

East Village Magazine

March 2025



Photograph By

Edwin D. Curtis



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720 E. Second St.
Flint, Mich. 48503

Website:
eastvillagemagazine.org

E-mail:
eastvillagemagazineflint@gmail.com

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Commentary

The Kildee Legacy: Flint to Lansing to Washington and back again

By Paul Rozycki

Those of us in Flint and Genesee County owe much to the many families that made our city and county what it is today. Flint wouldn't be Flint without the early and continuing influence of the Motts, the Balengers, the Dorts, the Durants, the Whitings, and many others.

In recent years, though, a list of other well-known families have also played a critical role in the politics of Flint and the surrounding area. Those include many of the names we see on our ballots each year like the Cherry, Neeley, Clack, Stanley, McCree, Riegle, and Mueller families, among others.

But few family names have led Flint on the local, state, and national level as much as the Kildee family has. And with U.S. Representative Dan Kildee's recent retirement and return to the city as President and CEO of the Community Foundation of Greater Flint (CFGF), now seemed as good a time as any to dive into the family's political history.

The Kildee legacy

For the last 60 years voters in Genesee County have voted for a Kildee. Since 1964, when Dale Kildee first ran for the state House,

local voters have had the opportunity to support a Kildee for national, state, and local offices.

Dale Kildee

Dale Kildee taught at the University of Detroit Jesuit High School and Academy from 1954 to 1956. After returning to Flint, he taught Latin at Central High School until 1964, when he was elected to represent the 81st District in the Michigan House of Representatives.

Kildee served in that position for a decade before being elected to the State Senate in 1974 and serving there until 1976.

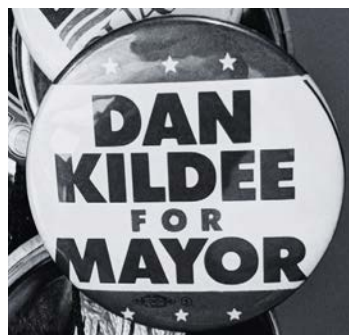
When Don Riegle resigned his U.S. House seat to be appointed to Phil Hart's U.S. Senate seat, Kildee ran and was elected for the next 18 elections, most by a large margin.

While in Congress, Kildee emerged as a major voice for labor, the auto industry, and Native American rights, serving as co-chair of the Congressional Automotive Caucus and the Native American Caucus. He chose to retire following the 2012 election after 36 years in the House. He passed away in October 2021 at the age of 92.

Dan Kildee

Dan Kildee followed his uncle Dale's footsteps when he was

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A Dan Kildee button from the commentator's collection. (Photo courtesy Paul Rozycki)



Photo of the Month: The Flint Roller Derby team of September 2018, originally published October 2018. The team's 2025 season is underway with their second home bout on May 10. (Photo by Edwin D. Custer)

Sports Beat

Ervin Leavy Jr.: Flint Central's 'Lightning' finds rewarding career at UM-Flint

By Harold C. Ford

Ervin Leavy Jr. was motivated to improve his basketball game after being bested again and again by his older brother at the playground behind Flint's Gundry School on Flint's north side.

"He would beat up on me every day until I finally beat him when I was about 13-years-old," Leavy Jr. recollected in a December 2024 interview with East Village Magazine (EVM).

"That meant a lot to me," said Leavy Jr. "That was the best feeling in the world."

Leavy Jr. went on to turn those playground beatdowns into basketball success at Flint Central High School and Central Michigan University (CMU) where he teamed up with future NBA star Dan Majerle to become "Thunder and Lightning," a moniker created by CMU's student newspaper. Majerle was "Thunder" and Leavy Jr.

was "Lightning."

He then parlayed those decades of practice, education, and experience into a most rewarding career at the University of Michigan-Flint, all of which prompted EVM's sit down with the local hoop star.

Cut from five teams before 11th grade

Despite his persistence and love for the game, Leavy Jr. was a late bloomer and was cut from five teams at Gundry Elementary, Bryant Junior High, and Central High School – all before 11th grade.

Leavy Jr. had transferred to Central in his sophomore year. "I went to Flint Central because all the guys who beat me out went to Northwestern," he recalled. Nonetheless, a star-studded bunch of basketballers

– Eric Turner, Marty Embry, Mark Harris, Keith Gray, Darryl Johnson, and others —ruled the hardcourt and that sent Leavy Jr. to the junior varsity team.

At the time, Flint Central basketball was in the midst of a trifecta, winning the Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA) Class A state championship three years in a row in 1981, 1982 and 1983. Central's overall record during those three seasons was 79 wins and only five losses.

In the 1982-1983 season, Leavy Jr. made the varsity team and cracked the starting lineup. "I was a very good shooter and that's what got me on the floor," Leavy Jr. recalled.

Nonetheless, he wasn't hall of fame coach Stan Gooch's first option. "To show you how deep we were," Leavy Jr. said, "I was probably

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Sports Beat ...

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the fourth option on that team and I [eventually] got drafted by the [Michael Jordan-led Chicago] Bulls.”

Along with the other starters – Johnson, Terence Green, Ken Bowie, and Ed Greer – Leavy Jr. and the team compiled a 25-win, 3-loss season and brought home the school’s third consecutive state championship. Leavy Jr. scored a game-high 21 points to help secure the win over Detroit Southwestern in the MHSAA tournament finale.

Remarkably, it was only Leavy Jr.’s second year of organized basketball. “I didn’t really understand basketball all that well,” he told EVM, mentioning “things like defense and spacing” were new to him.

1980s: a golden era of boys’ basketball in Flint

That a future college star and professional like Leavy Jr. was cut from five teams and didn’t crack the starting lineup until his senior year in high school seems remarkable until you consider the level of basketball excellence in the Flint area in the 1980s and 90s.

Of the two decades, the 90s tend to get more attention. It was the so-called “Flintstones” era of Flint-area basketball when players like Mateen Cleaves, Morris Peterson, Charlie Bell, Antonio Smith, and Anthony Mull dominated Michigan State University’s men’s basketball roster and led the team to a 2000 NCAA national championship, affixing Flint on the nation’s basketball map.

However, with deference to that 1990s generation of players, the 80s – during which Leavy Jr. and others honed their hardwood skills – was likely the most prolific era of Flint-area prep basketball.

In the 1980s, the Flint area sent teams to the quarterfinal level or higher 23 times in the MHSAA boys

basketball state tournament. That run included seven state championships (A-B-C-D class level and the number of achievements in parentheses below):

- 7 state champions: Central (A,3); Beecher (B,2); Northwestern (A,2)
- 2 runners-up: Northwestern (A,1); Hamady (C,1)
- 5 semifinalists: Beecher (B,3); Northwestern (A,1); Northern (A,1)
- 9 quarterfinalists: Flint Academy (C,3); Hamady (C,2); Beecher (B,1); Powers (B,1); Fenton (B,1); Holy Rosary (D,1)

In that oft-acclaimed Flintstones 1990s era, Flint-area boys basketball teams achieved that level of MHSAA tournament success a respectable, but far fewer, 15 times. (Note: 1999 quarterfinalists were not available at MHSAA website.)

So, in the 1980s, seven of the state’s 20 MHSAA state champions in Class A and Class B were Flint-based teams. That’s an impressive championship rate of 35 percent from Genesee County that represented less than five percent of Michigan’s total population in the 1980 census.



Ervin Leavy Jr. takes a jump shot for CMU.
(Photo courtesy Ervin Leavy Jr.)

A “detour”

Following high school, Leavy Jr. said, “I had to take a detour because I wasn’t the best student. I didn’t really apply myself.”

Leavy Jr. recalled that he “didn’t have the grades” in high school so he ended up going to Mott Community College (MCC) for two years following graduation. “That’s when I got it together academically,” he said.

Leavy Jr. helped lead MCC to the now-named Michigan Community College Athletic Association (MCCAA) championship game in 1984 before winning the league title in 1985.

At the end of his time at MCC, Leavy Jr. was recruited by several universities including Michigan State, Iowa, and Connecticut. He planned to transfer to the University of Detroit following a favorite coach, Charlie Coles, but then Coles suddenly made a move to Central Michigan University.

In the transition Coles told Leavy Jr., “I want you to come play for me,” and Leavy Jr. said the choice “was a no-brainer.” He was off to CMU.

There, Leavy Jr. teamed with Majerle, a future NBA all-star, to become “Thunder and Lightning” – fan favorites at CMU from 1985 to 1987.

Leavy Jr. ended his two years at CMU with the fourth highest scoring average in the MCCA (17.6 points per game), 28th on the list of most career points (1,003), and captain of the 1986-1987 Mid-American Conference championship team that finished with 22 wins and 8 losses.

In 1987, Leavy Jr. was CMU’s second leading scorer behind Majerle and achieved First Team All-Mid-American Conference honors.

Drafted by the Bulls

Leavy Jr. was genuinely surprised when he was drafted by the

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Sports Beat ...

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Chicago Bulls in 1987. “I thought it was a joke,” Leavy Jr. told MLive/Flint Journal in 2014. “I couldn’t believe it because I didn’t expect it.” He was chosen with the 10th pick in the 7th round.

The Bulls were a team loaded with professional talent at the time: Michael Jordan, Scottie Pippen, Horace Grant, Artis Gilmore, Charles Oakley, and John Paxson among other notables. Leavy Jr. was drafted the same year as Pippen and Grant.

Leavy Jr. said he often guarded Jordan in Bulls’ practice sessions.

“I remember the first day he showed up with the bodyguards and his own shoes and trainers,” he told MLive.

Though Leavy Jr. was cut from the Bulls before the start of the 1987 season, he did enjoy a brief career as a semi professional basketball player which was interrupted by injury and ultimately ended with an overseas team in Singapore. “It was just too far,” he told EVM, “I didn’t know anybody.”

From there, Leavy Jr. spent nine years as a carrier for the U.S. Postal Service and a few years with Flint-based New Paths, Inc.

“Son, you can’t eat a basketball.”

In 1990, Leavy Jr. finished his four-year degree work at CMU guided by his father’s advice: “Son, you can’t eat a basketball.”

U of M-Flint

In 2002, Leavy Jr. was offered a position at the University of Michigan-Flint. After various stints as Assistant Student Development Coordinator and Adjunct Lecturer he is now in his comfort zone as Assistant Director of Facilities Operation and Risk Management at the UM-Flint Recreation Center.

Leavy Jr.’s duties include: oversight of student supervisors; weight room staff; coordination of events that usually include requisite

contracts and insurance; maintenance of first aid equipment; and disciplinary matters. He oversees some two dozen staffers, down from 40 during the pre-COVID years.

“I’ve got a big plate,” Leavy Jr. said, but with that plate comes great benefits.

“I think working for the university is the most rewarding thing that could have happened in my life as far as a career,” he said.

Leavy Jr. told EVM that working with young people, watching them grow and graduate, is one of the biggest rewards.

“When I started off, I didn’t realize how influential I was in the lives of young people,” he said.

Fringe benefits most assuredly include health insurance and a chance to play the game he loves with the students he deeply cares about. At age 59, Leavy Jr. is a constant presence in the intramural basketball program at the UM-Flint recreation center as a member of a team.

“I’ve been the oldest guy in this league for 20 years,” he said with a smile. ●



Ervin Leavy Jr. in his career at the University of Michigan-Flint. (Photos courtesy Ervin Leavy Jr.)

Commentary ...

(Continued from Page 3)

elected to the U.S. House in 2012, but he was no stranger to politics before then.

In 1977, he was elected to the Flint School Board at age 18, one of the youngest elected officials in the nation. Kildee went on to study at Mott Community College and the University of Michigan-Flint before earning a degree in Community Development from Central Michigan University. Kildee was named the Fannie May Foundation Fellow at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government in 2005.

In 1984 he was elected to the Genesee County Board of Commissioners, where he served for 12 years and as chair for five. In 1991 he ran unsuccessfully for mayor of Flint and was later elected as Genesee County Treasurer in 1996 – a position to which he was reelected for the next 12 years.

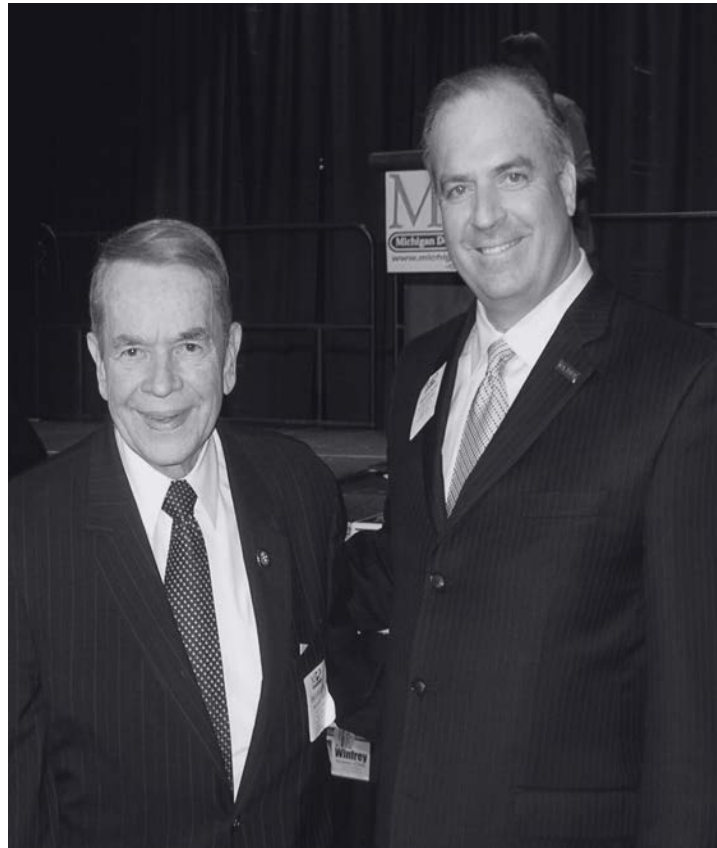
In his role as treasurer Kildee created the Genesee County Land Bank, an organization dedicated to fighting blight and addressing the challenges around tax-foreclosed properties in the area, the first of its kind in the nation. Following Kildee's lead, many other communities developed similar programs. In 2007, that effort earned him the Harvard Kennedy School of Government's Innovations in American Government Award.

In 2009, Kildee resigned as county treasurer to lead the Center for Community Progress, a group aimed at urban revitalization. In 2010, he formed an exploratory committee to run for governor, but chose not to run.

When Dale Kildee then chose

not to run for his U.S. House seat two years later, the Kildee name was strong and Dan was elected with a large margin for the next 12 years, even as congressional district maps changed.

As a member of Congress, Dan Kildee was a leading voice for those impacted by the Flint water crisis and a supporter of a number of urban renewal programs that impacted both Flint and Saginaw. In a Detroit Free Press interview,



Dale Kildee and Dan Kildee at the 2010 Michigan Democratic Convention
(Photo by Paul Rozycki)

he said that he takes great pride in getting \$170 million in federal funds to help Flint replace lead pipes during the water crisis. The younger Kildee also helped establish the Flint Registry to aid those impacted by the water crisis and was elected to leadership positions by his fellow Democratic members of Congress – serving on the Ways and Means Committee and the Budget Committee.

In recent years the former

congressman faced the turmoil of the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol, a cancer diagnosis and treatment, and the tragedy of his brother being shot and killed. (Following his brother's death, Kildee also urged support for both gun control and mental health policies in Congress.)

After choosing not to run for reelection in 2024, Kildee has returned to Genesee County to lead the Community Foundation of Greater Flint, a nonprofit public charity dedicated to causes that benefit Flint and Genesee County.

As reported by ABC12 News, Governor Gretchen Whitmer also appointed Kildee to serve as chair of the Michigan Natural Resources Commission, and he has also been selected as the Griffin Endowed Chair at Central Michigan University, where he will teach an undergraduate course in political involvement and critical government issues.

Dan Kildee's return to Flint

It was a surprise to many when Kildee announced that he wasn't going to run for reelection in 2024, but it also brought his career full circle from the local school board to the U.S. House and back.

In an interview posted by CFGF, Kildee outlined some of his reasons for the move and his hopes for the future of Flint and Genesee County.

When asked why he took on the challenge of leading the Community Foundation Kildee said:

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THIS MONTH IN THE VILLAGE

Below is a selection of events available to our readers, beginning after our March publication date. To submit events for our April issue, email information about your event to eastvillagemagazineflint@gmail.com by March 26.

Sloan Museum of Discovery Historical Book Club Thursday, March 13 | 6-7:30 p.m.

This book club meets the second Thursday of each month. March's book is "Car Crazy: The Battle for Supremacy Between Ford and Olds and the Dawn of the Automobile Age" by G. Wayne Miller. Attendance is free.

Sloan Museum of Discovery
1221 E. Kearsley St, Flint

Community Candor Live: Workforce Development

Friday, March 14 | 8-9:30 a.m.

The in-person event will spotlight critical issues in workforce development including job training, the skills gap in our region, and what policies need to be enacted to ensure that our area can succeed in the economy in the coming years. The event is free and open to the public, but pre-registration is requested by visiting: tinyurl.com/CCLiveMarch.

Factory One
303 W. Water St., Flint

The GatHERing: A Place for All Women

Friday, March 15 | 11:30 a.m.

Communities First, Inc. is celebrating Women's History Month, by bringing together a diverse group of Flint and Genesee County women for lunch, connection, and a panel discussion from women leading our community. Suggested ticket price is \$10 or pay what you can. Register at: tinyurl.com/GatHERingCFI2025

1110 W. Bristol Rd, Flint Twp.

Flint Youth Symphony Orchestra in Concert

Tuesday, March 18 | 7 p.m.

The FYSO presents a variety of music including Shostakovich's Symphony No. 1, which he wrote when he was only 17-years-old. Featuring the 2024 FSPA Concerto Competition Winner, violinist Annika Warby performing Lalo's Symphonie Espagnole.

FIM Whiting Auditorium
241 E. Kearsley St, Flint

Open Mic Night

Friday, March 21 | 6 p.m.

Totem Books hosts a free open mic event every third Friday of the month. You don't have to register ahead of time to perform, just come in to enjoy the show or participate!

Totem Books
620 W. Court St, Flint

Dark Room Productions presents: The Twilight Zone Parody

Friday, March 21 | 7 p.m.

Enjoy a comedic take on the classic television show! The Twilight Zone Parody runs March 21 and 22 at 7pm and Sunday, March 23 at 2pm. The same show-times apply for March 28, 29, and 30. Tickets are \$10 per person.

Local 432
124 W. 1st St, Flint

Drag me to BINGO!

Saturday, March 22 | 8-9:30 p.m.

Join Veronica Scott and Yolanda DelFierce for a fun-filled night of laughing, comedy, and BINGO! One Bingo card is provided with ticket purchase and additional cards are available for \$5 each. A prize is awarded for every BINGO winner. Tickets \$29 on Eventbrite.

Burton Eagles Post 3814
3317 E. Bristol Rd, Burton

Chávez & Huerta Luncheon Celebration

Saturday, March 29 | 1-3 p.m.

The LatinX Technology and Community Center will host this special event honoring the legacies of César Chávez and Dolores Huerta, two trailblazers in civil rights and social justice. Enjoy an afternoon of an inspiring keynote speech, networking with community leaders, cultural performances, and a delicious lunch. Tickets \$20-35 on Eventbrite.

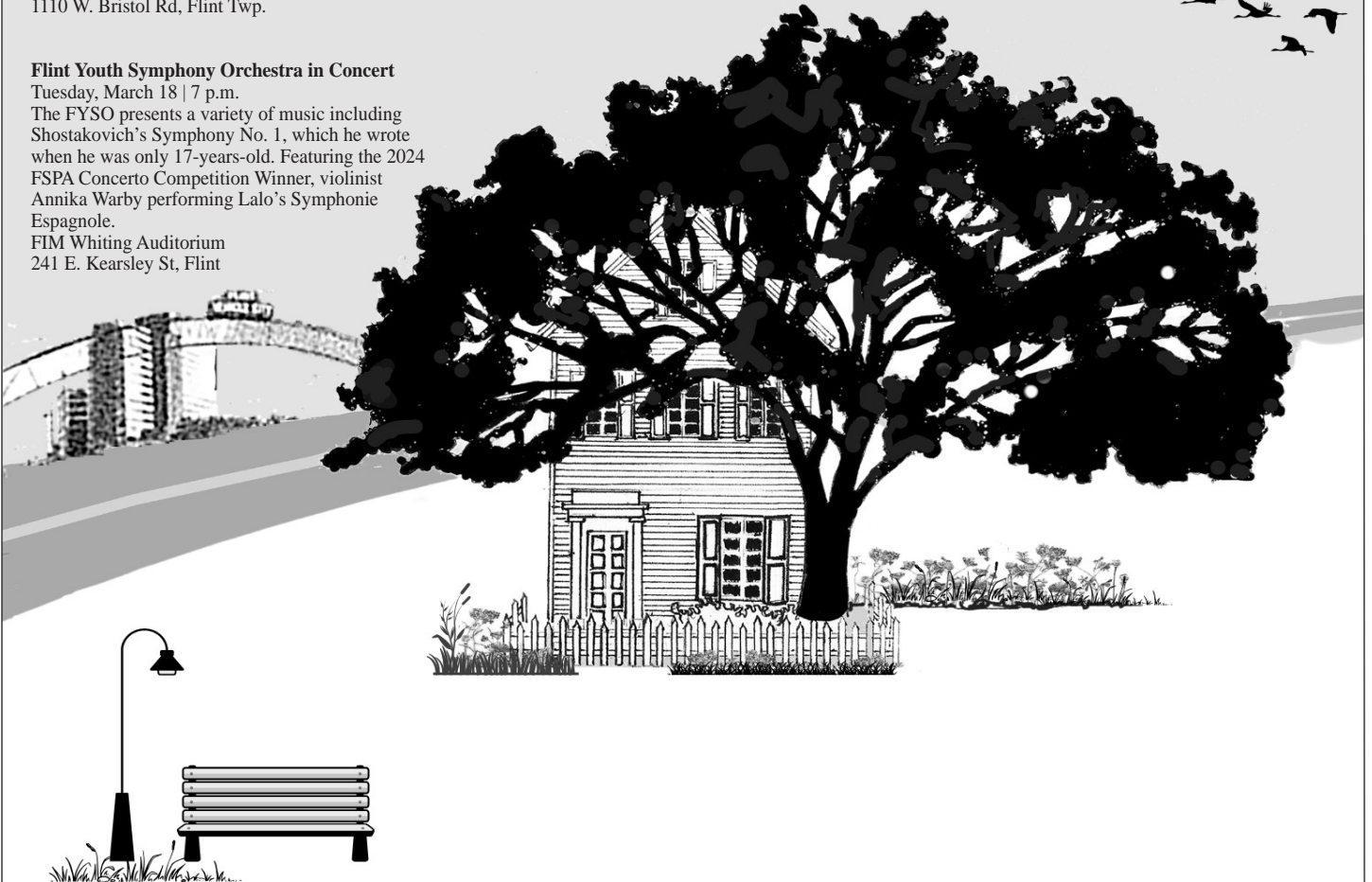
Flint Institute of Arts Museum
1120 E. Kearsley St, Flint

"Music to Cure What Ails You" Concert

Saturday, March 29 | 3 p.m.

Folk trio, Mustard's Retreat, is hosting a 50th anniversary show. Come listen to why one early reviewer said the group plays "music to cure what ails you." Tickets are \$25 with reservations taken at 810-232-4023 or office@uflint.org. An extended intermission to socialize will include beer, wine, sweets, and savories for additional donation.

Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Flint
2474 S. Ballenger Hwy, Flint



Commentary ...

(Continued from Page 7)

“I saw the opportunity to continue the kind of work I’ve done, but with a different toolbox. It’s much more local — seeing the immediate impact of the work we do at the Community Foundation. Working with local grantees and being able to drive a mile or two, or even walk down the street, to see the work they’re doing is incredibly rewarding compared to some of my past experiences. I’m excited to be part of the change — right here at home.”

In terms of the challenges facing Flint and Genesee County, Kildee was both hopeful and realistic saying:

“Well, it’s changed in a lot of ways — some positive, some real challenges. We’ve lost population on one hand, but we’ve begun this transition from an economy focused on just one company to one that’s a lot more diverse. We have our challenges,

but there’s this sort of through point, this thread, that runs through Flint. We never give up on ourselves. We’ve been through a lot of tough times. We don’t give up. To me, that is one characteristic of our community that I’m really proud of.”

Those last lines say a lot about Flint, but they also say a lot about Dan Kildee. We can be thankful that even after going through tough times, he’s come back home, ready to continue serving Flint and Genesee County in a new role. ●

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1221 E. Kearsley St. Flint, MI 48503

SLOAN MUSEUM OF DISCOVERY

Parks & Rec in Flint and Beyond: Jack N. Abernathy Park

By Christina Collie



Collie's father and his "grand-dog" exploring the woods of Abernathy Park. (Photo by Christina Collie)

This article is the fourth in a series East Village Magazine is producing about parks and recreational areas to explore in Flint and surrounding areas, presented in no particular order.

*Jack N. Abernathy Park
402 Dayton St
Davison, MI 48423
Phone: (810) 653-2191
Hours: 8 am – 8 pm*

Jack N. Abernathy Park offers a variety of amenities that cater to diverse recreational interests.

Nature lovers can enjoy the paved walking trails that meander through the park's scenic landscape. The Black Creek Nature Trail, a 1.6-mile paved path, runs along Black Creek and connects with the Abernathy Park Trail, offering a serene

environment for walking, running, or biking.

Pet owners should know that dogs are welcome, but I only remember seeing one waste station with refuse bags. However, there is also a dog park nearby, which is accessible from Abernathy Park via a nice, paved trail that goes to North Gale Road which you do need to follow north a stretch to where you can cross to the dog park.

Once across the road, the trail winds around the dog park before entering a pretty, wooded area. Please be cautious if riding a bike because there are some blind spots once you get into the wooded area, and it is a common path for joggers and folks walking their dogs. There are a couple of spots to sit to rest along the path – one bench and further down a picnic table – but there

aren't any restrooms.

Back at Abernathy Park, families will appreciate children's playscapes which provide engaging spaces for those with kids who need more than a walk through nature. Additionally, the park offers pavilions that can be rented for gatherings, making it an ideal location for picnics, reunions, and other social events. Public restrooms are available in this area of the park.

For sports enthusiasts, Abernathy Park also features baseball and soccer fields, tennis and basketball courts, and even a sand volleyball court and skate park. The park's well-maintained facilities and natural beauty make it a cherished asset to the area, fostering a sense of connection among its visitors.

Happy exploring! ●

Village Life ...

(Continued from Page 12)

our physical medium – its distinctive black and white photography popping up at businesses and on Flint doorsteps as reliably as an old friend.

But that shared process of cre-

fewer print issues a year.

Rest assured though: the website will simply become an extension of this same magazine, the trustworthy news source you've picked up to read today.

It has always been our focus to keep our news free, and now seems an

“Our journalism school is tuition-free and our classroom is the Flint community...”

ation also means no one person is responsible for this magazine's success. And, in order to maximize our impact on the small budget we're able to pull together, we wanted to let you know that we're planning to put more of an emphasis on our website and move to

important time to build on that access and grow our team of citizen journalists and community-focused readers.

Like this magazine, my role has changed over the years. Alongside my day job and a host of community posi-

tions, I now serve as EVM's business manager. And while my father has replaced his makeshift delivery van twice since I was a child, he still delivers EVM magazine bundles to our distributors each month. So, even as we work to grow EVM's online presence, we are confident it will remain the “magazine” – albeit more digital than physical – that you have known and trusted since 1976.

We welcome your thoughts and feedback as we transition in the year ahead.

You can reach us at eastvillagemagazineflint@gmail.com.



For nearly 50 years, East Village Magazine has been a staple in our community: a non-profit publication that appears on newsstands and front doors without any cost to its readers.

In an age of growing uncertainty and diminished public support, EVM is unable to do this work without your help.

We are asking for your financial contribution to keep independent news coverage and community journalism thriving for the next 50 years.

Please consider donating through PayPal at eastvillagemagazine.org, adding EVM to your bequests, or sending a check to our office: Village Information Center, 720 E. Second St. Flint, MI 48503.

Thank you for your continued support and being an active part of our village!

Music Around Town Presents
Flint Under the Stars - DJ Battle



**DJ Hype, DJ Winter Soldier
DJ Sic Musiq & DJ Chef Nate**
with emcee CJ the DJ

**Wed., Apr. 16
at 7pm**



**Free to attend
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Village Life

East Village Magazine, an old friend made new

By Nic Custer

In the 1990s, one afternoon each month, my father would pick me up from school in his Plymouth minivan and instead of heading home, I'd help distribute this magazine.

Dwarfed by seats stacked high with rubber-banded East Village Magazine issues – counted earlier that day by volunteers who'd batched them into the exact numbers needed for each neighborhood drop – we would drive across the city, listening to "Science Friday" or another public radio show, and pull up to a home where I'd hop out and drop off a batch.

Even at that age, I knew I was part of something larger than I could understand. Me, entrusted to carry these important pages those final few feet to volunteer distributors' doorsteps.

I'll admit that I didn't know the person whose porch I set each bundle on, nor the neighbors whose doorstep the distributor would later deliver each issue to – but I knew we were all part of an unseen network of readers and volunteers, writers, editors, advertisers, photographers, board members and distributors, who all came together each month for this printed magazine to exist.

In high school, I joined EVM's staff as a reporter, and I, like decades of volunteers before me, was trained in professional journalism techniques and sent into the community to find the stories that weren't being reported elsewhere.

I spent evenings in neighborhood association meetings and city council chambers, learning how to find story ideas from conversations, event flyers, and public notices.

Alongside my nightly schoolwork, I deciphered hastily scrawled interview notes and transcribed audio recordings into Associated Press-style articles before each issue's deadline.

McLuhan put it, "the medium is the message."

McLuhan contended that the medium by which we receive our information is just as important as the information itself. And while EVM was founded before the internet democratized how people access the news, it remains in print because it was built on a similar premise.

Over its 49-year history, EVM has welcomed students, whether at the beginning of their careers or retirees who want to give back – folks of all walks of life who see value in learning journalism and informing their neighbors of what happened at that most recent school board meeting.

Our journalism school is tuition-free and our classroom is the Flint community, and we proudly prepare reporters to cover real events and hold public officials accountable in our city and beyond.

Our mission of community-centered journalism is the message and is apparent in every facet of our operation: from the number of hands involved in each issue's creation to the generations of volunteers and readers that continue to prove that this media has

value and is worth sharing.

And while we've used our website to expand readership and the speed at which we can report in recent years, the magazine has remained



A copy of the July 1993 issue of East Village Magazine.
(Photo by Edwin D. Custer)

I played my small part informing my neighbors and empowering Flint residents with the news they may have missed (or may otherwise never have the chance to learn about).

As the philosopher Marshall

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