about them, it’s fair to say that this is one of the most significant and important elections in our lifetime. Take the time to learn what the real issues are, and don’t be distracted by the name calling, the latest insult, or the newest conspiracy theory on social media.

Just be sure to get out and vote. There is too much at stake in this year’s election.

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Kate Stockrahm joins East Village Magazine as new editor

By Jan Worth-Nelson

Kate Stockrahm, an experienced journalist already well-attuned to issues in the Flint community, has joined East Village Magazine (EVM) as editor, the publication's board of trustees have announced.

Stockrahm, a Dearborn, Mich. native, came to Flint in 2021 as a reporter at Flint Beat, part of the national Report for America program. In that role she developed the newsroom's economic development beat, covering affordable housing, brownfield redevelopment, business openings and blight elimination efforts.

She was promoted to associate editor, helping guide Flint Beat's coverage on government accountability, gun violence, and access issues for public services and projects. She also led journalist training efforts and the newsroom's solutions journalism work.

Stockrahm holds a masters degree from Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, where she focused on audio production, visual storytelling, and multimedia story design; and a bachelor's degree from the University



Kate Stockrahm is East Village Magazine's newest editor, replacing Tom Travis as of Feb. 1, 2024.

of Michigan — Ann Arbor, where she graduated summa cum laude in English Language and Literature with a minor in Latin.

During her tenure at Flint Beat, Stockrahm won several awards from the Michigan Press Association, for spot news, enterprise, and business reporting.

Paul Rozycki, a political commentator and president of the EVM board of trustees, said, "We expect that Kate Stockrahm's energy and skilled journalism will give East Village Magazine the ability to cover the news that matters to Flint and the surrounding community."

Stockrahm will supervise a staff of about ten citizen journalists in covering a range of city, school board, politics, nonprofit, neighborhood, sports, and arts and culture stories for EVM. She also will continue efforts to recruit and train writers in local community journalism.

A fuller version of this story, including an interview with Kate Stockrahm, can be found on eastvillagemagazine.com.

SEEKING WRITERS

East Village Magazine is searching for community journalists! Ideal candidates are curious, engaged Flint residents who want to help keep their neighbors informed of the local news that affects them most. EVM writers receive free training, story writing and editing support, and payment for each published story. (We also have pretty great snacks at our monthly writers meetings.) If you're interested in getting involved, please email us at eastvillagemagazineflint@gmail.com with the subject line "Community Journalist."

Christopher Paul Curtis, author and Flint native, wins lifetime achievement award

By Canisha Bell

In late January, acclaimed novelist and Flint native Christopher Paul Curtis received the 2024 Coretta Scott King – Virginia Hamilton Award for Lifetime Achievement.

The award is presented every even-numbered year to an African American author, illustrator, or author/illustrator who has made a significant contribution with their published books for children or young adults.

Curtis has authored eight novels, and is perhaps best known for childhood staples like “The Watsons go to Birmingham – 1963” and “Bud, Not Buddy,” though he has also penned magazine and newspaper articles as well as introductions to several prominent books over his decades-long writing career.

In an interview with East Village Magazine (EVM) following his lifetime achievement win, Curtis, who grew up on Flint’s southside, shared his reflections on his life and literary accomplishments thus far.

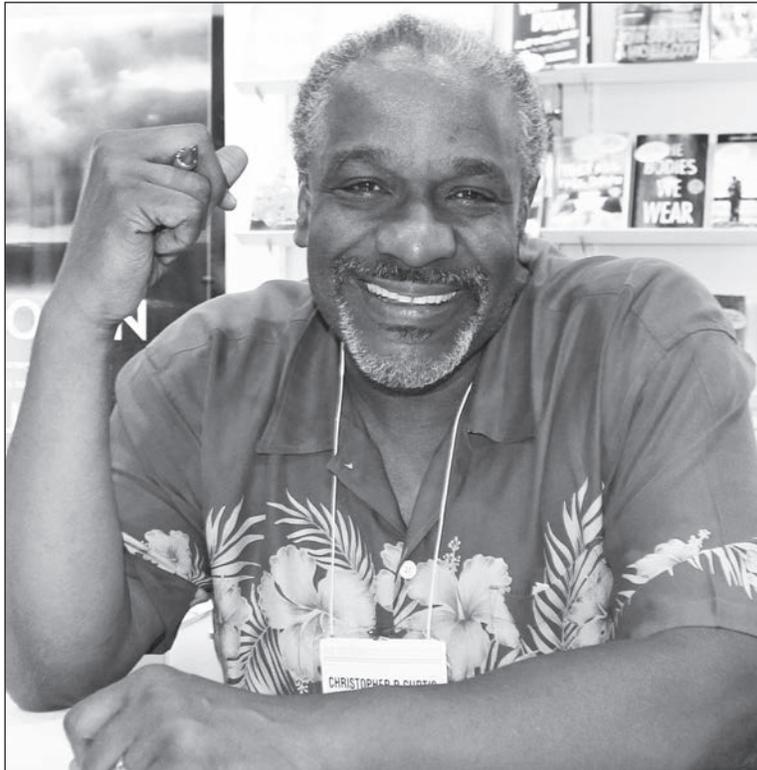
“The person who most influenced my writing is my mother,” the two-time Parents’ Choice Award winner said. “She gave me the best review I’ll ever have of anything I’ve written.”

Curtis described a time he brought home an article he’d been working on at school for his mom to read.

“She said the most encouraging thing: ‘I wish you hadn’t brought this home. They’ll think an adult wrote it,’” he said. “My

parents were always so proud.”

Curtis is the second oldest of five children, his parents both trailblazers in their own right. His father, Dr. Herman Elmer Curtis, was a chiroprapist by trade and the first Black production foreman at the Fisher Body Plant. His mother, Leslie Jane Curtis, was one of the first African Americans to be a



Novelist Christopher Paul Curtis

(Image courtesy Jeffrey Beall via Wikimedia Commons)

member of the board of directors at the Flint Institute of Arts.

Though Curtis’ stories have since made him a widely taught author in elementary and middle schools, he was quick to share praise with the teachers he’d learned from in Flint.

“There is no other occupation that has as much of an influence on people’s life than teachers,” Curtis said. “I’ve always been a huge fan of teachers.”

He recalled Ms. Henry, his

third-grade teacher at Clark Elementary, and said she “...made me feel special, like I could do anything...she just had that special teacher magic.” And Ms. Harris, his eleventh-grade teacher at Flint Southwestern High School, was the first teacher who encouraged his writing.

“Whenever I’d write something she’d be very enthusiastic about it and very encouraging,” he remembered.

After high school, Curtis spent 13 years working on the assembly line of Flint’s Fisher Body Plant No. 1. It was there he began writing on his breaks, finding that it made the time go by more quickly.

Eventually, he took time off from the factory to pursue writing in earnest.

“I’d go to the library every day and sit in the same spot, and I’d write for three or four hours,” Curtis explained. “I did that for about a year, and I had a manuscript called ‘The Watsons Go To Florida.’”

But, when his son brought home Dudley Randall’s poem “The Ballad of Birmingham,” Curtis said he realized that Birmingham would be a more meaningful destination for the Watsons and changed his story accordingly.

“The Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963” was published in 1995 and soon named to the American Library Association’s list of Best Books for Young Adults. It won the Newbery Honor Book Award and the Coretta

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Curtis ...

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ta Scott King Honor Book Award alongside more than twenty-five other awards and honors.

It also sold over 300,000 copies and was translated into 11 different languages, according to a 2002 *Melus Journal* article by Peter E. Morgan. Morgan also notes the novel's movie rights were eventually bought by Whoopi Goldberg, and it has also been adapted for television and stage.

Following the success of "The Watsons," Curtis said he was inundated with queries on how he would repeat it.

"You want to let the history lesson in on it. You want the story to be funny, you want it to be relatable, and you want it to mean something."

"I'd go places to speak and people would say, 'What are you going to do to top that?'" he told EVM. "And I said to myself: that's a fool's journey to try to top it. I'm just going to go back to the same place I was when I was writing ["The Watsons"] —physically, emotionally, mentally—and just do the same thing."

Curtis did, and he ended up writing another now-classic: "Bud, Not Buddy."

Published in 1999, "Bud, Not Buddy" won both the Newbery Medal and the Coretta Scott King Award, among others. Like in "The Watsons," the story centers around another 10-year-old boy, Bud Caldwell, a Flint kid who runs away from his foster home amid the Great Depression in

search of his biological father.

Curtis has said he based the story on his grandfather who, throughout the 1930s, traveled around Michigan with a band called "Herman Curtis and the Dusky Devastators of The Depression."

While perhaps best understood as a children's author, Curtis said that role was not his early aim. Of writing "The Watsons Go To Birmingham," he said, "I thought of it as a story narrated by a 10-year-old boy. I didn't think of it as a child's book or an adult book."

Curtis added that people tend to think writing for young people is somehow "easier" than doing so for adults, but he disagrees.

"It's actually harder because you want it to be realistic, [and] you're limited to the kind of things a young person can say," he explained. "I've read books narrated by a 15-year-old but have the heart and mind of a 60-year-old person, and, you know, that's not realistic...you don't want people to stop and say, 'Wait a minute, no kid would say that.'"

Curtis also let EVM in on a bit of his process for achieving a childlike perspective while weaving in historical understanding.

"One thing they say to authors is 'know your audience,' but I write to myself. I write the kinds of things that I'd like to read as a kid," he said. "Before I grab ahold of who the characters are, I write just in the voice of Christopher Curtis, adult author, and as I catch the voice of the main character I go back and readjust and put the lines in their mouths and learn from that character and go from there."

Curtis said he enjoys writing historical fiction because it provides a sense of reality and allows him to explore important stories that haven't been told or widely taught to young readers.

"You want to let the history lesson in on it. You want the story to be funny, you want it to

be relatable, and you want it to mean something," he said. "You want young people to come away with questions about what really happened during the Civil Rights Movement, or during The Great Depression, or whatever it is that you're writing about."

"I said to myself: that's a fool's journey to try to top it. I'm just going to go back to the same place ... physically, emotionally, mentally, and just do the same thing."

As for what's next, Curtis said he plans to take on a piece of Flint's history: the demolition of the city's minority neighborhoods to make way for Interstate-475.

"What I'm working on now is a story about urban renewal, and it takes place in Flint," he said. "The neighborhood that I lived in was torn out to make the expressway, so it deals with that. Lo and behold it's always the Black neighborhood that gets ripped out."

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THIS MONTH IN THE VILLAGE

A selection of events available to our readers is highlighted — beginning after our publication date of March 1. It's a sampling of opportunities in the city. To submit events for our April issue, email info about your event to pisenber@gmail.com by March 20.

From Her Perspective:

Intersections of Gender and Race

Now - Aug. 24

A new exhibition of paintings, photography, sculpture, and works on paper by artists who explore Blackness, womanhood, and the female experience through their art.

MW Gallery

815 S. Saginaw St., Flint

Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA)

March 2, 9, 16, 23 | Registration begins 9 a.m.

VITA volunteers will provide income tax assistance to those with low to moderate incomes (\$60,000 or less) filing 2023 tax returns.

Gloria Coles Flint Public Library

1026 E. Kearsley St., Flint

For more info, visit fpl.info/event/vita-8373.

Flint Firebirds OHL Hockey

March 6, 8, 9, 13, 16, 20, and 23, 7 p.m.

Tickets: \$39 - \$49

Dort Financial Center

3501 Lapeer Rd., Flint

For more info visit dortfinancialcenter.com/events or call 810-744-0580.

Music in the Heart of the City

March 10, 4 p.m.

New Century Chorale will be presenting "Reflections of the Heart." featuring the music of Ken Galbreath.

Tickets are \$12 at the door, \$5 for students.

MCC and U of M students are free with school ID.

St. Paul's Episcopal Church

711 S. Saginaw St., Flint

The Whiting "ON YOUR FEET"

March 12 and 13, 7:30 to 9 p.m.

This musical has gotten rave reviews from *Chicago Tribune* and *New York Times*.

Available tickets are \$30 to \$85.

The Whiting

1241 E. Kearsley St., Flint

For more info visit thefim.org or call 810-237-7333.

St. Patrick's Day Boxed Lunch

March 14, 10 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Lunches include corned beef and Swiss on rye

with chips, coleslaw, pickle and a treat.

Proceeds benefit Catholic Charities Meal Program.

Price: \$12 each.

Pick up lunches on Thurs. March 14

or drive thru open from 10 a.m. - 1 p.m.

901 Chippewa St., Flint

For more info visit catholiccharitiesflint.org/stpatricksday, call 810-232-9950 x170, or email givehope@ccsgc.org.

Silent Book Club

March 15, 10 - 11:30 a.m.

A monthly book club for those who want to read in the presence of others, just in silence. Bring your book from home or grab one from the library and join the club in the Sky Salon.

Gloria Coles Flint Public Library

1026 E. Kearsley St., Flint

PASSAGES

March 16 | 6:30-8:30 p.m.

A curated collection of storytellers, hosted by writer David Scott Smith, will share true passages from their lives under the theme of 'Crossroads.'

Queens' Provisions

421 Garland St., Flint

For more info, contact David at wordsmith810@gmail.com or call 810-240-0666.

Sharon Love Jones

March 16 | 7 p.m.

A concert from acclaimed Detroit songstress,

Sharon Love Jones.

The New McCree Theatre

4601 Clio Rd., Flint

For tickets, visit www.thenewmccreetheatre.com.

"Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?"

March 22 through April 7

This modern American classic stars Flint Rep Associate local artists.

Tickets: \$10 - \$27, 30% discount for Genesee County residents

Flint Repertory Theatre's Elgood Theatre

1220 E. Kearsley St., Flint

For more info visit tickets.

thefim.org or call

810-237-7333.



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

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Love local journalism? Donate to East Village Magazine.

As a nonprofit organization, EVM operates on a tight budget, allowing only minimal stipends for our wonderful staff.
We rely on your contributions to help keep local journalism alive in Flint!

Donate \$50 or more today and receive a free, signed copy of EVM contributing editor Jan Worth-Nelson's book, "That's My Moon Over Court Street: Dispatches from a life in Flint." Author Thomas Lynch called it a "powerful, intimate, deeply insightful and darkly humorous documentation of recent history with the good heart beating true."

To donate, please visit eastvillagemagazine.org and click the "Donate" button on our Contact page.

Over \$400K paid to 350 Flint moms in first month of pathfinding Rx Kids program

By Miriam Zayadi

More than \$400,000 has been paid to roughly 350 Flint mothers in just over the first month of a new pathfinding initiative, Rx Kids.

The program's coordinators announced the milestone at a celebration on Feb. 14.

The initiative, which launched Jan. 10, is the first city-wide maternal and infant "cash prescription" program in the nation. It was designed by pediatrician and public health advocate Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha and Luke Shaefer, inaugural director of poverty solutions at the University of Michigan.

Aiming to support every expectant mother in Flint, the Rx Kids program pays \$1,500 during pregnancy and \$500 dollars a month for the baby's first year, with no stipulations on how the funds are used.

The program also offers assistance to mothers for transportation to and from medical appointments.

All pregnant mothers living in Flint and infants born in 2024 are eligible to enroll, with no income restrictions.

The program is designed to support mothers specifically during the first year after birth because, as Hanna-Attisha stated, "families are the poorest around childbirth and this is also the most important time for a child's development.

"Their whole future life is shaped by what happens during this period," she said.

Shaefer added that the first year after a baby's birth can be perilous, sometimes resulting in families losing their kids to out-of-home placements – in many cases, outcomes driven by poverty.

"So, we are going to be looking to see if this money buffers families from the economic shock of having a baby, to help them keep

their child in that first year," he said.

The program started with "zero money in the bank" last year and so far has secured \$43 million of a \$55 million goal in program funding, according to Hanna-Attisha and Shaefer.

The funds came from multiple organizations, including the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Doris Duke Foundation, the Kellogg Foundation, and others as listed at FlintRx-Kids.com. But support also emerged from "tens of thousands of individuals that are just energized and excited about the vision and have given to the cause," Shaefer said.



Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha

(Photo by Harold Ford)

Asked what motivated the initiative and why it was launched specifically in Flint, Hanna-Attisha emphasized, "Everything that we do in Flint is done in this humble sort of community-partnered way."

She added that the initiative in Flint means "an infrastructure that has our community members, moms, dads, and children at the table as an advisory [group]. We even have a group of kids that advise us. It's this long-standing kind of lived experience of hardship."

Shaefer recalled a case the team encountered just before Rx

Kids launched. A mother needed to come in to her first appointment after giving birth – a crucially important time for both baby and mom, he said, but she had to go back to work four days after giving birth, creating an "unimaginable physical toll" on both mother and child.

Hanna-Attisha said in addition to many such stories emerging from community conversations, numerical data supports the need for Rx Kids.

One source is evidence collected from the Flint Registry, which she runs, showing people are struggling to make ends meet. She added that data from multiple sources emphasizes that "Flint is the poorest city in our state and one of the poorest in the nation."

Shaefer also cited results of the federal 2021 Expanded Child Tax Credit — another source of evidence from a program similar to Rx Kids.

"That program provided money to families with children all across the nation, cutting child poverty to a historic low that year," he stated. "Food hardship fell to the lowest level that we have ever recorded in 2021, and kids just did better on so many levels."

The main goal of the Rx Kids program, he said, is to see a change in health outcomes for both babies and their mothers. Success is measured by asking questions like "Does the money help people eat and keep a roof over their head?" and "Are we really able to support parents in the hard work of parenting in that first year?"

"Another interesting piece of it is that research suggests many of these dollars are being spent back into the local community," Schaefer added. "We see it as a different vision of economic development. Instead of paying some business to locate a factory here, we can provide

(Continued on Page 15)

Rx Kids ...

(Continued from Page 14)

resources to families who are going to spend on grocery stores and clothing stores in the community.”

So far, the program has attracted attention and support at both the state and national level.

White House senior advisor and American Rescue Plan coordinator Gene Sperling came to Flint for the celebration. He said, “Rx Kids is living proof that now that Americans have seen what President Biden’s monthly Child Tax Credit did for dramatically lowering child poverty and lifting up all working families — there is no going back.”

Sperling added that he believed Rx Kids “is going to be a

national model” instead of a “one and done pilot.”

Hanna-Attisha said she hopes Sperling’s words come true, but she’s optimistic that Rx Kids will at least continue on in Flint beyond its pilot phase.

“We hope to do this in perpetuity,” she said. “The beauty of the funding model that we’ve created is that it leverages both public and private dollars, which creates this playbook of sustainability and scalability.”

Looking forward, Shaefer said, “We are hearing interest from all over the country — interestingly, both from what people might consider blue states and red states. Flint has now become a national leader that we should walk alongside.”

“This is really a program

about uplifting dignity,” Shaefer said. “So many of the programs we have help families, but they make them feel bad when they have to fill out really long forms that ask a lot of intrusive questions.

“We don’t have to do it that way. We can have better outcomes if we empower families and trust them. We have a program that is easy to understand, and we can just reimagine the social contract,” he said.

Hanna-Attisha added, “This is about love, dignity, agency, empowerment, trust and a new vision of the social contract and how we care for each other.”

Information and application forms for the Rx Kids program can be found at <https://flintrkids.com/>.

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Village Life

Let's get to important things, again

By *Kate Stockrahm*

In the first ever issue of East Village Magazine on July 3, 1976, our late founder Gary Custer got straight to the point.

"It's customary for a new publication to justify its existence by running a long list of idealistic goals in its premier issue," he wrote. "We'll pass up that tradition."

In that early editorial, entitled "Let's get to important things," Custer said EVM wouldn't waste precious space on expounding journalistic concepts. Instead, he wrote, "we suggest that you read *East Village Magazine* and form your ideas about what we can do."

Of course, I don't believe he expected that nearly 48 years later, an editor not yet born when that first issue debuted would take comfort in those words.

But here we are.

I didn't meet Gary before he passed away in 2015, but I've since met him in the archived pages of this magazine and in the family (both blood and chosen) who remain to run it.

The pages tell me he was an exacting, meticulous, and incredibly competent editor. His family says he was much, much more, which is why they continue to carry on his legacy

nearly 10 years after his death.

And now, sitting here in EVM's Second Street office, among the artifacts of Gary's life and work, I am heartened by the way he

written that first issue, at the helm of this next iteration of his publication.

In full transparency: I don't know whether Gary and I would agree on other elements of that

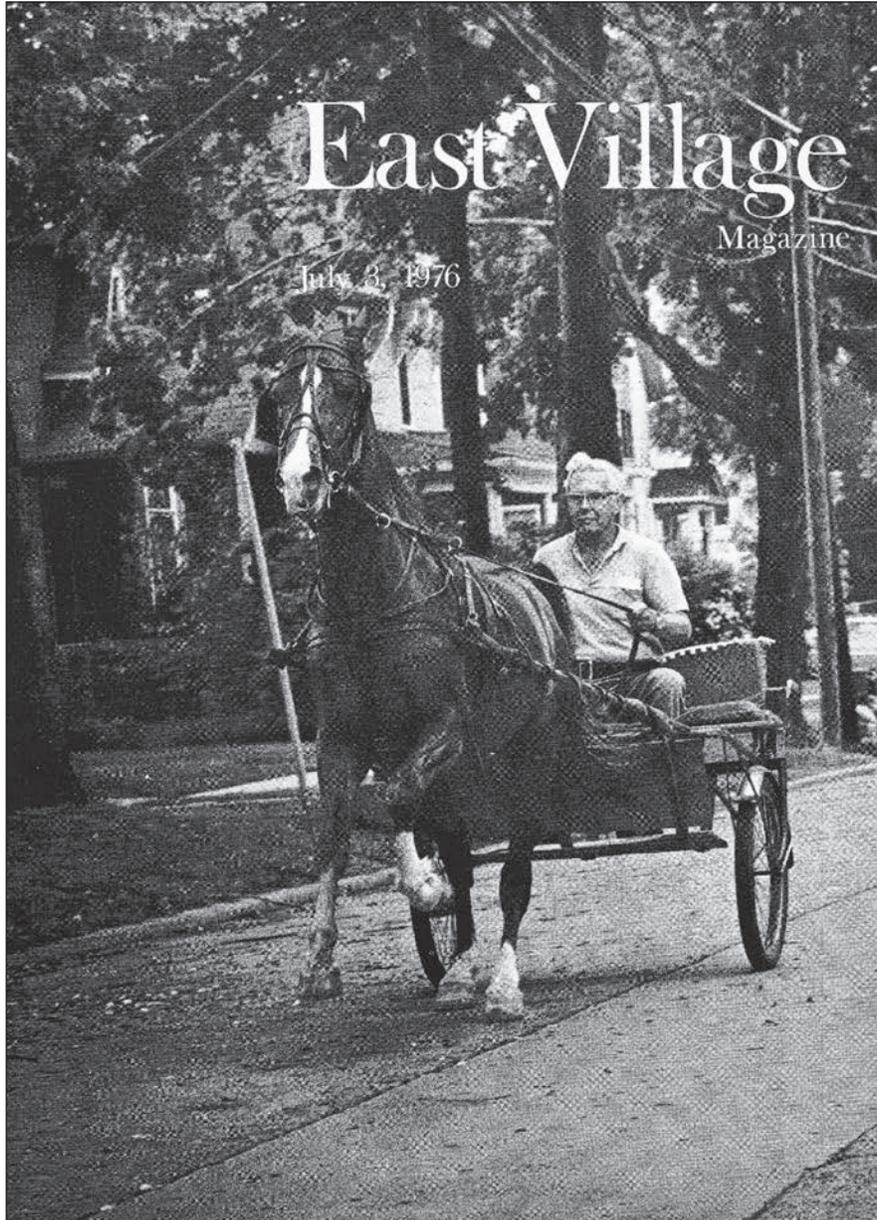
editorial (or this one). But, whether or not we'd share views on city policies or school board decisions, I do know that we'd meet soundly on dedicating "precious space" to encouraging our neighbors to take action on the issues affecting them — and to promising EVM's "fair, relevant, and factual" coverage along the way.

So, as EVM's new editor, I vow to honor our founder's legacy, one which spurred on community-centered journalism, civic engagement, and spirited debates for so many decades, while working hard to push our coverage forward.

And in my first act to honor that promise, I ask that you please reach out to share "your ideas about what *East Village Magazine* can do" — for you, today.

Let's get to important things.

Kate Stockrahm is East Village Magazine's new editor. She can be reached at eastvillagemagazine@gmail.com.



The cover of East Village Magazine's first ever issue on July 3, 1976.

chose to introduce himself and this publication all those years ago: by passing up tradition.

I'd like to believe that means he'd be glad to see me, a youngish Flint-transplant and holder of all those journalistic ideals he left un-