

VILLAGER

DECEMBER 23, 2020 - JANUARY 5, 2021

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How they came to life one day

Dayton's figures find new home in Highland

BY JANET LUNDER HANAFIN

Thanks to a handy Highland Park resident, beloved animated figures from the old Dayton's annual eighth-floor Christmas displays have found a new home and a new life. By restoring 10 decrepit characters, John Pihaly has created Santa's Workshop on the front porch of his family's home at 1887 Saunders Ave. this holiday season.

The Dayton's Christmas displays were first exhibited in 1963 and changed themes every year until 2008 when it was converted by Macy's as "A Day in the Life of an Elf" through 2016.

Pihaly became interested in the figures when Macy's, which had taken over Dayton's successor, Marshall-Field's, announced the closing of its department store in downtown Minneapolis in March 2017. He attended the store's closing sale, but was unable to purchase any figures at that time.

Last summer, he noticed a few of the characters on a shelf in a ware-



John Pihaly blends in with the figures he still plans to rehab from Dayton's Christmas displays. At right are some of the finished characters that grace the front porch of his Highland Park home. PHOTOS BY BRAD STAUFFER

house in Minneapolis and learned that more than 20 of them were still in storage. Several months later, he was able to acquire them and began his pandemic project to restore them.

"I loved visiting the Dayton's display as a child and got to relive that magic when I brought my own

family to the display during its final years," Pihaly said. "When I thought about setting this up at my home, I figured it made sense to do it in 2020. I knew I'd have the time to work on it, and figured the neighborhood would enjoy it, too."



SANTA'S WORKSHOP ▶2

Council adopts 2021 budget that holds the line on property taxes

Members Jalali, Yang vote 'no' while calling for greater defunding of police department

BY JANE MCCLURE

The Saint Paul City Council on December 9 approved a \$633 million city budget for 2021. However, the 5-2 vote does not end the debate over such contentious issues as police reform and the city's response to the fiscal challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

City Council members Mitra Jalali and Nelsie Yang voted against the budget, saying it did not go far enough in defunding the Saint Paul Police Department in favor of alternative methods for addressing crime. The police budget in 2021 is \$104.7 million, or \$800,000 less than in 2020. Among departmental cuts was the police training academy's 2020 session, a decision that Yang called "bold" but may reduce the city's police force by as many as 40 officers next year as cops retire or resign and are not replaced.

2021 CITY BUDGET ▶4

Pair close book on decades of service to city library

BY JANE MCCLURE

More than 400 years of experience with the Saint Paul Public Library is checking out by the end of the year. The dozen retirees include volunteer coordinator Wendy Neurer of Highland Park and library specialist Mary Ann Berglund of Summit Hill.

Neurer has worked with thousands of volunteers over the years in all of the city's libraries. Berglund began as a substitute, but spent much of her career at the Lexington and Rondo branches. They have nearly 70 years of experience between them. They each worked under half a dozen mayors, numerous City Council members and several Saint Paul Public

Library directors.

"These retirements are a big loss for our library system," said City Council member and Library Board chair Jane Prince. "We have so much institutional knowledge going out of the door."

Berglund and Neurer were part of many changes at the libraries over the decades, including the way patrons are served. "It was vital to grow with the ever-changing world to keep the public library current and relevant," Neurer said.

The biggest change both women cited was in technology. Neurer remembered bringing volunteers to the Hamline-Midway branch to teach patrons how to use the internet. Some staff members were skeptical. "I had one librarian say, 'This will

never work,'" she said.

"Of course technology has made a huge change in our focus," Berglund said. "Many people still don't have computers at home, and if you don't have a computer you can't apply for a job, you can't sign up for unemployment or other programs, you can't find housing."

Neurer began her career with the library system after being laid off from the city's Department of Parks and Recreation. When she started, the library had 125 volunteers. Now it is closer to 1,125. She estimates that volunteers' time and talent saves the library system about \$700,000 a year.

LIBRARIANS CHECK OUT ▶2

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1◀ SANTA'S WORKSHOP

The most challenging part of the project was "explaining to my wife why I had 22 broken figures in the garage," Pihaly said. "But once I shared my vision, she was 100 percent on board."

The figures were in sad shape. All of them required reconstructing a combination of fingers, hands, heads, hair, paint and costumes. The biggest challenge was that only one still had a motor, so Pihaly had to craft all new mechanicals and add new motors. Seven of the restored 10 characters now move.

"I wanted to ensure that the restoration preserved that same look and motions of the eighth-floor Christmas display," Pihaly said. That required some research.

Viewing historical photos and videos on the internet and connecting with people who had worked on the earlier displays helped in replicating the original motions and costumes. Pihaly located the mold supplier used by the first artists and learned how to restore the old characters using resin and foam.

His wife helped with the design and layout and his 8-year-old son supervised in the shop, Pihaly said. His sister made all of the elf hats,



John Pihaly has created Santa's Workshop on the front porch of his family's Highland Park home with characters he restored from Dayton's annual eighth-floor Christmas displays.

scarves and shoes, matching the colors and styles of the originals. Two got completely new outfits.

The 10 characters in Santa's Workshop come from "A Day in the Life of an Elf," "Cinderella," "A Christmas Carol," "Pinocchio"

and other displays. Pihaly said that the project was more work than he had anticipated, but he still intends to restore the dozen or so remaining figures.

Characters not in Pihaly's collection have found other homes. He said he has compared

notes with a private collector in Minnetrista and knows of another private collection in Plymouth. The Minnesota Historical Society has a collection in storage and the Bentleyville light display near Duluth also has many of the original characters.

Though restoring the Dayton's figures required a good deal of work, creating a holiday tableau is not a totally new venture for the Pihaly family. They have lived in their house for five years, and each year they decorate for Halloween with pneumatic, motorized props.

"The neighborhood feedback has been really positive," he said of Santa's Workshop. "Grownups are full of nostalgia for the display and we enjoy hearing their memories. We've even had a visit from a past Dayton's employee and that was really special for us."

He said children also love the animation and some stop by every day. The display operates daily from 9 a.m.-9 p.m., but is best viewed under the floodlights after dark.

"We've really enjoyed bringing this history and wonder to the neighborhood and sharing the memories of the Dayton's Christmas display with passersby," Pihaly said. "It brings a little extra joy to the neighborhood in a dark year."

1◀ LIBRARIANS CHECK OUT

"I wanted to bring the community in and I wanted to see what volunteers could do to take the burden off of library staff," Neurer said. She also wanted volunteers to feel that they were part of a larger family. Some volunteers went on to become library professionals.

Neurer has worked with volunteers ranging from gradeschoolers helping with special events to an 89-year-old who assisted in a homework center. Volunteers also assist with reading, conversational English, job searches, workshops, knitting circles and special programs. "Weekly weeders" keep up the library gardens and grounds. Volunteers adopt shelves and keep them tidy. Some post recommended reading lists for patrons.

"Each library has its own flavor and the volunteers add to that," Neurer said. One favorite program of hers is Paw Pals, in which children read to therapy dogs. One father tearfully told Neurer that his son's stutter disappeared when he read to a dog.

"What never changed was how I

performed my job—putting people first," Neurer said. "It was important to me that individuals were never just a name. I knew who they were and what talents they wanted to share. Along with that I got the privilege to know more about them and how special they are."

Neurer has high praise for Berglund, calling her "the wisdom of the library system. She knows where everything is and can just walk to a shelf and find it. She treats everyone with courtesy and respect. She's one of the shining stars who keeps the library system bright."

Berglund was looking for part-time work while she still had two children at home when she learned from a friend that the library had openings. She worked throughout the system as a substitute, getting to know staff and patrons in all of the branches.

In 1985, she started at the Central Library. One of her favorite jobs was manning the "phone room." Before the internet, people frequently called libraries with questions and the staff would use phone books, city directories and other resources to find the answers. Berglund also



Pictured, from left, are Americorps member Charlotte Tjaden, library volunteer Nayni Paung, Wendy Neurer and Mary Ann Berglund in December 2019 during a CelebrAsia event at Saint Catherine University.

worked in youth services and the children's room.

Lexington and later Rondo were where she spent much of her career. She was on the planning committee for the construction of the Rondo Library, which opened in 2006 and is now the second-busiest library in the city after Central. "What I liked about Rondo was that there was always something going on," Berglund said. "There's just a lot of activity."

She especially enjoyed the youth summer reading program, older adults programs and English as a Second Language program. Tax time was also a busy period at the library, with patrons lined up for assistance.

Berglund said she also liked working with the small business assistance resource center and the Neighborhood Development Center. "We were able to connect a lot of people who were interested

in being entrepreneurs to classes and other resources," she said. She also worked with people with disabilities.

"Looking back, what really comes to mind is the expansion in services," Berglund said. "It's so much more than books and movies. We provide connections to a lot of resources, all kinds of data bases, programs and help."

Both women said they will miss the people they have met over the years. The pandemic meant that 2020 has been one of change for library workers, volunteers and patrons. Berglund was part of a group that sewed thousands of facemasks for city employees while the libraries were closed. She plans to continue sewing in retirement, as well as spending more time with her family.

Volunteers have not been allowed in the libraries for several months, leaving Neurer at loose ends. "I'm used to helping people and I don't know how to do it now," she said. "So I decided it's time to retire."

"I'll truly miss the volunteers and my fellow staff members," Neurer said. "I know no better people."

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VILLAGER

MORE THAN EVER, YOU NEED TO KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON

Council finds funds to protect police during violent protests

New helmets will replace equipment bought in 2008

By JANE MCCLURE

The Saint Paul Police Department will receive 519 new helmets with face shields and laser protection tape following a 5-2 vote by the City Council last week on a \$2.45 million package of amendments to the city's 2020 budget. The \$250,000 in new helmets will replace equipment the city purchased in 2008 with federal grants prior to the 2008 Republican National Convention in Saint Paul.

The helmet purchase was opposed by council members Mitra Jalali and Nelsie Yang.

Both have pushed this fall to cut police spending and redirect those funds to alternative approaches to fighting crime. "I just don't feel it's appropriate right now," Jalali said.

Other council members disagreed. They noted the frequent protests this fall in front of the governor's mansion on Summit Avenue and at the state Capitol, some of which have turned violent.

"I'm increasingly worried about the nature of the protests," said Ward 7 City Council member Jane Prince, citing the number of protesters openly carrying handguns and rifles.

While protesters have First Amendment rights to express themselves, said Ward 3 council member Chris Tolbert, it is important for police to be able to protect themselves.

"I'm increasingly worried about the nature of the protests," said Ward 7 City Council member Jane Prince, citing the number of protesters openly carrying handguns and rifles.

Ward 1 council member Dai Thao agreed, saying that the helmets are essential protective equipment, not weapons.

The Police Department had asked to replace the helmets in the past, but the expenditure never made it into the city budget. The City Council routinely adjusts its departmen-

tal budgets at the end of the year, and more adjustments than usual have been made this year because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The \$2.45 million in budget amendments also includes \$700,000 in anticipated unemployment insurance costs and \$1.5 million for Como Zoo and Conservatory operations. The Como facilities, which rely on donations from visitors, have been closed for many weeks this year, and that has caused a strain on fixed expenses for staff and animal, plant and facility maintenance.

The extra money was drawn from several sources, including \$250,000 in higher than anticipated receipts for building permits, an additional \$445,000 for franchise fees, and \$775,000 gained from police pension amortization aid.

14 2021 CITY BUDGET

Jalali criticized the 2021 budget for maintaining the status quo in the wake of the civil unrest and the demands for change following the death of George Floyd while in Minneapolis police custody last May. According to her, more needs to be done about the "overpolicing" of communities of color.

"I'm struggling to understand why (the 2021 budget) would show so little movement on the most prominent conversation about police funding we've had in recent memory," Jalali said. She called for disbanding the police department's K-9 unit and for having "less officers period."

"We've definitely let a lot of people down," Yang said.

Other City Council members said efforts to reform the police department will continue. Some cited concerns about rising crime. The city had its 32nd homicide of the year on December 16—two more than in all of 2019.

Council members also cited the city's new Community First Public Safety initiative, which provides an array of alternatives for preventing crime, including the hiring of community ambassadors. A Community First Public Safety Commission was recently formed, and its 48 members will be studying alternative ways to respond to "lower priority" calls to the emergency management system's 911 line. The commission has been tasked with making recommendations by May 2021—recommendations that could be incorporated in the city's 2022 budget. Mayor Melvin Carter has called for that budget to include money for more social workers, mental health professionals and housing counselors to work with the police.

"In supporting this budget, I'm absolutely not supporting the status quo with regard to

City taxes, fees see slight overall increase

By JANE MCCLURE

The Saint Paul City Council approved a city budget for 2021 that holds the line on property taxes. Some homeowners may see the city's share of their property taxes decrease next year as a result. However, the fees Saint Paul residents pay for city services are scheduled to increase, offsetting some of those savings.

The median-value home in Saint Paul increased from \$199,800 to \$215,800 over the past year. However, the city's share of the property taxes on that home will decrease \$19—from \$906 in 2020 to \$888 in 2021.

Meanwhile, the city's street maintenance assessment on that home will increase from \$101 to \$102 to cover the cost of street lighting, street and alley sweeping, and street

and alley seal coating.

Water charges on the average home will increase from \$306 in 2020 to \$313 in 2021. Sanitary sewer charges will increase from \$305 to \$314 due to a 3.5 percent increase in the volume fee. Storm sewer charges will increase from \$101 to \$105.

The city recycling fee will increase from \$58 to \$60. The residential solid waste collection fee will increase from \$25 to \$27. That fee is in addition to what homeowners pay for city-mandated trash collection service.

The total city taxes and fees on the average home will be \$1,809 in 2021, or \$6 more than in 2020. What a homeowner actually pays in city taxes and fees will vary depending on the assessed value of the home, the level of water usage and any special assessments.

public safety," said Ward 2 City Council member Rebecca Noecker. According to her, the City Council will continue to look at police spending thoughtfully instead of "indiscriminately hacking away" at the department's budget.

The budget for the police department in 2021 includes an estimated \$3.7 million in savings due to attrition. To meet that target, according to council member Jane Prince, 30 to 40 police officers may have to retire or resign before any new officers are hired. She said she is concerned about what that would mean for police response times.

The majority of the City Council praised the 2021 budget and the property tax levy that will support it. The levy has been set at \$165 million next year, the same as in 2020, hold-

ing the line on property taxes.

Ward 1 council member Dai Thao called the budget "realistic and solid," given the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and the steep decline in city revenue it has caused. City departments had to cut their budgets mid-year in 2020 and were were planning for a deficit of almost \$20 million going into 2021. The 2021 city budget as approved is \$3 million less than the amount the city spent in 2020.

The mayor and City Council wanted to avoid laying off city staff and dipping into budget reserves, and they succeeded in that while restoring some funding for libraries, recreation centers and street work. With an array of budget shifts and other changes, the council was able to add back \$225,000 for parks and recreation, \$344,000 for street

work and \$310,000 for library hours.

With money saved through delays in purchases, canceled conferences and travel, and a postponement in a Community First Public Safety contract, the city was able to shift funds to parks and recreation and library materials. The Saint Paul Public Library will also use federal Community Development Block Grants to restore 3.7 full-time-equivalent library technician positions.

The Parks and Recreation Department had considered cutting organized sports for children ages 9 and up, as well as swimming and water aerobics programs. Those services were partially restored by shifting money from bicycle and pedestrian projects. Those projects will now be funded by the Neighborhood Sales Tax Revitalization program.

According to city budget director Susan Earle and City Council chief budget officer Holly Huston, the 2021 budget will be revisited mid-year, and if city revenue comes in higher than expected, more money can be devoted to parks and recreation and libraries.

The City Council would like to keep recreation centers open until 9 p.m. during the school year instead of closing them at 8 p.m. as currently planned. However, rec center hours and library staffing may depend on the pandemic, which has shuttered city facilities or dramatically reduced their hours since last spring.

Council members do not anticipate fully reopening city facilities for much of 2021, given the ongoing pandemic. Noecker said that while she would like the city to be able to "throw open our doors and welcome people back," she is worried about the ongoing lag in city sales taxes, hotel and motel taxes, parking revenue, paramedic and other fees and the prospect of delinquencies in property tax payments.

Property taxpayers get a break in 2021 with only schools raising levy

St. Paul School Board approves 4.77% hike in its tax levy for 2021

By JANE MCCLURE

Saint Paul's property tax outlook for 2021 is coming into focus. Earlier this month, the City Council approved a tax levy for 2021 that is no higher than the levy in 2020 (see the story above and on page 1), the Ramsey County Board voted to hold the line on its share of property taxes, and the Saint Paul School Board approved a 4.77 percent increase in the school district's tax levy.

The Saint Paul Public Schools will levy \$197 million for the 2021-22 school year. That is up \$9 million from the levy for 2020-21. The school district levy includes \$74.5 million for operations; \$43.1 million for pensions, con-

tracts and benefits; \$74.6 million for facilities; and \$4.2 million for community services.

Ramsey County's levy for 2021 is \$333.6 million, in support of a total county budget of \$749 million, which is \$7.2 million or 0.9 percent higher than the county budget in 2020.

The County Board had been considering a 4.5 percent tax levy increase in 2021, but that was before the outbreak of COVID-19. The board, acting as the Regional Railroad Authority, did approve a 6.2 percent increase in the transit levy, raising it to \$27.6 million for 2021.

It was "no small feat" to hold down the levy for 2021, said commissioner Victoria Reinhardt, who chairs the County Board's budget committee. "But it's been a difficult year."

The county held its levy flat by not filling open positions and not replacing aging vehicles. That saved \$14.2 million. More savings came from deferring technology purchases (\$2 million) and interest reductions (\$1 million). The county also drew on \$2.8 million in budget reserves.

The county held its levy flat by not filling open positions, not replacing aging vehicles, deferring technology purchases and through interest reductions.

Board chair Toni Carter noted that the county uses its reserves as a rainy day fund. "This wasn't just a rainy day," she said. "It was a torrential storm."

The pandemic has reduced revenue and increased costs for Ramsey County. The administration was able to draw on \$96 million in federal CARES Act funding to cover many pandemic-related expenses. However, the demand for food and shelter programs

keeps growing. Ramsey County manager Ryan O'Connor said the county is spending as much as \$1 million per month on food programs alone, and there is no guarantee that additional federal funds will be forthcoming.

Another wrinkle in the budget process were three requests brought forward in November by Ramsey County Sheriff Bob Fletcher. The Sheriff's Department was seeking an additional \$657,789 for a projected salary shortfall; \$165,000 for a shortfall in retirement funding due to a software problem; and \$550,000 for an expected increase in enforcement costs due to the civil unrest following the death of George Floyd.

The Sheriff's Department will have to address its budgeting errors and make up the salary shortfall with its own funds, the County Board decided. The county will cover future civil unrest costs as needed through its budget reserves. According to Ramsey County chief financial officer Alex Kotze, the retirement funding shortfall can be fixed.

Committee gets look at plans for 2nd phase of Lexington Landing

By JANE MCCLURE

As the first residents move into phase one of the Lexington Landing senior housing development this month, a 2021 groundbreaking is being eyed for phase two. The Highland District Council (HDC) Community Development Committee got its first look at plans for the second building on December 8. The developers hope to submit final plans to city officials later this month or in January.

Lexington Landing's first phase is a five-story, 170-unit apartment building at the corner of West Seventh Street and Montreal Avenue. It is on the southern part of a 5-acre, triangular site that was the longtime home of Riverside School. The school building was torn down in late August 2017 after the property was sold by the Saint Paul Public Schools to the J.A. Wedum Foundation.

The first building includes a mix of independent, assisted living and memory care units. The majority of the units are for independent living, and about 95 percent of the first phase units are already pre-leased.

The second phase will be a four-story apartment building on the

northern end of the property. It will have a mix of 91 one- and two-bedroom independent living units. The plans are currently undergoing a preliminary site plan review by city staff, said Scott Black of EDI, the firm overseeing the project. Presbyterian Homes and Services will manage both buildings.

The two buildings will be separated by a rerouted Lexington Parkway, a project that is also entering its second phase. Lexington was detached from Montreal Avenue this summer and rerouted through the development site across West Seventh Street. The second phase will extend Lexington to Shepard Road via a rebuilt Elway Street, with construction expected to begin in 2022.

Black said it has not been determined if the second phase of Lexington Landing needs any approvals from the city's Planning Commission or Board of Zoning Appeals. In any case, he plans to seek a letter of support from the HDC in 2021.

The entire site was rezoned from single-family to Traditional Neighborhoods 3 (TN3) in 2018, so no zoning change is needed. Building heights of up to 45 feet are allowed under TN3 zoning, and the current proposal has the second building



The second phase of the Lexington Landing senior housing complex will feature a four-story apartment building with a mix of 91 independent living units on the northern end of the property off of West Seventh Street and Albion Avenue.

at 44.5 feet. Black said that the first building was originally going to be 65 feet high and ended up at 58 feet.

The exterior of the second building will be similar in appearance to the first one. The four-story building will drop to two stories at its north end, where there will be a rooftop patio. The L-shaped building's estimated 178,747 square feet will include common areas on the first floor. It will not replicate the commercial kitchen in the first building, but will have space for fitness activities and pickle ball. Apartments will occupy the upper floors.

The main entrance for the sec-

ond building will be off Albion Avenue, while the entrance for the first building is off Lexington. Both buildings will have vestibules facing West Seventh.

The second building will have about 32 surface parking spaces and 87 underground parking spaces, with the parking entrance off of Albion and Race Street.

The issue of safety for pedestrians crossing Lexington was brought up during the meeting on December 8. Residents in the first building are in their early 80s on average and it is not known how many of them will walk over to the second building.

Another issue discussed during the meeting was pedestrian safety in general. While Lexington Landing is on the Route 54 bus line and the proposed Riverview Corridor modern streetcar line, city officials and both the HDC and West Seventh/Fort Road Federation have long raised concerns about how pedestrians can safely cross West Seventh in that vicinity.

Spillover parking was also an issue raised by neighbors. Black noted that not all Lexington Landing residents will own motor vehicles, and the housing complex will have a shuttle bus for residents.

Council allows variances, but HPC denies permit for Portland Ave. townhouse

By JANE MCCLURE

It appears that the dispute over whether a proposed three-unit townhouse at 540-542 Portland Ave. would be appropriate in the Historic Hill District will continue. The Saint Paul City Council voted 6-1 on December 16 to deny an appeal by neighbors and uphold a Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) approval of six variances for the project.

However, one condition attached to the variances is that the building permit gets the support of the Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Commission. The HPC initially approved the permit in October, but then denied it on a 5-2 vote on December 14 after Ramsey Hill residents complained that they did not receive adequate notice of the earlier hearing.

That leaves the developers, Sullivan Property Investments LLC and their partners with variances for a project that they do not have approval to build. The variances are for the primary entrance's location, the number of off-street parking spaces, lot coverage, lot size, lot width and rear-yard setback.

The developers want to build the three-unit Dutch Colonial-style townhouse at the rear of a lot that already has a three-unit townhouse facing Portland. The design of the proposed building would be similar to the existing structure, which dates from 1908. The proposed building would face Summit.

The developers and their supporters, including the Summit-University Planning Council, contend that the project would be an improvement to what is now a vacant lot and parking area. Opponents, including the Ramsey Hill Association and Summit Avenue Residential Preservation Association, say the project does not meet the guidelines for the Historic Hill District and is out of scale for the site.

Olov Strole, who is part of the development team, sent an email to the City Council asking that the appeal of the variances be denied and that the developers be allowed to work with neighbors on a new plan.

Portland neighbors Gar Hargens and Mary Staples Thompson appealed the BZA and initial HPC approvals to the council. They said neighbors did not receive proper notice of

the online HPC hearing on October 5, which was held at the same time as the one for the BZA, making it difficult for neighbors to participate. They also said that the HPC hearing had technical difficulties and neighbors who tried to get onto the call were unable to present testimony.

The City Council was to hear the appeal in November, but laid the matter over twice. Council member Dai Thao, whose Ward 1 includes the property, sent the issue back to the HPC for a second hearing due to the technical difficulties and notification issues.

The hearing on December 14 also had technical difficulties, as people wishing to testify had trouble calling in. Some HPC members also were dropped from the call and missed some of the discussion. The HPC, which initially voted on December 14 to approve the building permit, debated the issue again and then voted to deny it.

HPC members made it clear that they expect the developers and neighbors to work together on a new building design.

Because the HPC voted against the build-

ing permit on December 14, the initial appeal of its earlier decision was withdrawn. Still, two days later City Council members at times were confused about what they were voting on. After initially voting to deny the appeal of the BZA's decision and grant the variances, council members were unsure if they should vote on it again.

At one point, council president Amy Brendmoen declared, "I'm absolutely confused. I'm legitimately befuddled."

Thao moved for reconsideration on the vote to deny the appeal of the BZA decision, but then dropped the motion and apologized for causing confusion. He also wants the developers and neighbors to get together and discuss the project.

Other council members said they would like to see something built on the site, saying it would add to the city's housing stock.

Council member Jane Prince cast the sole vote against denying the appeal. She questioned why the council would uphold variances for a project that did not have a building permit.

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HPC rejects UST's request to raze Loras Hall for science building

By JANE MCCLURE

Citing Loras Hall's historical significance, the Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) voted 6-1 on December 14 to reject a request from the University of Saint Thomas to demolish the structure in order to build a new science and engineering building.

University officials now must decide whether to change their plans or appeal the HPC's decision to the Saint Paul City Council. HPC action is required because Loras is in the Summit Avenue West Historic District.

Loras Hall, which was built in 1894 as a residence for Saint Paul Seminary students, is located on Summit Avenue just west of the university's Frey Science and Engineering Center. Loras was designed by noted architect Cass Gilbert and is one of only three original seminary buildings that remain.

The university wants to tear Loras down and construct a 120,000-square-foot STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and

mathematics) building on the site.

The majority of commissioners who said Loras should not be demolished want to see it incorporated into the new STEAM building.

Commissioner Paul Nelson cast the sole vote against denying the demolition permit. "I've come to the conclusion that Saint Thomas has made its case for demolition," he said.

Commission David Wagner, on the other hand, said allowing the demolition of Loras "would be a dereliction of duty on our part."

In a preapplication review, HPC commissioners had asked UST officials to find ways to preserve and repurpose the building. Mark Vangsgard, the university's chief financial officer, said renovating Loras had an estimated cost of \$10.4 million, while addressing exterior maintenance alone would cost more than \$1.7 million. If UST is forced to save Loras, he indicated that the building could be mothballed.

The Macalester-Groveland and Union Park district councils supported the demolition permit request. The Cass Gilbert Society, Summit Avenue Residential Preservation As-



The 126-year-old Loras Hall at the University of Saint Thomas.

sociation, Historic Saint Paul and other preservation groups opposed it. Campus neighbors weighed in on both sides of the issue. The HPC heard from almost two dozen supporters and opponents of the demolition.

UST officials said they have looked unsuccessfully at ways to incorporate Loras into the new STEAM building. Instead of that, they have proposed installing a display on the history of Gilbert, seminary founder Archbishop

John Ireland and benefactor James J. Hill into the new \$80 million building.

Commissioners asked if a new site could be found for the STEAM building. Vangsgard said that could force the university to reopen its controversial 2004 conditional use permit that regulates campus growth and development. That is a step university officials and neighbors have long sought to avoid.

"This is not an either/or proposition," said Macalester-Groveland resident Marc Manderscheid, who contended there is space for the new STEAM building without tearing down Loras.

Macalester-Groveland resident Saura Jost was among those speaking in favor of the demolition, saying the building lacks historical significance. Jost said the advantages of the new STEAM building must also be considered.

University officials have also cited the educational benefits of the new building, including the ability to add programs such as nursing.

Board approves variances for new senior housing at Highland Bridge

By JANE MCCLURE

Variances for height, setback and a pedestrian skyway were granted on December 14 by the Saint Paul Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) to Presbyterian Homes and Services. The organization plans to construct two buildings of senior housing on either side of a new extension to Mount Curve Boulevard one block south of Ford Parkway.

The buildings are part of the Highland Bridge development on the site of Ford Motor Company's former assembly plant. The building at 820 Mount Curve would have 118 independent-living apartments, 4,000 square feet

of commercial space and a 99-space parking ramp. The building at 825 Mount Curve would have 102 independent-living apartments, 40 assisted living units, 40 memory care units and a 158-space parking ramp.

Both buildings will have balconies. A minimum setback of five feet is normally required for balconies, and zero setback is proposed. Both buildings will be 65 feet tall and located partially in the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area. They needed 17-foot variances to the 48-foot height limit in the river corridor.

The Saint Paul Planning Commission and City Council are expected to adopt new zoning regulations for the river corridor in early

2021. The 48-foot height limit is part of those pending regulations.

A 96-foot-high tower is planned for the building at 820 Mount Curve. The tower would be outside of the river corridor, and it needed a 31-foot height variance to the maximum 65-foot height limit there.

The Friends of the Mississippi River opposed the variance for the 96-foot tower. According to Friends member Colleen O'Connor Toberman, the tower will be visible from the Mississippi River Valley, spoiling the natural vista. The advocacy group did not oppose the 17-foot height variance for 825 Mount Curve since it will not be visible

from the river valley.

Presbyterian Homes is planning a pedestrian skyway to link the two buildings over Mount Curve. It wants the skyway so that residents and staff can safely walk back and forth between the buildings, according to Maureen Michalski, vice president of development for Ryan Companies, master developer of the Ford site. Presbyterian Homes and Ryan Companies will also have to seek air rights for the skyway, a process that requires City Council approval.

The Highland District Council recommended approval of all the variances, as did the BZA staff.

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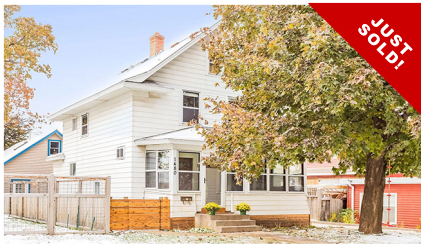
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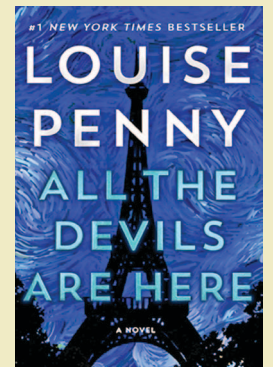
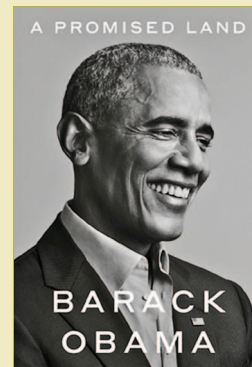
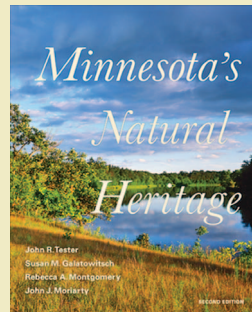
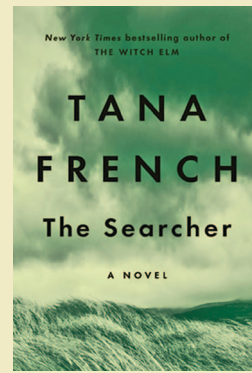
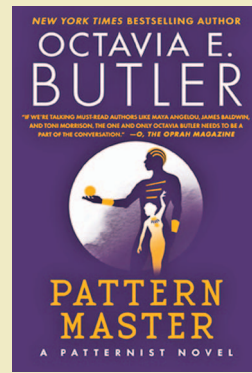
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News Briefs

Sisters of Saint Joseph may open Provincial House to homeless

A proposal to turn the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Carondelet's Provincial House into a shelter for families who are homeless will be addressed at a virtual town hall meeting from 5-6:30 p.m. Tuesday, January 5. The meeting will be hosted by the Sisters of Saint Joseph, Ramsey County and Interfaith Action of Greater Saint Paul.

Interfaith Action would lease the space at 1880 Randolph Ave. to serve approximately 20 families with children, almost all of whom are under age 12. The Saint Paul Planning Commission's Zoning Committee will hold a hearing on the issue on December 31. The full Planning Commission meets on January 8.

COVID-19 and the economic downturn brought about by the pandemic have exacerbated the housing crisis locally. Ramsey County officials have been working to identify possible new shelters. The Provincial House, which has served as offices and a residence for the Sisters of Saint Joseph for nearly 100 years, has not been fully occupied for the past 10 years.

Interfaith Action, with financial support from Ramsey County, would operate the shelter as part of Project Home, its 23-year-old program that has provided temporary shelter and support for families experiencing homelessness at synagogues and churches across the area. Interfaith Action's rapid exit support team would staff the Provincial House facility while helping families find permanent affordable housing as well as employment and educational opportunities.

All shelters in Saint Paul are required to have conditional use permits, which limit the number of residents and the hours of operation. The permit application for Provincial House states that the shelter would house up to 30 families in rooms on the second, third and fourth floors. A main floor dining room and laundry facilities would also be used.

To join the town hall meeting on January 5, visit zoom.us/j/96222033055#success or call 651-372-8299.

Long battle over downtown's Pedro Park takes another turn

The Minnesota Court of Appeals on December 14 ruled against the Friends of Pedro Park, affirming a lower court decision to dismiss the group's lawsuit against the city over plans for developing the site in downtown Saint Paul.

Friends leader Kati Berg said park supporters should now encourage city officials to develop the larger park they have envisioned. The group has long fought for a park to take up the entire block bounded by 10th, Robert, Ninth and Minnesota streets. That proposed park has appeared in city plans since 1997. Instead, a passive park was created there next to the city's Public Safety Annex at 100 E. 10th St.

Instead of razing the annex and creating a larger park, the City Council voted in 2018 to sell the building to Minneapolis-based Ackerberg Group, which planned to convert it into retail and office space. However, Ackerberg has dropped that proposal, leaving open the possibility that the vacant building could be torn down and incorporated into a larger park. Or the city could market the property for development again.

The park is named for the Pedro family, who closed its longtime luggage center at 10th and Robert streets in 2008. The family donated the .45-acre site for a city park the following year with the condition that it carry the Pedro family name.

Earlier this fall the City Council reallocated \$800,000 in Capital Improvement Budget (CIB) funds earmarked for improving the park to help make up a \$22 million deficit in the 2020 city budget. City staff told the CIB Committee in November that Pedro Park's path forward is uncertain as park funding was

tied to the redevelopment of the annex building. Ackerberg was to buy the building for \$1.4 million and planned to work with the city to develop the adjacent vacant land as a park. Ackerberg was also to provide \$40,000 annually for 20 years to maintain Pedro Park.

Berg said she does not have any regrets for the years she and others spent challenging the city. She said now that Ackerberg has dropped its plans to purchase the building, the park issue can go back to the City Council.

Council lays over decision on wine shops near liquor stores

The Saint Paul City Council was poised to vote on a proposal to change the distance requirement between wine-only shops and off-sale liquor stores on December 16, but laid the matter over until January 27.

The ordinance change would allow wine shops to operate within a quarter mile of off-sale liquor stores, instead of the current half mile. The change is being led by council member Jane Prince in response to a request from the owner of the Yoerg Brewing Company to open the Vin de Pays wine shop next to his brewery and restaurant. The wine shop would not meet the city's current distance requirements from other liquor stores.

Prince said she has heard from two other business owners interested in opening wine shops. Because liquor licenses also are based on population, she estimates that the city could accommodate only about half a dozen more shops.

The measure has support of the city's Business Review Council and several district councils and business associations. It is opposed by off-sale liquor store owners and the Minnesota Licensed Beverage Association.

Mayor Melvin Carter has said he wants the matter to see further review from the city's Department of Safety and Inspections. Otherwise, he said he may veto the measure. City staff have said they may not have time to work on the ordinance until March.

Prince said she and her staff have spent months meeting with neighborhood groups and that the ordinance should be ready to be voted on now.

New, undisclosed plans in works for Fire Station 10 on Randolph

The long-awaited redevelopment of former Fire Station 10 at 754 Randolph Ave. is moving ahead, but not with the plans that were originally proposed.

Building owner Travis Temke had previously announced plans to convert the building into a restaurant, microbrewery and event center. This fall, the city issued a building permit to Terra Construction for the fire station's renovation. Temke recently said that he now plans to fix up the building, bring it up to city codes, and prepare it for a new and as yet undetermined use.

The Saint Paul City Council on December 16 approved a special assessment for a fire protection sprinkler system for the two-story building, which was constructed in 1885. The system has an estimated cost of \$109,872. Temke will be responsible for installing the sprinkler system and presenting city officials with invoices for payment of the work. If Temke abandons the project, he will have to reimburse the city for assessment-related costs.

The building was once the oldest active firehouse in the city. It served five different fire companies over the years and at one point was the infirmary for ill or injured fire horses. It was expanded in 1911 and was used as a fire house until 2010 when its last fire company moved to the new Fire Station 1 on Randolph Avenue and West Seventh Street. It was used for storage before its sale in 2018.

News Briefs were compiled by Jane McClure and Dale Mischke.

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VIEWPOINT

A Bridge too far: The cement canyons of Highland Park

BY BRUCE HOPPE

Behind Ryan Companies' marketing spin and slick illustrations for the Highland Bridge development in Highland Park, there is another story. Community awareness and activism can keep developers from manipulating city-approved plans for the 122-acre Ford Plant site, from circumventing regulations and from focusing primarily on their self-interests.

Ryan Companies is employing a continuous stream of variance requests and amendments to work around the city's approved Ford Site Zoning and Public Realm Master Plan. These tactics are allowing Ryan to deviate from the carefully developed plan, which is based on 10 years of community input and prior city approvals.

The Ford site master plan mentions "open space" more than 40 times as an important component of the development. However, on one of the first parcels to be developed, the city has allowed Ryan to count private rooftops and apartment balconies toward the public open space requirement. The city and Ryan need to commit to the commonly held definition of open space, which is publicly

accessible green space that is distinct from building lot coverage.

The Highland Bridge development will be using tax increment financing (TIF) to offset public improvement costs. Big developments routinely use TIF for financing public infrastructure. However, the Ford site is a premium development that is not in a blighted area as most conventional TIF districts are. The Ford development has a massive budget of up to \$275 million in TIF. If that is ultimately approved, it would essentially lock up public subsidies that could otherwise go to other areas of Saint Paul needing economic development.

The city, Ryan Companies and Xcel Energy are considering a proposal to construct a solar energy array for the Ford site on top of a massive 25-foot-deep pile of buried industrial waste near the Mississippi River. It seems this solar installation is a convenient justification to leave the so-called Area C waste dump intact. Tolerating a toxic landfill across the street from a billion-dollar development

is strangely inconsistent with the city's desire for a world-class urban village on the riverfront. Ford painstakingly cleaned up its main assembly plant property before it sold to Ryan; Ford should now finish the job by cleaning up its remaining waste dump.

There has been minimal planning around repurposing the old Canadian Pacific Railway corridor into the Ford site. This abandoned rail spur could serve as a mass transit route to help relieve eventual traffic congestion in Highland Park. It seems shortsighted to be breaking ground on Highland Bridge with no clear long-term transit

plan. Further, Canadian Pacific owns 15 acres of land adjacent to the Ford development. Undoubtedly, this land will eventually sell for further development, adding more scale to an already overbuilt site plan.

There has been little planning for schools, fire and police department services to support the more than 7,000 future residents of Highland Bridge. When will we see a

written plan for this with budgets and timelines?

Neither Ryan Companies nor the city has shifted from a maximum-density paradigm, even as people and businesses leave urban areas amid the COVID-19 pandemic, a summer of civil unrest and rising crime rates. The appeal of a mega-density development in the heart of Highland Park should be in question as the pandemic exposes the hazards of overcrowding.

Early in the planning process, the city envisioned a Ford site development that is woven into the existing Highland Park neighborhood, supporting walking, biking and mass transit and providing new housing, services, jobs and activities that everyone can enjoy. This positive outcome is still achievable as long as the city and developers do not over-commercialize the Ford site development and squander what makes Highland Park a thriving community.

Highland Park's quality of life is vulnerable. In the end, the neighborhood could be left with overcrowded streets set among continuous rows of oversized buildings that look more like cement canyons.

Bruce Hoppe is a resident of Highland Park.

In the end, the neighborhood could be left with overcrowded streets set among continuous rows of oversized buildings that look more like cement canyons.

INBOX

James-Lexington bait 'n' switch?

In June we were told that the owners of property at James Avenue and Lexington Parkway wished to build a 60-unit apartment building, but required a zoning change in order to do so. The property ultimately was rezoned from single-family to RM2, or medium density.

In September, the City Council reviewed proposed changes to local zoning rules. According to the *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, under the proposed changes, added density would be awarded to developers who make 10 to 20 percent of the units in their building affordable to renters earning no more than 60 percent of the area's median household income. The density bonus would be based on floor area ratio, or floor area divided by the area of the lot. In RM2, the maximum floor area ratio is 2.25, which would increase to 3.25 if 20 percent of the units are designated affordable.

The owners have now proposed to increase the number of units by 50 percent, from about 60 to 93. We are told that physical challenges at the site and a desire to include affordable housing motivated this change. The site has not changed since the rezoning request was made. The only change I can see is a dramatic increase in the number of units.

The story in the December 9 *Villager* does not state how many affordable units are proposed. It seems, based on the above, that only 9 or 18 affordable units are required to obtain the density bonus. What of the other 12 to 21 units? Given these facts, I can't help but believe we have been played once again.

*James M. Hamilton
Macalester-Groveland*

The bullies in City Hall

The ways in which our government bullies us are piling up. The November 11 issue of the *Villager* showed us four of them.

One headline read, "Saint Paul scrambles to fill budget gap," but Mayor Melvin Carter spends like there is an excess of funds with money given to all newborns, guaranteed income programs, millions more for a bike lane, and a half-million dollars for tenant protections. Staffing this and staffing that probably means staffing these new positions forever.

"Riverview Corridor streetcar project rolls into next phase" read the headline of a second story about a \$2 billion streetcar project directed by unelected officials at the Metropolitan Council. This is after building a \$1 billion light-rail Green Line and a \$2 billion Southwest Corridor light-rail line. This is a magnificent windfall to union contractors while property taxes soar. Does anyone know how much taxpayers will be forced to pay in transit subsidies when all three transit lines are working? Our leaders knew back in the 1970s that

the Twin Cities have the worst possible configuration for streetcars and light-rail transit with suburbs in all directions and no population densities.

I've lived in my duplex for 30 years, and the city's rulers decided that I needed two trash carts at twice the expense. Now I read that I will be responsible for giving packets of information to my tenant. In Merriam Park, newly elected City Council member Mitra Jalali totally ignored over a year of work by the neighborhood on housing density. Now a Highland Park group is suing to get the city to follow its own zoning rules. Our city rulers, after years of work on the Ford site, changed the definition of open space to create higher density.

We used to have public servants, but after decades of one-party rule, many leaders feel they can do whatever they want.

*Dave Kubes
Macalester-Groveland*

Skating on thin ice

There are many things that don't seem right these days, but this one really galled me: We have billions of dollars to build a train to the airport, on a route that most people already find easy transportation on, but we can't come up with money for skating rinks in Saint Paul, when our kids so desperately need outdoor activities during all this craziness? (*Villager*, December 9).

*Jean Craig
Snelling-Hamline*

Support our restaurants

Ward 3 restaurants are in crisis. Many have temporarily closed or are barely hanging on after losing as much as 80 percent of their business since March due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As one of the pillars of our community, restaurants in Macalester-Groveland and Highland Park have served friends and families, supported and hosted fundraisers, and donated time and energy to countless causes over the years.

They've been there for us for generations, and now it's time for us to be there for them. You can help save our vibrant food scene by taking the following actions: Buy restaurant gift cards for family, friends, clients and yourself; order takeout meals and pick them up at curbside; and leave a healthy tip.

We also ask you to participate in Taste of Ward 3—Save Our Restaurants. By dining out a few times at local establishments, you can enter a contest and win gift cards. Or simply enjoy a few wonderful meals from the dozens of Ward 3 restaurants serving a wide variety of cuisines. Learn more by visiting tasteofward3.com.

As we look to 2021, ordering out is about more than just convenience and good food; it's about helping an industry survive in one of the most challenging times in our nation's history.

*Highland District Council
Highland Business Association
Macalester Groveland District Council
Grand Avenue Business Association
Friends of Highland Arts*

Merry Christmas, Saint Kate's

We always enjoy the Christmas lights at the University of Saint Catherine, but this Christmas season, when it seems even more important, the enhanced display is especially appreciated. Merry Christmas.

*Jim and Deb Mulcahy
Highland Park*

Children, school thyself

As the mother of Saint Paul Public Schools children, my daughter is now the lunch lady, the custodian, the school nurse, the hallway monitor and the principal. Oh, and the teacher.

*Elizabeth Ellis
Summit-University*

Involve people in COVID policy

Governor Tim Walz's draconian decision to keep Minnesota's hospitality industry out of business indefinitely while big-box retailers thrive makes no sense when one examines the most recent data regarding the spread of COVID-19 in the state. Restaurants and bars can be and have been operated safely, and they should be open.

The governor's insulting and preposterous suggestion that establishments provide outdoor dining in the dead of a Minnesota winter—having to invest thousands of dollars that shuttered eateries do not have—shows how deeply out of touch Walz is and how little he understands the private economy. I would respectfully submit that while Minnesota restaurant workers forgo their paychecks, the governor forgo his.

It is unconscionable that Governor Walz executed this sweeping executive order without the consent of the state Legislature, which has been in special session a historic seven times this year and is more than capable of working with him on these measures. The people of Minnesota's duly elected representatives should be equally involved in crafting our

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pandemic policies now that we understand the virus better and the state is no longer dealing with an unknown crisis as it was last March.

DFL House leaders Melissa Hortman and Ryan Winkler have been derelict in their duty by abdicating the power of the Legislature to a governor who quite alarmingly likes unilateral decision making a lot. These consequential public policy decisions deserve and require the input of the people.

*Andy Brehm
Ramsey Hill*

School Board's Vue is listening

I'm excited to serve the people of this city as the newly elected member of the Saint Paul School Board. Here is what I've heard from voters as their priorities:

- Provide the best possible education during the pandemic.
- Provide ways for families and students to share ideas with district administrators and School Board members.
- Help the district attract additional students.
- Refine the curricula so that students from all backgrounds are learning about their own heritage and that of others in Minnesota.
- Reduce administrative costs and put more funds into teachers and other direct services for students.
- Clarify and improve the process by which families get answers to their questions.
- Help make the Saint Paul Public Schools curricula more engaging, more active.
- Increase the number of high school students who earn college credit.

These are among the items I will work on over the next year with other School Board members and the school district administration. Reactions and questions are always welcome. Email jim.vue@spps.org.

*Jim Vue
East Side*

A chance to build a better world

Human Rights Day was December 10, marking the date in 1948 when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by all of the world's nations through the United Nations General Assembly. The declaration was, and continues to be, a landmark document that proclaims that dignity, equality, respect and freedom are inalienable rights for every human being. It is the foundation of international human rights law.

This year Human Rights Day's theme is "Recover Better," focusing on the need to build back better from our COVID-

ravaged world, ensuring that universal human rights are central to our recovery efforts. This virus has exposed and worsened inequalities and prohibitions. We now have the opportunity to greatly reduce, if not totally eradicate, these horrific injustices.

We are all interconnected and collectively responsible for the well-being of our planet. Let's imagine that ending this pandemic will bring a new era of global solidarity and sustainability, ending wars and militarism and ushering in worldwide peace and harmony.

*Bill Adamski
Kingfield, Minneapolis*

Know the history behind name

On December 7, School District 197 decided to drop Henry Sibley's name from the high school in Mendota Heights. We, along with others, recommended that they take a year to educate the student body and larger community about the complexities of political leadership in early state history before considering such an action.

We believe community members are interested in knowing more about the history of their own neighborhoods. Many of these leaders lived in the areas surrounding Fort Snelling and Mendota. As a starting point, we recommend two excellent books on the subject: *North Country: The Making of Minnesota* by Mary Lethert Wingerd and *Henry Hastings Sibley: Divided Heart* by Rhoda Gilman. This is a great opportunity to take a deep breath and get better acquainted with our local history.

*Jay Pfaender
Mendota Heights*

*Matthew Wright,
Dayton's Bluff*

Variances' fairness questioned

On our block, a developer said one thing and did another. Demolition of the house at 1493 Highland Pkwy. started in August with immediate property damage and safety issues along the alley and property lines. Now construction is in full swing, with collapse along property lines in two areas. It seems a different set of rules apply to this developer and his city acquaintances.

When city higher-ups were made aware of the significant change in the project, a stop work order was initiated and the developer returned to the Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) for the required variances. The developer appealed to the City Council after the BZA denied the variances.

In recommending approval at the October 28 City Council meeting, council member Chris Tolbert commented that the developer knew better, but stopped short of reprimanding city officials. He seemed to refer to deft maneuvers by an experienced developer to get permits ahead of needed variances and later getting variances approved through misrepresentation.

Council members were made aware of the trouble neighbors had getting the facts corrected. Later, zoning clarified an unknown and narrow window to appeal the "error in fact." At the hearing, zoning added misinformation, incorrectly citing neighbor petitions—while 23 homeowners opposed, the city official reported the opposite. Without typical live testimony, the inaccurate and erroneous information stood uncorrected.

While we support responsible development, city officials sidestepped facts and ordinances that will alter our block. Construction at 1493 Highland Pkwy. will result in lot coverage greater than the 40 percent allowed by ordinance, with no backyard and minimal front- and side-yard setbacks. It will be unlike all other homes on the block, a salient criteria used by the BZA.

While a variance process exists, numerous loopholes, barriers and no reasonable way to correct wrong information make it an empty process. Our experience points to a need for reform at zoning and City Council. We implore that they know better and should act better. They've lost our trust.

*Margaret Isom, Jon Isom,
Katie Bliss, Patti Hade
Highland Park*

*Juan Torres
West End*

Our elitist public servants

Letter writer Kathleen Deming certainly gets it ("City has strayed from purpose," *Villager* Inbox, November 25). Too many of our "leaders" on the City Council and in the mayor's office continue to turn their backs on the citizenry in favor of greedy developers and their construction affiliates.

Where is multi-millionaire Minnesota United owner Dr. William McGuire in terms of the repair, rebuilding and fulsome rehabilitation desperately needed in the Midway district? We are all helping to pay for his snazzy Allianz Field soccer stadium. What is he doing for us with all the millions he has? Not much. Methinks he has weaseled out of his past commitments.

Alas, my City Councilwoman seems to have no answers. She is much more interested in bike paths, University Avenue beer pubs, less police presence, tearing down century-old houses and replacing them with overpriced high-rise apartments, and continuously overtaxing us with her myriad projects and pet interests while solidifying her future political career. Her fawning over Mr. Carter, Mr. Stark, Mr. Ellison, et al., is pretty transparent and tawdry in my opinion.

I urge voters to dump the majority of these elitist public servants next election and replace them with sensible, fair-minded and practical civil servants to restore order and ethics to our declining city.

*Mathew Curran
Merriam Park*

An incredible resource

As a former resident of Macalester-Groveland and a current *Villager* subscriber, I am constantly amazed at the amount of content produced by writer Jane McClure. Virtually every article in the *Villager* having to do with real estate (taxes, zoning issues, development plans, street work, etc.) have the "Jane McClure" byline.

The articles are thorough, factual and without personal opinion, which seems rare in these days of everyone having an opinion on everything. Ms. McClure's research and writing alone make the investment in a *Villager* subscription well worth the money. What an incredible resource she is!

*Steve Townley
Saint Anthony Park*

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Homeless folks mask up thanks to Tommies, Catholic Charities

By ANNE MURPHY

Informed this fall of the growing need for facemasks for the homeless people served by Catholic Charities, the University of Saint Thomas for all practical purposes replied, "We've got you covered." Through the university's Center for the Common Good, the Saint Thomas community has donated 900 facemasks to the nonprofit organization.

As COVID-19 concerns have escalated, so have requests for facemasks, according to Catholic Charities' senior procurement manager Pam Hagen. Already vulnerable without a permanent home, Catholic Charities' clients want to be safe from COVID and compliant with the prescribed precautions regarding facemasks, Hagen said.

"I think we're all relieved to know that a vaccine has been approved and will soon be available," said Dustin Killpack, assistant director of Saint Thomas' Center for the Common Good. "However, with the recent surge of coronavirus cases and the potential strain on the health care system, it's extremely important that we all do our part to help mitigate the spread of the disease. We encourage all to consider donating masks to organizations like Catholic Charities."

It was out of a longstanding collaboration between Saint Thomas and Catholic Charities that the school became aware of the need for facemasks. "In July 2019 the two organizations signed an agreement to strengthen our partnership," Killpack said. "The goal was to coordinate efforts around volunteer engage-



Wearing facemasks just like the 900 donated by the University of Saint Thomas community, students Jake Plodge and Tiaryn Daniels join Catholic Charities manager Pam Hagen (right) and volunteers Martha Kinney and Jo Baregi in boxing Christmas packages for the homeless. PHOTO BY BRAD STAUFFER

ment, academic pursuits, research, education, advocacy and thought leadership."

This fall, while Saint Thomas was planning Tommie Give Day, an annual event that supports the university as well as the community at large, the university's annual giving team approached the Center for Common Good and learned about Catholic Charities' need for facemasks.

"This year was our sixth annual Tommie Give Day, and our focus was on raising critical

support for the Hardship Scholarship Fund," said giving program manager Lindsey Donovan. "Hardship scholarships go directly to helping students pay tuition, stay in school and graduate. The need this year is greater than ever due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The annual giving team wanted to find another meaningful way to spread Tommie goodwill," Donovan said. "We reached out to the Center for Common Good with our 'give-a-mask get-a-mask' idea. They right away

shared with us the need at Catholic Charities. Everyone who gave \$60 or more on Tommie Give Day was mailed a Saint Thomas-branded facemask. We donated 900 purple masks to Catholic Charities on behalf of our donors."

"We received enormous support for this initiative from our alumni and community members," Killpack said. "We had an initial goal of providing 300 masks. I don't think any of us anticipated that we'd nearly triple that goal."

Since strengthening its ties with Catholic Charities, "the Center for the Common Good at Saint Thomas has worked to expand the partnership," Killpack said. "We've seen an increase in the number of students volunteering at Catholic Charities. Whole classes have engaged in creative collaborations at Catholic Charities sites. Additionally, Catholic Charities' Hunger Banquet and Family Homelessness: Journeys in Minnesota simulation have provided hundreds of Tommies with the opportunity to think critically about some of the biggest challenges in our community and the innovative strategies to address them."

Saint Thomas' contributions to Catholic Charities have been invaluable, according to Hagen. "Catholic Charities serves 23,000 clients a year, and our Twin Cities distribution center provides a lot of supplies for basic human needs." In addition to facemasks, the distribution center has an ongoing need for household goods, personal hygiene products, toys and clothing. For more information, visit Catholic Charities' website at cctwincities.org.

John Anfinson, superintendent of the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, recently announced his retirement effective January 2. Anfinson's career in the federal service spanned over 40 years, beginning at the Saint Paul District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, followed by 20 years with the National Park Service. With the Corps of Engineers, he served as chief of cultural resources and district historian, reviewing the potential impacts of the Corps' projects on cultural resources and researching the history of the Corps' work on the Mississippi. He also wrote *The River We Have Wrought, A History of the Upper Mississippi River*. With the Na-



Names in the News

tional Park Service, he first served as cultural resources program manager and historian for the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area. As the park's superintendent, he spearheaded the conversion of the abandoned Bureau of Mines campus at Coldwater Spring to parkland, worked with partners to save the Upper Post at Fort Snelling, and supported the renovation of the park's visitor center at the Science Museum of Minnesota.

Jewish Family Service of Saint Paul is offering a Community Support Program that offers up to three free 20-minute phone conversations with a mental health professional. The goal of the program is to help people feel more grounded and emotionally secure dur-

ing this uncertain time. The therapist can assist in problem-solving immediate concerns, discuss strategies for improving one's sense of well-being, provide information on coping skills and connect people to additional resources. The service is free, but donations are appreciated. Contact Avi-Natan Zadaka at 651-410-7822.

Kevin Anderson of Merriam Park has published *Organization Design Made Easy: Structure, Process and People*. Anderson draws from more than 25 years of experience in offering practical advice on how to design an organization, whether leading a large firm or supervising a small team. He is currently a senior organizational development consultant at a

global agribusiness. He also has worked with the city of Minneapolis, Accelare Consulting and Thomson Reuters. Anderson holds doctoral and master's degrees from the University of Minnesota, and a bachelor's degree from Macalester College.

State Representative Kaohly Her (DFL-District 64A) of Merriam Park has been chosen to serve as majority whip in the Minnesota House for the 2021-2022 legislative session. In that role, she will work with other DFL leaders to implement the House majority's agenda. She was elected to her second term in office on November 3.



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District Councils

Highland Park

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Meet board members—Those who are interested in getting to know who represents their part of the neighborhood on the Highland District Council’s board of directors are invited to meet them at bit.ly/meetHDCboardmembers.

Taste of Ward 3—Order take-out food from restaurants in Ward 3, which includes the Highland Park and Macalester-Groveland neighborhoods, between January 9-23 and submit your receipts to be entered into drawings for gift cards. Every two receipts submitted by January 27 will be eligible for the drawing. Receipts can be emailed to info@highlanddistrictcouncil.org or mailed to the HDC office, 1978 Ford Pkwy., Saint Paul, MN 55116. Include contact information. Winners will be notified in early February. Learn more at tasteofward3.com.

Family shelter on Randolph—Join a virtual town hall hosted by Ramsey County, Interfaith Action of Greater Saint Paul and the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Carondelet to learn about a potential temporary shelter for families facing homelessness at the sisters’ Provincial House, 1880 Randolph Ave. The town hall will be held from 5-6:30 p.m. Tuesday, January 5. Visit bit.ly/VirtualTownHallJan5.

HDC office hours—The Highland District Council office will be closed from December 24-January 3.

Upcoming meeting—board of directors, 7 p.m. Thursday, January 7. All HDC meetings are currently being conducted online via Zoom. Links to access the meetings are being posted on the HDC’s website.

Macalester-Groveland

macgrove.org • 651-695-4000

Taste of Ward 3—The Macalester-Groveland Community Council, Highland District Council and others are putting together a program to support local restaurants. Those who order from Ward 3 restaurants between January 9-23 may submit photos of their receipts to be entered in a drawing for gift cards from local restaurants. Every two receipts is good for one entry in the drawing. Learn more at tasteofward3.com.

Free virtual webinar—A webinar on climate will be presented by Russ Stark, chief resilience officer for the city of Saint Paul, at 7 p.m. Tuesday, January 19. More details and registration information are available at macgrove.org/2020webinars.

Show your neighborhood pride—Locally designed Macalester-Groveland T-shirts can now be ordered online for home delivery. The shirts come in kiwi, heather indigo and dark heather in a variety of sizes. Visit macgrove.org/tshirt.

Office closed—The community council office remains closed. Email mgcc@macgrove.org for more information.

Summit Hill

summithillassociation.org • 651-222-1222

Holiday house tour—The Summit Hill and Ramsey Hill associations have created a virtual Historic Hill Holiday House

Tour. The 30-minute, professionally narrated video offers a chance to look inside eight historic properties in the Summit Hill and Ramsey Hill neighborhoods and see how they are decorated for the holidays. The tour will be available through January 5 and can be purchased for \$20. Proceeds will benefit local projects and nonprofit organizations. Learn more and buy tickets at stpaulhistorichilltours.org/home/2020holiday.

Union Park

unionparkdc.org • 651-645-6887

Helping the homeless—Numerous homeless encampments have sprung up across Union Park’s neighborhoods, most prominently at Snelling Avenue and I-94. The UPDC is working to help ensure that homeless people have the resources they need. The Saint Paul Camps Hub (linktr.ee/Stp-CampsHub) will connect people to different sources to donate and get in touch with those who are coordinating those efforts. An Amazon wish list (tinyurl.com/y6hj8wnf) has been assembled for another Union Park encampment. The UPDC is also encouraging people to join Hamline Midway Neighbors Helping Homeless Neighbors (tinyurl.com/yys3ur6p) on Facebook.

Upcoming online meetings—Neighborhood Involvement Committee, 6:30 p.m. Monday, December 28; board of directors, 7 p.m. Wednesday, January 6; and Transportation Committee, 6:30 p.m. Monday, January 11. To access the Zoom meetings, email wako@unionparkdc.org or click on the links at unionparkdc.org/calendar.

Stay in touch—The public is invited to “like” the Union Park District Council on Facebook, follow it on Twitter at @UnionParkDC, and subscribe to its e-newsletter, “Neighborhood Matters,” by emailing info@unionparkdc.org.

West Seventh

fortroadfederation.org • 651-298-5599

Board update—At its meeting on December 14, the West Seventh/Fort Road Federation board of directors approved updates to its strategic plan and personnel policy, as well as a 2021 budget. Planning for board recruitment also began, as well as discussion about next year’s annual meeting. Instead of the traditional holiday party in January, the board will volunteer serving meals at Catholic Charities’ Opportunity Center.

Yard signs—Orders are still being accepted for yard signs with the message “West 7th Believes: Black Lives Matter, Fort Road Together, LGBTQ Lives Matter, Women’s Rights Are Human Rights, Immigrants & Refugees Are Welcome, All Abilities Are Celebrated.” The signs can be picked up at curbside at the federation’s office after purchase. People can see the design and place an order at fortroadfederation.org/yardsign.

Upcoming virtual meetings—Transportation and Land Use Committee, 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, January 6; and Joint Riverview Task Force, 6 p.m. Thursday, January 7. Updated agendas and links to the Zoom meetings can be found by visiting fortroadfederation.org/calendar.

Office closed—The West Seventh/Fort Road Federation office will be closed on December 24-25 and on January 1.



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Crime Report

The following crime incidents were compiled from Saint Paul and Mendota Heights police department reports and other sources.

Highland Park

Burglary—Commercial burglaries were reported on the 1300 block of Alton Street on November 30, and the 1900 block of Ford Parkway on December 2.

—A burglary was reported on the 2200 block of Stewart Avenue at 6:58 p.m. Wednesday, December 2.

—Three garage burglaries were reported on December 3, including garages on the 2100 block of Niles Avenue, the 2000 block of Watson Avenue, and the 800 block of South Lexington Parkway.

Theft—Items valued at more than \$1,000 were reported stolen from a vehicle on the 1600 block of Middleton Avenue on Friday, November 27.

Weapons—Gunfire was reported on the 1900 block of Montreal on November 28, on Saunders Avenue and Davern Street on November 28, and on the 1400 block of Randolph Avenue on November 29.

Lexington-Hamline

Burglary—A garage burglary was reported on the 1200 block of Portland Avenue on Sunday, November 29.

Theft—Vehicles were reported stolen on the 1300 block of Marshall Avenue on November 30 and December 3.

—Items valued at more than \$1,000 were reported stolen from a vehicle on the 1300 block of Marshall Avenue on Monday, November 30.

Sex crime—A rape was reported on the 1300 block of Marshall Avenue at 4:50 a.m. Saturday, December 5.

Macalester-Groveland

Burglary—A burglary was reported on the 1800 block of Sargent Avenue at 10:06 p.m. Monday, November 30.

Theft—Items valued at more than \$1,000 were reported stolen from vehicles on the 200 block of Brimhall Street on December 5, and on Grand Avenue and Macalester Street on December 7.

Weapons—Gunfire was reported on Jefferson and Cleveland avenues on Friday, November 27.

Mendota Heights

Burglary—A suspect went through two vehicles in a garage and tried unsuccessfully to enter a home on the 1300 block of Riverside Lane at 9:57 a.m. Sunday, November 29.

—Change and keys were reported stolen from a business on the 2000 block of Dodd Road at 7:20 a.m. Sunday, November 29.

—Suspects were caught on video stealing alcohol from a business on the 900 block of Highway 13 during the evening of December 1-2.

Theft—Thefts from vehicles were reported on the 1100 block of Highway 13 on November 15, the 1500 block of Dodd Road on November 27, the 500 block of Watersedge Terrace on November 29, the 1100 block of Cascade Lane on November 30, the 2400 block of Pilot Knob Road on December 1, and the 1300 block of Farmdale Road and the 1400 block of Northland Drive on December 7.

—Tools were reported stolen from a construction site on the 1700 block of Linden Street over the weekend of December 12-13.

—The catalytic converter was reported stolen from a vehicle on the 2500 block of Lexington Avenue at 7:25 a.m. Tuesday, December 15.

—Police were called to the 1300 block of Northland Drive around 2:08 p.m. Wednesday, December 16, regarding a stolen vehicle. Upon arrival, the officer found that in place of the missing vehicle was a different vehicle that turned out to have been stolen from another jurisdiction.

Miscellaneous—Someone reported finding a confused elderly woman who was not dressed for the weather outside on the 1000 block of Highway 62 around 7:41 p.m. Monday, December 14. The woman did not know her name or where she lived. The officer was able to identify her and she was transported to the hospital.

Merriam Park

Homicide—A man who called 911 just before 10 p.m. Wednesday, December 16, to report he had been shot near the intersection of University and Snelling avenues died a couple of hours later at Regions Hospital. The victim was later identified as Jeffery Adam Mintz, 55, of Saint Paul. Officers arrived to find him inside his Toyota Prius suffering from an apparent gunshot wound to his chest. Preliminary

information indicates he may have been shot by someone in another vehicle. No arrests had been made. It was the 32nd homicide in Saint Paul this year. Anyone with information is asked to call 651-266-5650.

Robbery—A strong-arm robbery was reported on Prior and University avenues at 5:49 a.m. Saturday, November 28.

—A robbery at gunpoint was reported on the 300 block of Pierce Street at 10:31 p.m. Saturday, November 28.

Burglary—Residential break-ins were reported on the 100 block of Exeter Place and the 100 block of Cretin Avenue on November 27, and the 500 block of North Mississippi River Boulevard on December 3.

—A garage burglary was reported on the 100 block of Exeter Place on Wednesday, December 2.

Theft—Vehicles were reported stolen on the 1700 block of Ashland Avenue on November 27, the 1900 block of Iglehart Avenue on November 30, and the 2200 block of Selby Avenue and the 200 block of Otis Avenue on December 1.

Snelling-Hamline

Burglary—A commercial break-in was reported on the 1400 block of Dayton Avenue at 12:32 a.m. Thursday, December 3.

Theft—A vehicle was reported stolen on the 1500 block of Selby Avenue on Thursday, December 3.

Assault—An aggravated assault with a gun was reported on Snelling and University avenues at 12:47 a.m. Saturday, November 28.

Summit Hill

Burglary—Burglaries were reported on the 700 block of Grand Avenue on the mornings of November 30 and December 6.

—A garage burglary was reported on the 1000 block of Lombard Avenue on Saturday, November 28.

Theft—A vehicle was reported stolen on the 500 block of Grand Avenue on Tuesday, December 1.

—Items valued at more than \$1,000 were stolen from a vehicle on the 1200 block of Summit Avenue on Monday, December 7.

Miscellaneous—Three incidents of vandalism were reported on Chatsworth Street between Grand and Summit avenues from 4-5:10 p.m. Saturday, December 5.

Summit-University

Robbery—A robbery at gunpoint was reported on the 300 block of Dayton Avenue at 5:18 p.m. Friday, November 27.

—A robbery was reported on Concordia Avenue and Grotto Street at 7:05 p.m. Friday, November 27.

Theft—Vehicles were reported stolen on the 700 block of Concordia Avenue on November 27, the 500 block of Portland Avenue on November 30, on Iglehart Avenue and Victoria Street on December 3, the 200 block of Victoria and 1000 block of Laurel Avenue on December 7, and the 500 block of Saint Anthony Avenue on December 9.

—Items valued at more than \$1,000 were reported stolen from vehicles on the 600 block of Portland Avenue on November 27, and the 600 block of Laurel Avenue on December 6.

Weapons—Gunfire was reported on the 800 block of Concordia Avenue on Monday, November 30.

West End

Theft—Items valued at more than \$1,000 were reported stolen from vehicles on the 900 block of West Seventh Street on November 30, and the 1000 block of Watson Avenue on December 7.

—Vehicles were reported stolen on the 300 block of Toronto Street on November 27, the 700 block of Perlman Street on November 28, two vehicles on the 500 block of West Seventh Street on November 28, on Bay Street and James Avenue on December 1, two vehicles on the 1100 block of West Seventh on December 2, the 700 block of South Chatsworth Street on December 7, and the 100 block of Wilkin Street and the 800 block of Tuscarora Avenue on December 7.

—A purse-snatching was reported on the 100 block of Forbes Avenue at 5 p.m. Thursday, December 3.

—Two bicycles, each valued at more than \$1,000, were reported stolen on the 200 blocks of Spring Street and South Exchange Street between 3-4 p.m. Saturday, December 5.

Arson—Fires were set on the 200 block of Goodhue Street on December 2, and on Shepard Road and Otto Avenue on December 4.

Miscellaneous—Felony criminal damage to property was reported on the 500 block of West Seventh Street on Tuesday, December 8.



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ON THE TOWN

Mystery in the pines

Millett returns to central Minnesota for his latest novel, but without super sleuth Sherlock Holmes



West End author Larry Millett has set his latest mystery in the present day, *Pineland Serenade*. PHOTO BY BRAD STAUFFER

BY ANNE MURPHY

Larry Millett's latest novel is something of a departure for the West End author. In *Pineland Serenade*, he ventures into new territory with both the setting and the characters. Millett takes readers outside of the Twin Cities, home to most of his classic Sherlock Holmes mysteries, and introduces a new protagonist.

Millett's novel is set in Pineland, a fictitious town located halfway between the Twin Cities and Duluth, where the characters are brought together by the disappearance of the area's wealthiest man. The plot thickens when threatening messages are left in the town square by a dark figure who calls himself the Serenader. Enter the newly elected county attorney and a Black woman attorney from Chicago with possible ties to the missing man.

"I've been up there quite a few times," Millett said of the novel's setting in and around Pine County. In fact, the first book in his Sherlock Holmes series had British novelist Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's detective and his assistant Watson traveling to Minnesota in pursuit of an arsonist following the disastrous Hinckley fire of 1894. "I did a lot of research (in Pine County) when I wrote *Sherlock Holmes at the Red Demon*," he said.

In the setting, *Pineland Serenade* represents a homecoming of sorts for Millett, but that is where the similarities end. "The new book is closer to a classic mystery than a thriller," he

said, "but it moves along at the kind of pace that a thriller might have."

"It's funny," he said. "With some books I have a pretty good idea where they came from, because I'd been thinking about them for a long time. This one I did for the fun of it—a contemporary mystery as opposed to another historic mystery."

"I found myself going back to starting points," he said. "My first published novel was set in Pine County. It isn't a place people write about a lot. It's a corner of Minnesota that people pass through on their way from the Twin Cities to Duluth. But the new novel is set more than 100 years later, and it's not all Pine County. I kind of mixed and matched various communities to create Pineland."

Another departure is in the narration. "For Watson and Holmes, the narration is first person, but the story is about someone else, so it sounds more like a third-person narrator," Millett said. "The new book is a straightforward first-person narration by the protagonist. It's intended to be a fast read, the kind of story that'll get you going and powers along very quickly."

Millett came up with the title for *Pineland Serenade* before the story. "Titles are as mysterious as books," he said. "Where they come from is always kind of a mystery."

"I've always found that if you get the right title for a book, it's like getting the right headline on a story," said Millett, who began his writing career at the *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*. "The right title tells you that you've got

something you can deal with. If you struggle for a title, as I have with a couple of books, it's kind of a sign that there's some uncertainty."

A good example of finding the right title is a book Millett wrote about 15 years ago, *Strange Days, Dangerous Nights*, about the era of the Speed Graphic camera and the blunt and powerful black-and-white newspaper photographs of the 1930s-50s. "That was a case where I had all of this wonderful material and I couldn't figure out how to organize it thematically," Millett said. "Then one day the title fell into my head. I said, 'That's it. That's the title. That's the organizational scheme right there.' A title can really help you when you're putting together a book. When you have the title, you kind of know the situation and you can move

forward."

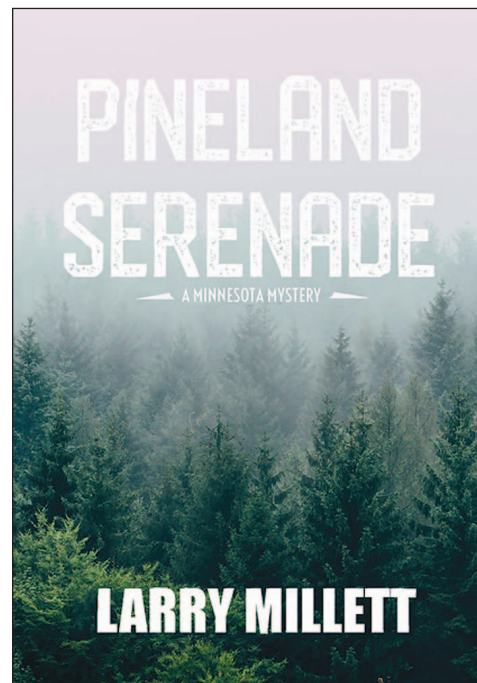
The main character in *Pineland Serenade* "is as much of a hero as an antihero," Millett said, referring to the county attorney. "Then there's the Black woman attorney from Chicago who comes to Pineland because she believes the missing white man may be her father. Years ago, I wrote a book that never got published. It had some elements of this story in it. There were a few characters from that book that I thought I could rescue and bring into another book, so I did."

As a contemporary thriller, *Pineland Serenade* allowed Millett more freedom in writing. "I got to use a few swear words," he said, "and it was fun to be free with the language and not have to maintain a historic tone. The main character, the county attorney, is a smart-aleck who resembles me, and there's a lot of humor in the book."

The county attorney is named Paul Zweifel. (*Zweifel* means doubt in German.) "He's a guy who's wondering what he's done with his life," Millett said. Zweifel is divorced and he has a dog named Camus, after the 20th-century French philosopher. "Camus is a border collie," Millett said, "and he fits right in."

Since finishing *Pineland Serenade*, which is self-published, Millett has been working on what he believes will be the final installment in his Sherlock Holmes-Shadwell Rafferty series. It is called *Rafferty's Last Case*.

"The book begins with Rafferty's death," Millett said, "before it backtracks into a big investigation. It's a summation of what has gone on before in Rafferty's life and in Holmes'. In the Holmes-Rafferty series, I've moved through time. It's 1928 in the coming book, and Rafferty and Holmes are old men. It might be out in the fall of 2021."





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ON THE TOWN *Briefly*

Music

Sounds of Blackness performs songs from the family favorite *The Night Before Christmas* in a live recording from the Ordway Concert Hall streaming online through December 31. Seventeen singers and a 10-piece band are featured in this contemporary adaptation of the classic poem "A Visit from Saint Nicholas" augmented by traditional carols and holiday favorites. Tickets are \$15. Visit ordway.org.

The Minnesota Boychoir is featured in a virtual holiday concert that will be available free of charge from December 24 through January 1 at landmarkcenter.org.

The music of Libby Larsen will be featured in a free Courtroom Concert presented by the Schubert Club from noon-1 p.m. Thursday, January 7, on Landmark Center's website. Visit landmarkcenter.org.

Books

"**Lemonade Christmas,**" a staged reading of Merriam Park author Roger Barr's 23rd Christmas story, is being presented through January 31 on the Hallie Q. Brown Community Center's YouTube channel. The story delves into the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on a family's holiday traditions. Joining Barr on stage are actors Brian P. Joyce, Charla Marie Bailey, Terrence C. Newby and Melvin Carter Jr. The video recording may be viewed free of charge, though donations are encouraged to Hallie's Q. Brown's Summit-University food shelf. For information and a link to the reading, visit hallieqbrown.org.

Join Milkweed Editions for the virtual launch of poet torrin a. greathouse's debut

collection, *Wound from the Mouth of a Wound*, at 7 p.m. Thursday, January 7. Winner of the 2020 Ballard Spahr Prize for Poetry, greathouse will be joined in the free hour-long program by author and Ballard Spahr judge Aimee Nezhukumatathil. To register, visit tinyurl.com/y4xz6waz. The first 500 RSVPs will receive access to the Zoom link via email. The event will also be live-streamed to Milkweed Edition's YouTube page.

Exhibits

"**1.5,**" an exhibit by seven artists from Southeast Asia who immigrated to the U.S. as children and their descendants, is on display through January 3 in the sidewalk and skyway windows of the Minnesota Museum of American Art, 350 N. Robert St. Visit mmaa.org.

Northern Clay Center, 2424 E. Franklin Ave., is holding its annual holiday exhibition through December 30. Eighty-five artists are displaying for show and sale their handmade pottery, sculpture and ceramic jewelry. Visit northernclaycenter.org or call 612-339-8007.

Theater

Winterlight, 20 minutes of classic and original stories, songs and poems to warm the heart at midwinter, will be available free of charge on Monday, December 28, on Girl Friday Productions' YouTube channel, Facebook page and website. Performers include Kirby Bennett, Reese Britts, Craig Johnson, Willie E. Jones III, Sam Landman, Hope Nordquist, James Rodriguez, Taj Ruler, Sophina Saggau and Dana Lee Thompson. Visit girlfridayproductions.org.



"Drawing from Life."

Thirty-two sketches of everyday moments by artist Don Thomas, including "The Talk" at left, are on view through January 10 in the virtual North Gallery on Landmark Center's website. Thomas discusses his art in an eight-minute video that is also posted there. Visit landmarkcenter.org.

A Christmas Carol, a re-creation of the Mercury Theatre's 1939 broadcast of Charles Dickens' beloved tale as adapted by Orson Welles, is being streamed through January 3. The presentation by Park Square Theatre and the Mysterious Old Radio Listening Society stars Shanan Custer, Joshua English Scrimshaw, Tim Uren and Eric Webster. Tickets are \$30 per household. Visit parksquaretheatre.org.

Weinstein tells of immigrant outsiders such as Irving Berlin, Mel Tormé, Jay Livingston, Ray Evans, Gloria Shayne Baker and Johnny Marks who discovered in Christmas the perfect holiday in which to imagine a better world. The video may be viewed free of charge anytime between 5 p.m. Thursday and 11 p.m. Saturday. Visit tinyurl.com/y4q9g2al.

Film

British Arrows Greatest Hits, an online presentation of the most inventive advertisements from the past 40 years of British television, is being streamed through January 4 by the Walker Art Center. Tickets are \$12. Visit walkerart.org/cinema.

Dreaming of a Jewish Christmas, an irreverent, offbeat documentary about the Jewish songwriters who wrote much of the soundtrack to the Christian holiday, is being presented on December 24-26 by the Twin Cities Jewish Film Festival. Set almost entirely in a Chinese restaurant, the film by Larry

Et cetera

Eight historic homes in Saint Paul's Hill District whose halls have been decked for the holidays may be toured in high-definition video with instrumental music and narration. Through a partnership of the Ramsey Hill and Summit Hill Associations, the virtual tour will take you through foyers, libraries, dining and living rooms, a kitchen and a Swedish-inspired front porch in houses constructed between 1862 and 1928 by Cass Gilbert, Clarence Johnston, David Adler and other architects of renown. The cost is \$20 for 33 minutes of content that may be streamed repeatedly for up to 30 days. Visit vimeo.com/ondemand/historichillholidaytour/.

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SPORTS



The Wright Call

By Dave Wright

Looking back at the year that was

Each year has its unique twists and turns, but one thing that nearly everybody can agree on is that the events of 2020 will stand out for a long time to come. Here's a quick update on some of the memorable people who were featured on these pages in the past year.

Major League Baseball didn't start the 2020 season until mid-July due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To fill the void, some excellent reading material was available to keep people in the game. One was written by Dick Bremer, who has been the television play-by-play voice of the Minnesota Twins for nearly four decades. His book, *Game Used: My Life In Stitches with the Minnesota Twins*, helped scratch an itch for many fans while waiting for the boys of summer to take the field. It's a folksy tome that covers all the bases with insights into just about anybody who was somebody in the team's nearly 60-year history.

When asked recently how readers reacted to the book, Bremer responded, "People said it helped them fill a void. We didn't have the season we would've liked and the book helped them get a fix. In that sense, it served a purpose."

Positive reviews helped, too. "I wanted it to be different than your standard biography," he said.

When Bremer did get back to work behind the mic, it was a different baseball world. Home games were fine, but announcing away games from Target Field was an adjustment.

"Viewers knew we weren't actually in Chicago, but you could still create the illusion," Bremer said. "The biggest challenge was following the cameras to see where the balls were going."

Authors often second-guess their work, and Bremer is no different. "I started re-reading it yesterday and I saw something I wish I'd written differently," he said. Too late. The book is already in its second printing.

Joe Bissen wrote a pair of books that went in a different direction, but achieved a similar result. An editor for the *Star Tribune*, Bissen wrote *Fore! Gone: Minnesota's Lost Golf Courses, 1897-1999* and followed it up this summer with *More! Gone: Minnesota's Lost Golf Courses, Part II*. The books tell the stories of golf courses in the state that once flourished, but are now just part of the dustbin of links history. Some of those courses once dotted the local landscape, including one in Lexington-Hamline.

"I didn't go into this to get rich," Bissen said. "People enjoyed reading about the courses they used to play, and I wanted to tell those stories."

Bissen recently said that he's heard back from folks who either remembered those long-lost old courses or were astonished to discover that what's now a parking lot was once a links layout. His legwork included unearthing Quality Park, a nine-hole course near University and Hamline avenues that was once described as "ideal for noon-hour recreation that could be played in an hour's time." The place opened in 1925, and closed just a few years later.

More! Gone found more lost gems across the state. It kept people reading this spring while waiting for tee times to open up. As golfers prepare to suffer through the upcoming winter, they now have a fallback to pass the time. However, Bissen doesn't think a third book is on the horizon. "I emptied my notebook," he said with a sigh.

John Shimpach was a guy in charge of getting golfers their real fix. COVID forced the Highland National club pro to be creative to get players on the course. After a delay due to the pandemic, the course opened on April 18 and stayed busy until closing for the season on November 8. "We had to set up good protocols," Shimpach said. "The clubhouse never opened. We took reservations online only. The safety of the employees and players was the big thing."

Golfers adapted to scheduling tee times online so well that Shimpach thinks Highland National will do it again in 2021. "When we can reopen the clubhouse, we'll likely take a few phone calls, though," he added.

WRIGHT CALL ▶ 16

Twins-Saints partnership to benefit fans, youth baseball

Saint Paul to bring own brand of fun to Triple-A

BY FRANK JOSSI

The Saint Paul Saints' recent announcement that the team will become the Triple-A affiliate of the Minnesota Twins beginning with the 2021 season is expected to benefit fans with better-caliber baseball and provide more generous support for youth baseball programs.

Sean Aronson, the Saints' vice president and director of media relations, said nothing of substance outside the level of play will change for the team, which plays at CHS Field in Lowertown. Ticket prices will stay the same, pigs will still deliver baseballs to umpires, nuns will offer massages to fans in the stands and "Fun is Good" will remain the team's motto.

"This extends the Saints' footprint in Minnesota and I think it's great for baseball in the state in general," Aronson said. "It allows two iconic brands to come together."

The teams will be the closest in proximity of any major league club and its minor league affiliate in the country, with just under 11 miles separating their stadiums. The collaboration gives the Twins a minority stake in the Saints, which will remain owned by chairman Marv Goldklang, president Mike Veeck and "team psychologist" and actor Bill Murray.

One of the chief beneficiaries of the arrangement should be youth baseball. The Saints offer youth baseball camps, such as Saints Sports Academy and the traveling showcase Saints Spotlight Games. The Twins encourage youth baseball through Play Ball! Minnesota, improve ballfields through Fields for Kids, make the game more accessible for youths through the RBI Program, and provide organizations with new equipment through Junior Twins.

"We're excited about the impact that



Baseball fans gathered at the new CHS Field in Lowertown for the Saint Paul Saints' home opener in May 2015. PHOTO BY BRAD STAUFFER

"This extends the Saints' footprint in Minnesota and I think it's great for baseball in the state in general," Aronson said. "It allows two iconic brands to come together."

we think we can have with the Twins on grassroots youth baseball programs," said Derek Sharrer, Saints executive vice president and general manager. "We think there's a huge opportunity here to really have an impact on the game of baseball in the state."

Mike Hahm, director of the Saint Paul Department of Parks and Recreation, said the Twins organization also offers significant financial support for the city's youth baseball and softball programs. "We've been closely aligned with them and their efforts to revitalize baseball in our city for years," he said. "This is a great opportunity to get more young people involved in the game."

Baseball offers young people a chance to learn the values of hard work, physi-

cal conditioning, accountability and being part of a team, Hahm said.

The Saints have been a highly successful minor league baseball operation ever since they helped found the independent professional Northern League in 1993. During their 27 full seasons (they played half of their home games away from CHS Field this year due to the pandemic) the Saints have led the league in attendance 17 times. They have packed CHS Field since it opened in 2015, and led all minor league teams in capacity last year by surpassing 100 percent.

Aronson said Major League Baseball is undergoing a significant transition this year. The Twins ended their 18-year relationship with their Triple-A affiliate in Rochester, New York, as the MLB took over independent baseball leagues. The league wanted their affiliates closer to their parent teams, Aronson said, in part to reduce the distance players have to travel when called up to the majors. Rochester will play next year as an affiliate of the Washington Nationals in a stadium much closer to them than Target Field.

TWINS & SAINTS ▶ 16

Businesses on edge of seat for new season at CHS

BY JANE MCCLURE

Many Lowertown business owners are eager for the 2021 baseball season to begin at CHS Field, as the Saint Paul Saints become the Triple-A affiliate of the Minnesota Twins. But a longer season and the chance for fans to see players in development to be called up to the major leagues are just two reasons for the excitement.

"We're really excited about the new development for the Saints," said Joe Spencer, president of the Downtown Alliance. "We're looking forward to more fans coming into downtown for many years to come."

"I haven't heard anything but excitement from constituents," said City Council member Rebecca Noecker,

whose Ward 2 includes downtown.

Lowertown's bars and restaurants have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic and forced business changes. Just/Us, Birch's Lowertown Tap Room & Barrel House, 12twelve Eyes Brewing, Salty Tart and Octo Fish Bar are among the businesses that have closed permanently. A few other restaurants have paused for the winter months and hope to reopen this spring. Others that have remained open have lost a significant percentage of their sales.

"It's been tough," said Jerry Blakey, owner of Lowertown Wine and Spirits, 262 E. Fourth St. "It's been like a ghost town down here. It's been devastating for bars and restaurants."

Business owners see the Saints' new Triple-A status as a definite plus. "It's

20 more (home) games," said Steve Lott, owner of Big River Pizza, 280 E. Fifth St. "Anytime there's activity in Lowertown, be it a parade, festival or any other event, it's a good thing."

"The No. 1 upshot of having the Saints here is that we could always bank on a certain amount of business," said Andy Remke of Black Dog Cafe, 308 E. Prince St. "We always do well on game days. Every day there's a game, we can count on additional patronage."

The demographics of who will attend Saints games with a Twins affiliation going forward is an open question, according to Remke. "It's been a very family-oriented crowd with the Saints," he said. "We've been wondering if having a Twins affiliate will bring in more younger adults. I guess we'll see."

15◀ TWINS & SAINTS

While the Saints and their competitors have fielded good teams, Triple-A ball does represent a significantly higher caliber of talent. Saints' games equaled Double-A play on a good night and A-level on average, Aronson said.

Technically, the Saints have been invited to become the Twins Triple-A team but have yet to finalize the contract. They join 119 other minor league teams that have an offer to affiliate with major league teams. Aronson said those teams would play in Triple-A, Double-A, High-A and Low-A divisions.

Once the teams sign contracts, the minor league divisions will form leagues. But that will be the easy part of the new landscape, leaving the

hard part—how the COVID crisis affects next season—still unpredictable. Aronson said the Saints are expected to play 144 games as the Twins Triple-A affiliate next year, running from April-September. This year, their season did not begin until July due to the pandemic.

"I would say I'm optimistic that there will be a season (in 2021), but I don't know what that season will look like," Aronson said.

Sharrer said the Twins-Saints agreement is making history. "There just hasn't existed a situation like the one that exists here in the Twin Cities," he said, "with a successful minor league franchise with 28 years of history and a successful major league franchise with almost 60 years of history, both of which are playing in best-in-class ballparks."

Sports Shorts

The Saint Paul Department of Parks and Recreation is continuing its free afterschool Rec Check program for kids in grades 1-5. With state and federal health guidelines in place, including the mandatory wearing of masks, Rec Check is being offered from 2-6 p.m. on weekdays when school is in session. Local recreation centers hosting Rec Check include Edgcumbe, Jimmy Lee, Martin Luther King, and Palace. Children in Rec Check are participating in a variety of supervised activities, including arts and crafts, daily physical activities and games. Participants can only register for one month at a time and must sign up for the specific days they wish to attend. Sign up by calling the rec centers or visit tinyurl.com/y2454hb5.

HomeTown Ticketing has been named the exclusive partner of the Minnesota State High School League to provide digital ticketing services for select league events for at least the next three years. Ticket sales will

be conducted on the league's website and will not require creating an account, remembering a password or downloading an app. Schools that choose to work with HomeTown Ticketing will receive the full face value of tickets sold with electronic funds sent to them immediately. For more information, visit mshsl.org.

SPIRE Credit Union recently donated \$3,000 to Billy Peterson Field at the Dunning Sports Complex in the Lexington-Hamline neighborhood. The field was dedicated to Peterson 10 years ago. He has been coaching kids in the city for the past 60 years, including baseball Hall of Famers Paul Molitor and Dave Winfield. Peterson, who coaches with Midway Baseball, has reached an estimated 21,000 youths throughout his coaching career. He also provides training for coaches and umpires, clinics for kids, and has a long-term partnership with the Minnesota Twins' Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities program.

15◀ WRIGHT CALL

Course maintenance is always key to an enjoyable round of golf. Thanks to fairly good weather, Highland National had an excellent year in that regard. "Early on, the assistant managers had to put in some long hours," Shimpach said, "but people understood."

The Highland 9-hole course didn't open until June 15, but it also picked up the pace quickly. Driving range fees were collected via a self-service credit card machine. That saved some money and the final tally showed a record haul for the range.

All things considered, it was a successful season.

Preppers learn to cope during pandemic

There were successes of different sorts for local high school athletes despite the pandemic. Henry Sibley's Taylor Gonzalez was awarded a Youth on Course scholarship that allowed her to play golf all summer at various courses for \$15 before heading to school in the fall at Columbia. The golfing went fine, but COVID-19 sidetracked Gonzalez and she did her first semester of classwork at home. "Online is challenging," she

said. "It's hard to stay motivated at times."

Gonzalez now has hopes of making the Columbia golf team as a walk-on. Staying at home instead of playing at the Bethpage course on Long Island, which was the site of a former U.S. Open, meant she hasn't been able to impress the golf coach...yet. The Lions have several juniors and seniors on their 2021 roster, so Gonzalez may have to wait a year to show her stuff.

Kate Pryor, the Minnehaha Academy grad who was that school's Athena Award recipient last spring, had a busy summer before heading to Boston University to start her college softball career. An infielder, Pryor played last summer with a team of North Carolina all-stars in various tournaments. "They had me at third base and shortstop most of the time," she said.

When she arrived at BU, she was stationed at second base. Pryor said the adjustment to college ball was made a bit easier by her summer routine of going up against older pitchers. "College is more of a mental game," she said.

Pryor was fine with the speed of pitches while at the plate, but discovered the older hurlers had more movement on the ball than her prep foes. "There are so many things to learn,"

she said. "What to look for in certain situations, the speed of runners, etc." There was also homework, in the form of scouting reports, to do as well.

Though there was a brief shutdown because of the pandemic, BU was able to complete a series of fall practices. COVID issues popped up again in November. As a result, Pryor ended up coming home at Thanksgiving and finishing her first semester of college classes in her living room.

The current plan is to return in mid-January, but the spring season is up in the air for all colleges at this point. "All I know is we won't have the usual preseason schedule," Pryor said.

One sign that she is on the Terriers' radar and could see action this spring is that she has already been assigned a jersey number and has a complete bio on the team's website.

Pryor also has had to adjust to navigating Boston's streets. "It's a different world," she said with a laugh when asked about that city's notorious drivers, some of whom view curbs as an afterthought. "I had a few close calls."

If she can handle getting around Boston safely, swinging at a softball should be a comparative piece of cake.

Dave Wright can be reached at dwright53@msn.com.

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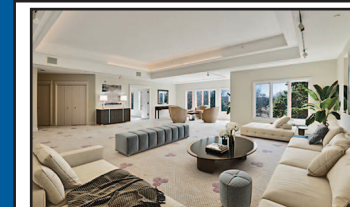
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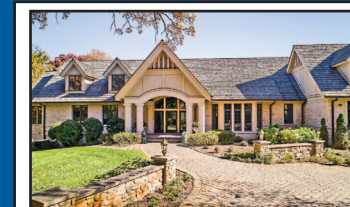
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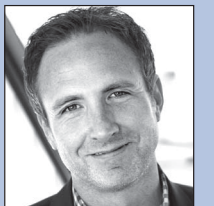
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