

Bolé Ethiopian moves to Como

Reopening in former Fox Trot Burger comes nine months after fire that destroyed restaurant, Subway and Napa

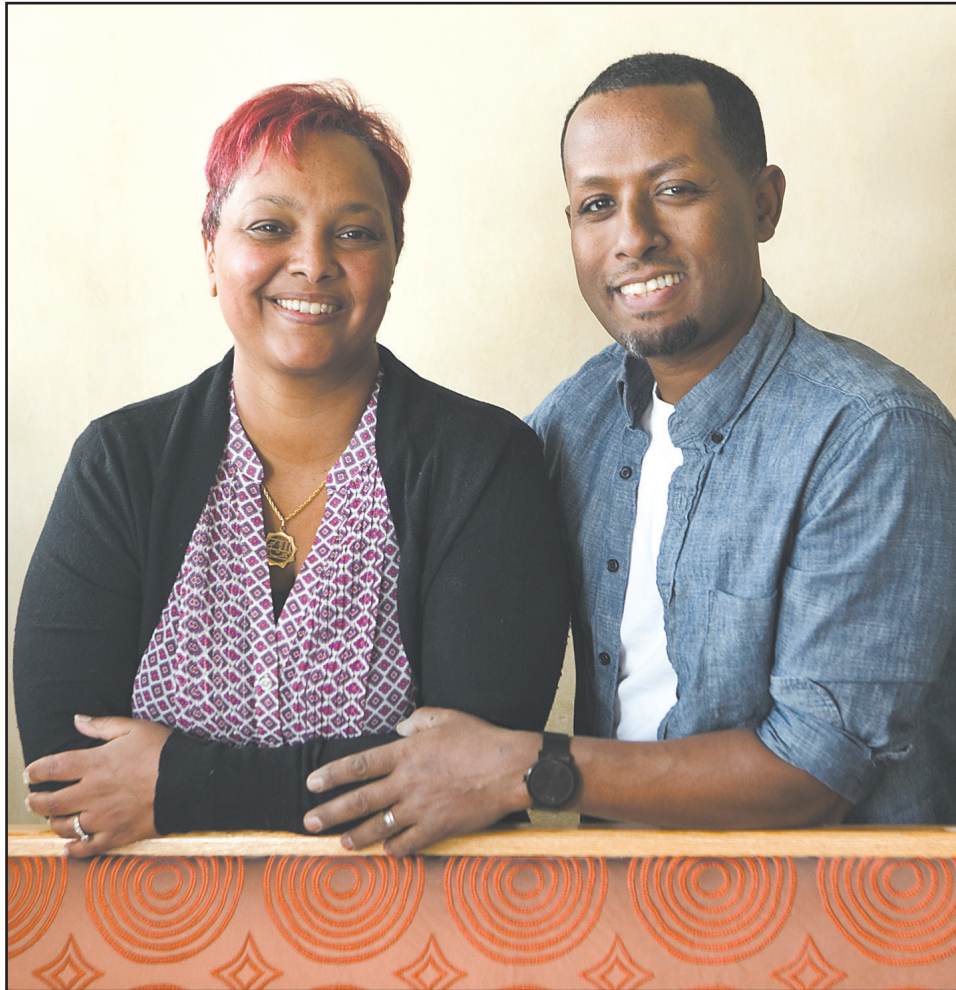
By MARGIE O'LOUGHLIN

When Midway's Bolé Ethiopian Cuisine burned to the ground last May, the owners were preparing to open an expansion of their restaurant that was two years in the making.

The grand opening for Bolé Express at University and Syndicate was scheduled for the next day, May 30. The owners were in the kitchen preparing food as crowds started gathering in front of the Midway Target. They sent their employees home, and left the restaurant. A few hours later, the NAPA Auto Parts next door was set on fire.

Business consultant Lelna Desta said, "After the flames tore through our restaurant, everything was gone. This brought us to a point of clarity very quickly. Husband and wife co-owners Solomon Hailie and Rekik Abaineh built Bolé on a dream – but we knew the dream was not limited to the loss of that particular space on Syndicate and University."

BOLE MOVES TO COMO >> 2



Co-owners Rekik Abaineh (left) and Solomon Hailie (right) said, "We have experienced an outpouring of love from around the world." (Photo by Margie O'Loughlin)

Lexington Station denied on 8-7 vote

By JANE McCLURE

A 288-unit, six-story mixed-use building planned near Lexington Parkway and University Avenue faces an uncertain future. Approval of the site plan for Alatus' Lexington Station project at 411-417 Lexington Parkway was denied Feb. 5 on an 8-7 vote.

A decision on the site plan is final unless it is appealed to the St. Paul City Council within 10 days.

The commission rejected site plan approval on a 8-7 vote Jan. 22, then voted 10-4 to lay the matter over. The layover allowed time for the commission, city planning staff and the city attorney's office to prepare a motion with a legal basis to deny the site

LXINGTON STATION >> 3

St. Paul businesses get \$1.6 million after civil unrest

By JANE McCLURE

St. Paul businesses have received more than \$1.6 million for to recover from 2020's civil unrest.

Another \$4.725 million went to help small business affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Whether additional dollars can be obtained from state and federal sources for either program is still a question mark.

Requests for additional funding for businesses affect by civil unrest are pending at the 2021 Minnesota Legislature. While a third round of pandemic-related grants is underway at city hall, the most recent federal funds have focused on needs such as ventilation equipment.

St. Paul City Council members and area groups including Union Park District Council (UPDC) have been reviewing the allocations made so far, and what's ahead. City officials have been tracking their own and outside grant programs, while UPDC oversees the Neighbors United Fund.

Both the city council and district council discussions focused on building ownership as a priority for businesses, especially those affected by

BUSINESSES GET \$1.6 MILLION >> 3

THEY WORK TO REVERSE WRONGFUL CONVICTIONS

>>New name: Great Northern Innocence Project<<

By MARGIE O'LOUGHLIN

A bedrock principle of the American criminal justice system is that a person accused of a crime is presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. According to Sara Jones, executive director of the Great North Innocence Project, "It doesn't always work out that way. Our American criminal justice system is far from perfect."

National statistics echo her thoughts. To exonerate means to reverse a conviction for a crime. Since 1989, more than 2,600 inmates of U.S. prisons have been exonerated. Between those inmates, nearly 24,000 years were lost while serving time in prison for crimes they did not commit.

In 1989, the first Innocence Project was started in New York City. That year marked a turning point when it became possible to use DNA testing as a tool for proving innocence. In the 31 years since, 69 other Innocence Projects have been established around the world.

The Minnesota Innocence Project was one of those. Established in 2001, this non-profit organization was recently renamed the Great North Innocence Project (GNIP). Its five staff members, along with law students from the University of Min-

nesota and Mitchell Hamline law schools, work to free the wrongfully convicted, and to prevent future wrongful convictions from happening. They represent inmates seeking exoneration who have been convicted of, or pled guilty to, crimes committed in Minnesota, South and North Dakota.

Sara Jones explained how the multifaceted work of GNIP is involved in building a better criminal justice system. She said, "Through school and community presentations, we inform the public about causes and consequences of wrongful convictions. We provide attorneys, judges, and law enforcement officers with continuing education and expert information on wrongful convictions – and the best practices to prevent them. We teach law school courses on wrongful convictions, and offer experiential learning opportunities for the next generation of lawyers."

Shining light on injustices

She continued, "Each year, our team screens hundreds of requests for help. GNIP staff, law students, investigators, and volunteer attorneys spend thousands of hours analyzing cases. We litigate cases

THEY WORK TO REVERSE >> 3



Sara Jones, executive director of the recently renamed Great North Innocence Project. (Photo by Margie O'Loughlin)

"I feel like I've learned even more about the depth of systemic racism since the events of this summer."

~ Sara Jones



Neighbors go solar together through new co-op

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King Milan's offers back-to-school haircuts in January

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Before the smoke cleared

The phones started ringing, and they didn't stop ringing for weeks. Callers encouraged the Bolé team to establish a GoFundMe account, so they could contribute to the rebuilding. The account raised \$100,000 in community donations from around the world in the first 24 hours.

Customers wrote on the GoFundMe page and other social media that Bolé was where they had first tasted Ethiopian food, where they had come to celebrate birthdays, engagements, anniversaries, and graduations. People wrote that Bolé was more than just a restaurant. Neighbors lamented that they missed the spicy smells wafting through the neighborhood.

Desta said, "One of my favorite comments was from someone who called our restaurant, 'a safe space.' How can you not want to recreate that for people?"

Team Bolé started looking into options for rebuilding. Desta said, "We looked at properties in St. Paul all summer, but nothing felt right until we visited the former Fox Trot Burger Spot at 1341 Pascal Street. It's only about five minutes north of where Bolé was before, technically it is in the Como neighborhood. When we walked through



The House Special, called Majet, is also the restaurant's most popular dish. The new Bole Ethiopian Cuisine will be located at 1341 Pascal Street in the Como neighborhood. (Photo submitted)

the door, we all felt it was calling our name."

The new location has off-street parking and an outdoor patio. It will offer both dine-in and express take-out services. In addition, it has a separate downstairs space that can be used for meetings and other small gatherings.

Desta explained, "We sent out a message on Christmas Eve to our customers, friends, and families that said, 'The Bolé you love has a new home! Just give us

a little time to renovate, and we will be back.'"

The renovation is moving ahead full steam, and opened for take-out on Feb. 14.

What's in a name?

Both restaurant co-owners were raised in Bolé, a vibrant neighborhood in Ethiopia's capital city of Addis Ababa. When it came time to pick a name for their restaurant four years ago, there was no need for discussion: it had to be Bolé Ethiopian Cuisine.

sine.

Desta said, "A good ethnic restaurant will offer a cultural perspective through their cuisine – and Bolé succeeds at that. If you are from Ethiopia or have traveled there, you will remember those times when you come here. If you have never been to Ethiopia, you will want to go once you dine with us. The moment you walk in the door, you will be welcomed and treated as family. That's the type of hospitality we all grew up with in our homes."

"If you've never been to Ethiopia, you will want to go once you dine with us."

~ Lelna Desta

Something for every palette

Ethiopian food offers something for everyone: meat lover, vegetarian, or vegan. The most popular dish at Bolé is the house special, called the Majet, which is several different kinds of meat dishes stacked together.

The Super Veggie Sampler for two at \$25 is also very popular. There is a small American children's menu, and there is ice cream. Beer and wine are available, as well.

The sampler platters come with traditional Ethiopian Injera: a soft, flat, spongy sourdough bread meant for scooping (or customers may substitute white rice instead.) Some dishes are served for two or four plus diners on a communal platter.

Desta said, "That's part of the Ethiopian dining experience. You sit together, scooping food with Injera from a shared platter. For a time, you don't have to be isolated – and you can forget the troubles of the world."

"After our restaurant burned down, we didn't have the chance to stay in a negative frame of mind for very long," said co-owner Solomon Hailie. Check the website for details about their reopening at www.boleethiopiancuisine.com.

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Lexington Station denied on 8-7 vote

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plan for the \$57 million development. Site plans must meet a series of findings for approval.

Affordability, the project's compatibility with the surrounding neighborhoods and a long-planned east-west bike and pedestrian connection that the project would block were debated at length by the Planning Commission. But while issues such as affordability are a concern for many commissioners, affordability is not an issue that can be considered when voting on a site plan.

Alatus Director of Development Chris Osmundson told the commission's zoning committee



"We don't just have a housing shortage, we have an affordable housing shortage."

~ Commissioner Kathy Mouacheupao

Lexington Station would have 15 units with four bedrooms to allow co-living at \$900 a person. Rent for one-bedrooms would be \$1,400 and for two bedrooms more than \$2,000. Those who voted against the project were concerned this was too expensive to qualify as "affordable housing" in this part of St. Paul.

in January that 155 of the apartments' rents would be affordable to those at or below 60 percent of area median income. Fifteen units would have four bedrooms to allow co-living, with rents around \$900 per person. The building would also include alcoves, studios, one-bedroom, one-bedroom with den, two-bedroom and four-bedroom units.

Supporters including Zoning Committee Chairman Cedrick Baker contended that Alatus' plans would bring development

to a site that has been vacant for 12 years. He cautioned that how commissioners vote could derail what they want.

Supporters said there is no legal reason to deny the site plan. "For a site plan, specific standards must be met," said Commissioner Kristine Grill. She and some commissioners didn't see a legal basis to deny approval.

Grill pointed out that currently the only way to require affordable units in a development is if a public subsidy has been

provided, such as low-income housing tax credits or grants. Despite pressure from the planning commission, city staff has not brought forward inclusionary zoning requirements that would require developers to add affordable units in all developments.

"I don't pretend that this project is perfect but there's no legal reason to deny it," said Commissioner Nate Hood.

Other commissioners disagreed. Planning Commission Chairman Luis Rangel-Morales said even if the developer promises affordable housing, there is no legal mechanism for the city to keep that in place. "All we have is the word of the developer," he pointed out.

Project foes said that there's a need for even more affordable housing near Green Line light rail and questioned whether the development would bring the type of housing the adjacent neighborhoods need. "It's obvious that this developer does not have this community in mind," said Commissioner Adrian Perryman.

"I have a hard time with really rigid parameters that don't take the values of the community into consideration ... we don't just have a housing shortage

we have an affordable housing shortage," said Commissioner Kathy Mouacheupao.

Perryman said the project would have a negative impact on its surrounding neighborhoods, citing potential property tax effects, impacts on area rents and the building's visual impact. He questioned whether any increase in property taxes brought by redevelopment would indeed benefit neighboring communities where residents are claiming they would seek damages.

Another sticking point is that regional income levels vary greatly from what is in St. Paul and in neighborhoods around the development site. For a family of four, regional area median income is \$103,000. That is for the 13-county Twin Cities metropolitan area. Project foes said a lower level must be kept in mind for St. Paul, possibly considering annual incomes around \$58,000, putting the affordable level around \$32,000.

Apartment prices have been estimated at \$850 to \$900 per bedroom for the four-bedroom units, with one-bedrooms at about \$1,400 and two-bedrooms at more than \$2,000. But those figures don't factor in affordability.

St. Paul businesses get \$1.6 million after civil unrest

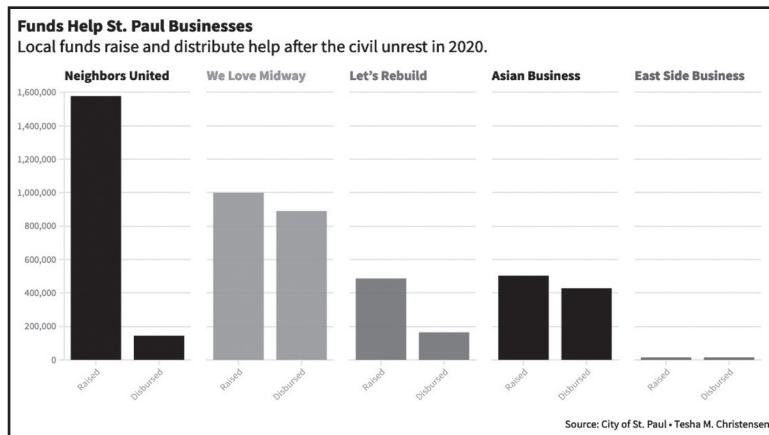
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the civil unrest during the summer, after the death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police.

A goal for the city is to equitably support local businesses as they rebuild. Another goal is to help Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC)-owned businesses, said Mary Rick, business development director for the St. Paul Department of Planning and Economic Development (PED).

Another key issue is how small business owners can own their properties. Ward 4 Council Member Mitra Jalali said that's an issue her office deals with often, as small business owners worry about displacement when properties are sold. "We won't get anywhere until our neighborhood businesses are owned by our neighborhoods," she said.

Moving toward a model of helping businesses, land banks or community economic co-ops buy or make down payments on commercial properties would be a shift in focus for city business programs, said HRA Chair Chris Tolbert. But he and other council members and city staff believe it is something that needs to be



looked at.

Neighbors United Fund

Currently, five funds support business affected by civil unrest. One is the Neighbors United Fund, which was set up by the Minnesota United soccer team, UPDC and Hamline Midway Coalition. Management of the fund has generated controversy. HMC pulled out of management duties last summer.

The city's totals show that Neighbors United has helped 22 businesses, including 15 that are in the funding pipeline awaiting final action. A total of \$1.578 million was raised, with \$515,700 committed and

\$145,700 disbursed. That leaves \$1.06 million remaining. The fund's board and staff work with the nonprofit Nexus Community Partners and UPDC to get money out.

Michael Martinez is a UPDC member who sits on the Neighbors United advisory committee. One recent request the committee has considered is that of Bole, an Ethiopian restaurant that lost its building at University and Syndicate in a fire. Bole sought \$50,000 and was recommended for \$25,000. The restaurant is re-opening, but in Como neighborhood. Martinez said such cases, where a business wants to relocate but to a neighborhood near Midway, are being considered on

a case-by-case basis.

Other funds helping

The We Love Midway and We Love St. Paul funds overseen by the Midway and St. Paul Area Chambers of Commerce, assisted 81 St. Paul businesses. That total includes four in the approval pipeline. More than \$1 million has been raised, with \$890,000 disbursed and about \$80,000 remaining.

Let's Rebuild: African Immigrant Businesses in Minnesota is overseen by African Economic Development Solutions. It has assisted 85 St. Paul businesses, raised \$487,000 and disbursed \$165,000.

The Asian Business Recovery Fund is overseen by Asian Economic Development Association. It raised \$504,000 and disbursed \$428,600 in St. Paul to 38 businesses. Both the Asian and African-focused groups disperse funds to affected businesses throughout the Twin Cities.

The East Side Business Association, overseen by East Side Area Business Association, raised and disbursed more than \$15,000 to 15 East Side businesses.

131 of 261 businesses repaired

PED and Department of Safety and Inspections (DSI) staff continue to monitor businesses affected by civil unrest, said Rick.

Of 261 businesses directly impacted, 131 have been repaired and another 73 need repairs. Other buildings are condemned, vacant or boarded.

The HRA is also tracking pandemic-related spending. Grants from the Bridge Fund, supported by city, federal CARES Act dollars, and private donations, have gotten out more quickly. It provides one-time \$7,500 grants for businesses. The program is for retail businesses with under \$2 million in annual revenue, said Andrew Hestness, principal projects manager for PED. Eligible business must have been impacted by an order by the governor related to the pandemic, such as restaurants being shut down.

The initial 10-day application period drew 2,107 requests, which Hestness said exceeded funding.

A total of 555 businesses were helped, with \$2.85 million distributed to 380 businesses during the summer and 175 businesses sharing \$1.31 million in the fall.

Hestness said a third round is underway, with \$562,000 to be split between 75 businesses. City officials will continue to direct businesses to other programs such as payroll protection, and will use other pandemic-related programs as they become available.

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Join the conversation, and let us know your diverse and varied thoughts on the issues that affect your neighborhood. Send letters and guest commentaries to news@MonitorSaintPaul.com.

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Newspapers are dying. Thousands of newspapers have closed.

No one reads the newspapers anymore.

Only old people read newspapers.

Newspaper ad effectiveness is uncertain.

Newspaper ads underperform digital campaigns. They aren't measurable.

There's a lot of negative perceptions out there about newspapers. The thing is, they aren't true.

Let's start with the idea that newspapers are dying.

Poynter recently reported that a quarter of all newspapers in the United States have died in the last 15 years, leaving vast areas as news deserts, and the *New York Times* picked up on the research by the University of North Carolina for its own article and interactive map.

That list includes The *Henning Advocate* in northern Minnesota.

But look up the *Advocate* and you can see it is definitely still open and operating on Henning's Main Street. What happened is that the *Henning Advocate* and *Citizen Advocate* merged.

It's the same thing with the *Fayette Leader* in Iowa's Fayette County. It merged into a county-wide publication, and the areas that have always been covered are still being covered.

The *Oconto County Times-Herald* in eastern Wisconsin is also still publishing after a merger.

During a seminar at the Tri-State Newspaper Convention on Feb. 5, Matt McMillan pointed out that in evaluating the health of newspapers, we also need to consider the health of the other businesses within these commu-

nities. In areas where newspapers have been shuttered, it is probably not just the newspapers that have left town. It's also the Subway sandwich shops and hardware stores. How many still have a school district or independent police department?

"There's something happening here that is a bigger thing," observed McMillan. He has had the opportunity to see the business community firsthand after working in newspapers for 25 years. He currently serves on the state newspaper boards for Minnesota and North Dakota and the national America's Newspapers Board of Directors, and works for a newspaper group that includes Press Publications, Northstar Media (my former employer), Kanabec Publications, Sentinel Publications and Printers & Publishers, Inc.

The closing of a few Twin Cities newspapers garnered attention this year, including *City Pages* (whose main revenue was in entertainment affected by COVID-19) and the *Southwest Journal* (whose long-time owners retired). But there are still 291 newspapers in Minnesota that are members of the Minnesota Newspaper Association, including the *Midway Como Frogtown Monitor* and the *Longfellow Nokomis Messenger*. Nationally, 2,941 of 3,141 counties are covered by a local newspaper - that's a whopping 93.7%. What industry can say that?

More college papers are returning to print publications as Gen Z experiences screen fatigue and yearns for a product they can hold onto. So, no, newspapers aren't only being read by the older generation.

"If you hear hedge funds are strangling the news industry and papers are dying every day, re-

Too much coffee

By TESHA M. CHRISTENSEN,
Owner & Editor
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member there is a third group of us who clearly see a bright future for newspapers. We are investing in the future, learning and growing, and we continue to produce news for people who depend on it." So wrote Ryan Brinkley, the owner of four weeklies including the *Anchorage Daily News*, and Francis Wick, whose family owns 24 newspapers, in a recent op-ed.

"The basic value proposition still holds: people need to know what's going on in their communities. They require credible, accurate and objective information that can inform their daily lives," continued the duo.

"So when you hear from people that the newspaper business is dead, ask them where they got their information. The answer might be online, or on Facebook, or on their phone - but, chances are, that news was likely still produced by a newspaper."

Local news really matters to people. As shown by the 2020 COVID-19 Societal Impact study by Whitman Insight Strategies Initiative and Creative Circle Media Solutions people are seeking authentic news sources. They trust local news media, including newspapers, much more than broadcast or television news sources and certainly more than social media or talk radio. In an environment where our former

president tweeted 7% of the time about "fake news," people trust their local news sources over national sources.

In fact, 82% of those surveyed said they trust local news.

When it comes to digital marketing, users trust the ads they see on reputable newspaper sites more than ads found elsewhere. There are 4x more likely to click through links on newspaper sites, according to News Media Canada. It cites new data from Totum Research - which also shows that ads in printed newspapers continue to be trusted more than any other traditional or digital format.

Google ads may be easy to set up and seem cheap, but only 26% of users trust them compared to 39% at news media web sites. The number drops to a trust rate of only 21% for social media networks like Facebook. Compare that to 52% for printed newspapers.

There's also a 'news trust halo' - additional benefits from advertising in newspapers. An IAB study found that 84% of consumers feel advertising within news increases or maintains brand trust. Put simply, consum-

ers like brands and businesses more that advertise in newspapers.

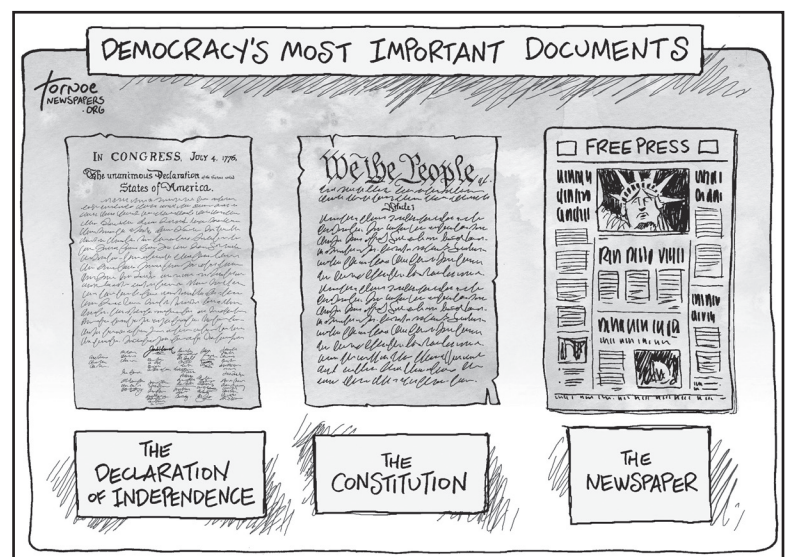
Classifieds have been hit hard since digital mediums like Craigslist and Facebook Marketplace have sprang up. But a recently conducted Pulse of America survey of almost 7,000 newspaper readers proves that newspaper classifieds get results. They report that 75% of classified ads got results.

Now, you can say (accurately) that I'm pretty biased when it comes to newspapers. But surveys from quite a few sources back me up.

I love what local business owner Kendall Crosby of Kendall's Ace Hardware has to say: "I've advertised in the *Midway Como Frogtown Monitor* for a number of years. I know I get a great response from its readers, and I know that the *Monitor* area is a prime market for me. I believe in community newspapers like the *Monitor* and advertising locally."

"And advertising where I get results."

Yep, I see a bright future ahead.



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I am very proud to have created this important resource for

people throughout our state. It is a model that can easily be replicated by organizations in every state across the United States. The Leader's Journey 365 portal is an essential and indispensable resource for training and information that supports civic engagement and participatory leadership.

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Guest columnist

By DR. ARTIKA TYNER,
dr.artikatyner@gmail.com



vide tools, resources, and assessments to help inspire you and discover how you can exercise leadership by making a difference in your community.

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and task forces. There are over 200 Boards, Commissions, Work Groups, Councils, and Taskforces. In addition, you can create change through voting, being counted in the U.S. Census, and establishing time banks in the community. You can serve as an election judge; there are also opportunities for youth to participate as student election judges.

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Knowledge is power and the

portal offers books and downloadable content for children, along with a myriad of resources for adults. According to the U.S. Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, research demonstrates a direct correlation exists between improved access to education, healthcare, and economic stability in communities that have a high level of civic engagement. We are providing the resources to help you find ways to be involved in the creation of communities that support diversity, equity, and inclusion. You can play a key role in making that happen.

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News for you!

The *Midway Como Frogtown Monitor* is a monthly community publication in the Midway, Como, Hamline and Frogtown neighborhoods of St. Paul, owned and operated by TMC Publications, CO. Visit our website for our calendar and publication dates.

Story ideas always welcome.

Keep in touch with the *Monitor*. Letters to the editor under 200 words and news releases for publication can be sent via e-mail to news@monitorsaintpaul.com. Unsigned letters will not run.

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The *Monitor* is for profit and for a purpose - and we don't sacrifice one for the other. We consider ourselves a zebra company, one that is both black and white, both/and. As a media company, we work to highlight issues, solve real, meaningful problems, and repair existing

social systems. We are working with our readers and advertisers to create a more just and responsible society that hears, helps and heals the customers and communities we serve.

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Letters

You missed something important in the Bethel-FSU Partnership pages

To the Editor:

Thanks for sharing these articles (*Monitor*, January 2021, pages 7-11); it's great to see positivity highlighted in our neighborhoods!

As one of the initial members of the partnership, who helped identify mission, I was a little disappointed to read:

"For 20 years, Bethel University has supported the Frogtown Summit-University Partnership, whose mission is to build intentional, long-term relationships in the two neighborhoods. The FSU Partnership takes the form of student internships at non-profits serving the two neighborhoods; participation in community events; and direct involvement from whole classes at the university in projects."

A hallmark of this partnership between the university and our neighborhoods is that it exists so that the university can benefit from engagement in our neighborhoods primarily for their students, and the neighborhoods can benefit from the educational resources offered by the university. The university demonstrated its commitment to partnering with our neighborhoods when it moved the funding for the partnership from grant funded sources to being a line item in the university's budget. Another demonstration of the university's commitment to partnering with our neighborhoods was when it created scholarships for residents of our neighborhoods to be able to attend the university. It was the Bethel-Frogtown-SummitU Partnership.

The statement that was printed implies that the university is in a paternalistic role of "supporting" that partnership. It also sadly leaves out the true sense of reciprocity that made this partnership real in its inception. It didn't mention that neighborhood organizations are who

identify what is needed in terms of student engagement - and that university departments are invited by the neighborhoods to fill needs identified by the neighborhoods through student engagement. These are key statements that support the self-determination of our neighborhoods.

Peace,
Kristen Kidder
Frogtown resident (30 years)

Editor's note: Thanks so much for helping us learn more about this partnership through your letter. We appreciate your important clarification and will make sure that future partnerships between Bethel University's journalism students and the Monitor that are funded through the Bethel-FSU partnership reflect this information.

Write in to say no to a fossil gas plant

To the Editor:

Citizens of St. Paul - we have an opportunity before us to drastically cut our carbon emissions. We have an opportunity to control how we get our power and how we use our energy. We have an opportunity to switch to clean energy and not fossil gas. And, most importantly, we have an opportunity to preserve our city, our state, our planet, and all the generations that come after us.

The Public Utilities Commission will vote on how we get our energy, and we can let them know we do not want it from fossil gas. The fossil gas plant in Becker, MN, that Xcel wants to build is a massive obstruction to our opportunity for a better place to live.

This plant will undo any work being done to cut our use of carbon - and we, the ratepayers, will pay for it.

Amazing things have been uncovered from numerous organizations that show we don't need fossil gas. We have the ability to get energy from rooftop solar - including houses, busi-

nesses, and schools. We can get our energy from wind. We have the ability to cut the demand of energy. We have the ability to save energy. We have the ability to electrify the system and make sure the infrastructure is in place to make that happen.

This is all possible if we act now. Thirteen of 17 of our district councils have voted to reject this fossil gas plant. Our city council has approved a plan that demands cleaner energy and rejects the building of this plant. It is time for you to let the Public Utilities Commission know: you are a citizen of St. Paul and you don't want this plant built.

To contact the Public Utilities Commission, fill out the form at: mn.gov/puc/consumers/speak-up. Enter document number E002/RP-19-368

Aaron Kerr
Como Park

I don't live in area, but I still read the Monitor

To the Editor:

I lived in the Midway from 1978-1990, and I've continued picking up the *Monitor* regularly since moving to St. Anthony Park, so I've been reading the paper for a long time. The current incarnation is the best I've seen.

Under your guidance, the *Monitor* has taken on some important social issues, while continuing to report the news in your distribution area and feature local persons, businesses, and organizations of interest. Even though I'm no longer a Midway resident, I always find things I want to read.

These are tough times for newspapers. I'm glad you're at the *Monitor*, and I hope the paper continues to fill its important role in the community.

Keep up the good work.
Dave Healy
(fellow Bethel grad)

Adding bonds to build affordable housing, protections for existing landlords who wish to keep rents at affordable levels, and tenants' rights programs are among many housing-related efforts the city is supporting.

The legislative agenda notes that the zoo and conservatory are the most visited cultural destination in Minnesota. A bonding appropriation is sought for pre-design and design for the entry exhibits, including a restoration to the orangutan habitat in Phase I. Funds are also sought for energy efficient asset preservation.

A second area capital project is to support the Minnesota Department of Transportation as it seeks funding to build a land bridge over Interstate 94, as part of the Reconnect Rondo project.

Delivery fees capped

Delivery service fees that take a bite out of restaurant profits will be capped, as a result of action Jan. 13 by the St. Paul City Council. The action affects third-party delivery services, such as DoorDash and BiteSquad. It caps the fees at 15 percent, the same as in Minneapolis.



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{ Monitor in a Minute }

By JANE McCLURE

LGA, Como Zoo, racial equity

Increased Local Government Aid (LGA), racial equity efforts and support for capital projects including Como Zoo and Conservatory are part of a sweeping 2021 city of St. Paul legislative agenda.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic made 2020 a very difficult and challenging legislative session, it is also affecting how lawmakers are working this year, said ThaoMee Xiong, the city's director of intergovernmental relations. Legislators held an unprecedented seven special sessions in 2020.

In 2021 the Minnesota House is doing its work online, with the Senate using a hybrid of online and in-person meetings to do business.

Xiong said city leaders city approached the 2021 legislative agenda through an equity lens. Staff from Mayor Melvin Carter's office worked with the Racial Eq-

uity Legislative Advocacy Workgroup to select legislative policy priorities. The group is made up of 25 nonprofit organizations and city employees committed to advancing health equity and economic justice. Issues chosen for a major focus at the capitol include eviction reform, emergency services, changes to drivers' license suspension procedures to help immigrants and support for nonprofits and microbusinesses. Other priority issues chosen by the group and added to the legislative agenda are to seek a funding mechanism for the presumption for COVID-19 workers' compensation, economic stimulus initiatives, rebuilding of communities impacted by civil unrest, and educational investments to address learning loss and opportunity gaps.

One focus with emergency shelter is call for the state's Emergency Fund to have a permanent base budget of \$15 million. The funds are used statewide to provide temporary and permanent housing, and supportive services.

THEY WORK TO REVERSE WRONGFUL CONVICTIONS

» from 1

when newly discovered evidence is identifiable, and can provide clear, convincing proof of innocence."

GNIP will only take on cases when inmates have contacted them directly. Staff lawyers and legal directors make regular visits to prisons in the three-state area, leaving pamphlets, questionnaires, and posters to help spread the word about their organization. If an inmate meets the necessary qualifications, GNIP legal services are provided free of charge.

At this time when the United States is deeply politically divided, Jones said, "We pride ourselves on being non-partisan at GNIP. Liberal and conservative

individuals and organizations all have a stake in the work we do."

Advocates for change

Jones is a former staff attorney for the Minnesota Attorney General's office, a former president of Minnesota Women Lawyers, and a former lawyer in private practice. She grew up in a family steeped in talk of law and lawyering; her father helped create the public defender system in the state of Minnesota.

She said, "I feel like I've learned even more about the depth of systemic racism since the events of this summer. There is no question in my mind that systemic racism is embedded in our criminal justice system.

When the criminal justice system makes big mistakes, the burden falls disproportionately on People of Color. Everything I see in my work confirms this."

What can community members do to start addressing this wrong? Jones suggests leaning into the resource section on their website, for starters: www.great-northinnocenceproject.org.

Standouts include the following books:

- "Just Mercy" by Bryan Stevenson
- "Punching the Air" by Ili Zobo and Yusef Salaam (an ex-onoree)
- "We are all Criminals" by Emily Baxter
- "The Sun does Shine" by Anthony Ray Hinton (an exonoree)

Justice Department grant received

The Great North Innocence Project received a two-year, \$300,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Justice to create Minnesota's first-ever Conviction Review Unit (CRU). The CRU, which will operate as a partnership between the Minnesota Attorney General's Office and the Great North Innocence Project, will allow the state to review legal cases for people believed to be innocent. While there are dozens of CRUs across the country, Minnesota's will be just the fourth in the country that operates through an Attorney General's Office. To date, CRUs have helped initiate the exoneration of 444 people in the U.S.

"Prosecutors have a duty to ensure those convicted of crimes are, in fact, guilty of those crimes," said Attorney General Keith Ellison. "We strive for perfection, but we know our system is imperfect. This grant will allow us to make sure justice is served and, if not, to right those wrongs."

oree)

For more information about speaking or teaching engagements, contact Sara Jones at sjones@gn-ip.org. The Great

North Innocence Project is located at 229 19th Ave. S., in space donated by the University of Minnesota Law School.

{ Development Roundup }

By JANE McCLURE

Johnny's Bar to be torn down

A longtime Frogtown bar will be torn down and replaced with a three-story commercial building, under plans submitted to city officials. The former Herges and Johnny Baby's Bar at 981 University Ave. would make way for the development by Suntide Commercial Real Estate.

The St. Paul Planning Commission Zoning Committee will review a request for a conditional

use permit for the development, at 3:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 11. The permit is to allow a building height of 42'9". That height is more than the site's traditional neighborhood zoning allows.

Suntide, which is housed at Court International in St. Paul, purchased the .36-acre property in March 2020. There has been a bar at 981 University Ave. since 1916. Johnny Baby's, the most recent occupant, closed in early 2020. While the bar was a fixture in Frogtown it also was the scene of violent incidents, including a

fatal shooting Jan. 1, 2020.

The city took sanctions against the bar in the past, even closing it for a time.

Suntide initially announced plans to renovate the building for retail use, to add new windows, landscaping and other features. A March 2020 company press release quoted Suntide CEO Barb Schuba, "We think this is a great opportunity for Suntide to improve the neighborhood and add service retail." Since then the decision was made to raze the old bar and build something new.

State property eyed for change

A long-vacant, state-owned

property at Snelling and St. Anthony avenues could be transformed with 44 parking spaces, a stormwater retention system and landscaped public area, if developer Wellington Management and owner Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) can reach agreement. The interim use plan, reviewed Jan. 25 by the Union Park District (UPDC) land use committee, met a mixed reaction.

Wellington Management would like to pursue an interim lease with MnDOT and install 44 surface parking spaces at the north end of the state property, for use by its residents at the Pitch.

The Pitch, a six-story mixed-use development at 427 N. Snelling Ave. just north of the MnDOT land, is on schedule, said Wellington Project Manager Casey Dziewczynski. Ground was broken in May 2020. The building should be completely framed and roofed in 30 days. Apartment leasing should start in the fall, by which time the first-floor commercial spaces should be completed.

Wellington initially tried to purchase the MnDOT land when project planning began. But the state is holding onto the site as a plan to possibly redesign I-94 is underway.

"The ache for authenticity is overwhelming. Local media are best positioned to deliver that."

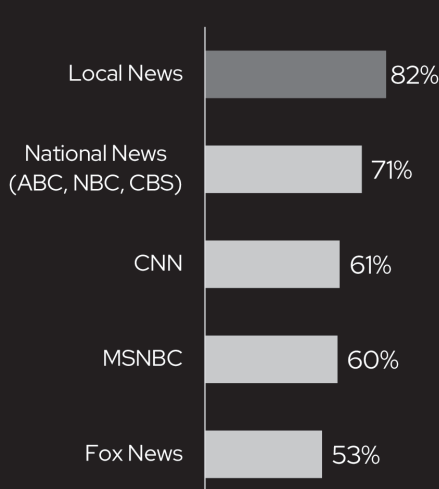
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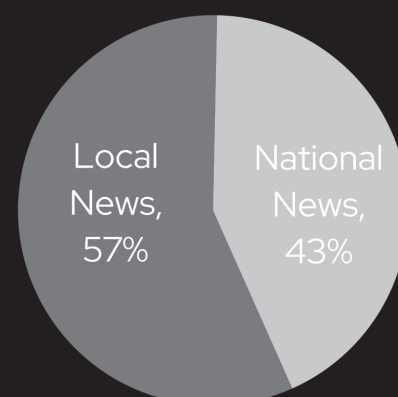
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* Data from "The Covid-19 Societal Impact Study" by Whitman Insight Strategies Initiative and Creative Circle Media Solution, 2020.

Solar United Neighbors launches co-op to make solar accessible to more people in the Twin Cities

NEIGHBORS GO SOLAR TOGETHER

By MARGIE O'LOUGHLIN

For home and business owners in the Twin Cities metro area who have been considering installing solar panels, there are two affordable reasons to go solar now.

Solar United Neighbors is a national non-profit organization that has spearheaded solar cooperatives in 11 states and the District of Columbia. Their newest venture is the Twin Cities Region Solar Co-op, which will make it possible for residents and business owners to go solar together for competitive pricing and installation.

In addition, COVID-19 relief legislation has extended the federal solar Investment Tax Credit. It was previously set to end at the end of this year. However, with the new legislation, the tax credit will remain at 26%, which would help co-op members save even more on their investment.

"The co-op will enable Twin Cities homeowners and business owners to join the growing community of people saving money by harnessing solar power," said Bobby King, Minnesota program director for Solar United Neighbors. "Together, we're building a movement to transform our electricity system into one that is cleaner, fairer, and shares its benefits more broadly."

The co-op is open to residents and businesses in the Twin Cities and surrounding metro area. The application deadline is still rolling.

"I'm excited by the incentives available to homeowners, and especially to low-income residents," said MNIPL Solar Outreach Manager Buff Grace. "Many will be able to go solar through this co-op."

"Rooftop solar means more

"I'm excited by the incentives available to homeowners, and especially to low-income residents. Many will be able to go solar through this co-op."

~ MNIPL Solar Outreach Manager
Buff Grace

clean renewable energy, more local energy and more distributive energy. It also means local jobs. This is all part of the new energy system we need to keep moving forward in our state," said Rep. Jamie Long (D-Minneapolis), incoming Chair of the House Energy and Climate Finance and Policy Committee. "I am glad to see SUN's solar co-op making this possible for more folks."

Become electricity producer, not just consumer

According to King, the motivator for most people in the co-op is simple. They want to be more hands-on about producing clean power on their own property.

One of the first benefits new co-op members receive is a roof assessment. This is done virtually, and takes several factors into account – starting with exposure. A north-facing exposure will not work for solar panels. South-facing is best, but east and west can work in some situations. There should be no shade, and there has to be sufficient space to mount the panels (meaning no dormers or skylights.)

A solar primer

nity process and considerable debate, St. Paul approved a ban of carryout containers that cannot be recycled or composted.

While saying she appreciates the spirit of Carter's order and understands the difficulties businesses have faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, Council President Amy Brendmoen expressed opposition to the delay.

The average roof-mounted system ranges from 2-12 kilowatts. Power is measured in kilowatts; one kilowatt equals 1,000 watts. Solar United Neighbors co-ops use photo voltaic (PV) systems. PV cells embedded in the solar panels convert sunlight into electricity.

King explained that solar panels are very low maintenance – as they have no moving parts. They clear themselves of snow, thanks to gravity, and have gone down in price approximately 50% since 2010. Most solar panel systems last 25+ years, and typically come with a 25 year guarantee. They will more than pay for themselves over the life of the system.

Co-op membership

The Twin Cities Region Solar Co-op is free to join. It is open to homeowners and business owners in the Twin Cities and surrounding metro area. Together, co-op members will learn about solar energy and leverage bulk purchasing to ensure competitive pricing and quality solar installations. After a competitive bidding process facilitated by SUN, co-op members will choose a local solar company to do their installs.

Joining the co-op does not obligate members to purchase solar panels. Instead, members have the option to individually purchase panels and electric vehicle chargers based on the installer's group rate.

Other local energy groups partnering with Solar United Neighbors in the creation of the Twin Cities Region Solar Co-op include the city of Minneapolis Sustainability Division, Climate Generation, Environment Minnesota, Minnesota Interfaith Power



South Minneapolis homeowner Kelly Muellman installed solar panels on her garage in 2018, as a member of an earlier group of Twin Cities Solar United Neighbors. She said, "Being part of a co-op was great. Our neighbor group reviewed several bids from installers together, and chose the one we thought had the best reputation, warranty, and price." (Photo by Margie O'Loughlin)

Nonprofit solar group

Solar United Neighbors is a nonprofit organization that works in Minnesota and nationwide to represent the needs and interests of solar owners and supporters. Solar co-ops are part of the organization's mission to create a new energy system with rooftop solar at the cornerstone. Solar United Neighbors holds events and education programs to help people become informed solar consumers, maximize the value of their solar investment, and advocate for fair solar policies.

and Light, and the Minnesota Renewable Energy Society.

Anyone interested in going solar can sign up for the co-op or watch Solar United Neighbors' information session on the co-op webpage at www.solarunitedneighbors.org/twincities. This session covers basic information necessary to make an informed decision.

Register for the free virtual information sessions at: <https://coops.solarunitedneighbors.org/coops/twin-cities-region-solar-co-op/events/>.

Solar United Neighbors has hosted 11 solar co-ops in Minnesota since 2017. According to the group's estimates, the 76 Minnesota homes and businesses that now have solar panels through its co-ops represent 544.2 kilowatts of solar power, \$1.8 million invested in the local economy, and 20 million pounds of lifetime carbon offsets. A carbon offset is a reduction in emissions of carbon dioxide or other greenhouse gases made in order to compensate for emissions made elsewhere.

Container ban delayed

St. Paul's ban on carryout food and beverage containers that cannot be recycled or composted was to take effect Jan. 1 but Mayor Melvin Carter issued an emergency order postponing implementation of the ordinance for a year.

In 2019 after a long commu-

pressed opposition to the delay. She said many businesses have already taken steps to switch containers. One reason for the delay was to see if a long-sought push for curbside composting was moving ahead. But that effort has stalled. The council plans to take up the issue again soon with the mayor.

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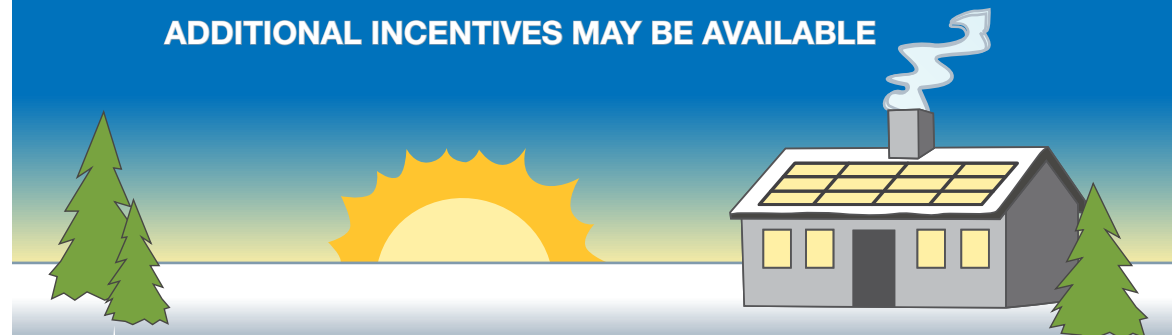
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LEGENDARY

Al Milgrom remembered by those in the Twin Cities film scene

By JAN WILLMS

The whirlwind life of legendary film enthusiast, professor, writer, photographer, filmmaker, and founder of the University Film Society ended Dec. 20 when Al Milgrom, 98, succumbed to a stroke.

Milgrom left behind a Twin Cities film scene that had been greatly influenced by his passion for film.

Milgrom taught film at the University of Minnesota and founded the U Film Society in the 1960s. In time his efforts produced what became the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Film Festival (MSPIFF).

Susan Smoluchowski, the current executive director of MSPIFF, recalls meeting Milgrom soon after she moved here 20 years ago. "A friend of mine invited me to the opening night of the film festival, so I went and that is where I first encountered Al," she said. "Later, I learned a bit about the legend behind so much of it, and I became involved with the festival. I started going to Oak Street. There was some angst among the board of directors. Al was the artistic director, but nobody was running the organization. I worked closely with him, and admired his cinema all the more."

Noting that Milgrom did not necessarily want to run the organization but curate films, Smoluchowski said she continued to interact with Milgrom through a complicated time, but they got through it.

"For the last few years, we have had a very congenial relationship, and he came up to the MSPIFF offices often, and

he came to all of our films. He could be an irascible, complicated, difficult guy, but he also had a warmth to him and a curiosity. He was a fascinating person to be around," she said.

Smoluchowski remembered that one of the last times Milgrom popped over to her office before the pandemic, he was very pumped up. Milgrom told her that Woody Allen had made a film that was opening the San Sebastian International Film Festival. "You have to go, Susan, and meet Woody Allen. You have to have your 15 minutes of fame," Milgrom said.

"Because of the influence Al had on them when they were growing up, so many people's lives were changed because of his passion. He was extremely important to people," Smoluchowski said.

'Al was honest'

One of those people is Hamline-Midway resident Michael Reano, a filmmaker and camera man. Although he did not meet Milgrom until the 80s and really got to know him after 2000, he considered Milgrom his 'film father.'

"I had a film, the Father/Son Work Tapes that I hoped MSPIFF would show in 2002," Reano said, "But Al didn't want to. Al was honest. If he didn't like something, he let you know."

Reano said he could get into deep conversations with Milgrom about film history. "I was impressed with his knowledge. I could name drop directors, and Al would have stories about them or had crossed paths with them."

"I got to know Al, started

hanging out with him. I worked on his Czech film and did a little bit on Dinkytown Uprising. I was second camera on his Berryman film."

Reano said working with Milgrom and spending time with him was fun. "I just loved his drive, and his making films in his 80s. Because of my own up and down relationship with my father, Al was always sort of a father figure to me. And that knowledge! He could drive you crazy, but I really enjoyed working with him."

"I remember his crazy driving. I was not comfortable driving in a car with him. He would speed, get pulled over and then talk his way out of it." Milgrom drove up until the week before he passed away.

East European and Russian filmmakers were Milgrom's favorites, and he brought many of them to MSPIFF. "He brought in films that you would never get a chance to see anywhere else," Reano said.

"He would go to Documentary Club, and socialize, and it was such a great experience to be with him. When you were with him, in those last couple of years before the pandemic, you never felt like you were hanging out with someone who was 96. He was still wanting to make films."

The more he got to know him, the more he found out about Milgrom's life experiences. "He was a journalist in WWII, met a Russian ballerina, filmed in Russia by himself."

"He was such a character. I used to compare him to Studs Terkel. Once my parents were gone, I was so glad I could have



Al Milgrom taught film at the University of Minnesota and founded the U Film Society in the 1960s. In time, his efforts produced what became the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Film Festival. (Photo by Janet Bayliss)

Al as a friend."

'Character, icon, gentleman'

Twin Cities actress Helen Chorolec was a college student at the U of M when she first came across Milgrom as he was showing films at the Bell Auditorium. She recalled going with her parents as a little girl to see Russian films on Sundays, and hearing about him then.

But it was about 15 years ago at the MSPIFF festival that she really got to know him. She was attending the festival with

her mother, Olga, and she recognized Al with his glasses, beret and white hair.

"My mom and I were chatting in Ukrainian," said Chorolec, "and Al came over and started to talk with us, using some Ukrainian phrases. He was of Ukrainian descent."

She said her family had been refugees from Nazism, and Milgrom had a fascination with WWII history, so they had a lot to talk about. "He had to go some-

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where else, but then he turned around and came back and gave us a handful of complimentary tickets. We were going to the films anyway, but whenever he saw us he gave us tickets, so we went to three or four films a day."

Chorolec said she and her mom would go to films and then to after parties, talking more with Al. "It was a wonderful time. I got to meet some of the European directors he brought over. Al was so generous. Even though he may have had a reputation as being cantankerous, he was super kind to me and my mom."

She remembers Milgrom as being extremely independent, always on the go from one event to another. "He was always going to a film or to a lecture."

"He was also a flirt," Chorolec recalled. "He would always ask me if I could find a good Ukrainian lady for him. He said he wanted to date someone around my age, who was vibrant and would want to go to concerts and films."

"Al hand-selected those European films for the festival. I was amazed at his stamina. Al was a character, an icon and a real gentleman."

'He was an improviser'

Mike Rivard, filmmaker and musician, said he shared shooting with Milgrom 12 to 15 years ago. "When I was a teacher at UC Video, located in an old church on the East Bank, Al moved the film society offices into that same church. I was his cameraman, and we started shooting for his current docs, a lot for 'Dinkytown' and a lot for 'Berryman.'" John Berryman was a professor at the U who committed suicide, and Milgrom wanted to do a film on him.

"For his Berryman project, he found a couple of experts on Berryman, and one of them was a professor at a college in Bos-



The whirlwind life of legendary film enthusiast, professor, writer, photographer, filmmaker, and founder of the University Film Society ended Dec. 20 when Al Milgrom, 98, succumbed to a stroke. (Photo by Janet Bayliss)

ton. Al made the arrangements, and we flew out to Boston."

Rivard said Milgrom was an inveterate note taker, and when they were getting on the plane, he had about six bags of legal pads, a camera bag, and bags of books, all on a wheelie cart. "Halfway down the aisle, the cart tips. I was behind Al and could help him scoop all this stuff up. Anybody who knew Al could just picture this."

Once they got to Boston, they met with the professor, which Al had said would take about an hour. An hour passed, and the interview had not even started, so the process was closer to three hours.

"We were setting up lights and mics as we walked through the library. Of course, Al had no permission to do this. He was an improviser. He used to say 'We'll get there and make it happen.'"

He said the expert on Berryman became totally engaged with Milgrom, and realized that he knew his stuff. And things

turned around, and the professor began interviewing Milgrom, and they went on for hours.

"Al educated several generations of people who went on to become filmmakers themselves. The Coen Brothers made a reference to him in their film, 'Inside Llewyn Davis.' He also influenced Werner Herzog. Al was known around the world to a certain generation of filmmakers."

'Nothing could stop him'

Artist and photographer Janet Bayliss would see Milgrom off and on over the years, when she was a student at the U, attended foreign films and worked in Dinkytown. And over the years, those occasional meetings increased, and she became a close friend.

Bayliss talked about driving in Dinkytown with Milgrom. "He yelled stop and jumped out of the car. He had found his Berryman, someone he wanted to re-enact in his film, and he

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KING MILAN'S BARBERSHOP KEEPS UP ANNUAL TRADITION

Free back-to-school haircuts for kids offered on Feb. 1 when St. Paul students went back to in-person classes

By MARGIE O'LOUGHLIN

Milan Dennie owns and operates King Milan's Barbershop in the Frogtown neighborhood. He has continued a tradition there for years that he started in his hometown of Gary, Ind.: offering free back-to-school haircuts for kids on Labor Day.

Labor Day 2020 came and went. Dennie hosted an event that day but it was smaller than usual, since kids weren't going back to school in-person. Now, with elementary schools starting to reopen for in-person learning, Dennie and his team of barbers hosted the Labor Day event all over again—on Feb. 1.

Back-to-school haircut event

It was a long day of barbering.

The event lasted all day and served more than 50 kids. Back-to-school backpacks were distributed, as well as school supplies.

Dennie said, "I love to see kids prepared for success in school. When they're sitting in my barber chair, I focus on being positive. I talk to them about their grades, how they're feeling about school, how they're treating their families."

Dennie was just a kid himself when he started cutting hair. He was his own first customer but, unlike most kids, his first haircut turned out pretty sharp. He cut his older brother's hair next, and then several other family members. By the time he was 19, Dennie had enrolled in barber school and was studying business at the University of Indiana.

He went on to open the first King Milan's Barbershop 16 years ago in Gary, Ind., once a fabled American city. There had been



Milan Dennie, owner of King Milan's Barbershop said, "We're a standout small business in the neighborhood because we stand for something positive." (Photo by Margie O'Loughlin)

steel mill jobs and the promise of upward mobility for Gary's growing African American and immigrant population – but the bottom fell out of the economy in the 1990s.

Dennie said, "I have never seen my hometown booming – not in my lifetime. It's hard to imagine, because our whole downtown is deserted now. I had hoped to be able to keep both

shops running, but I decided to move to St. Paul in 2014 to start a new life. I opened my second barbershop here, and eventually closed the one in Gary.

"I talk to the kids who come in about my experiences growing up in a very poor neighborhood. I try to keep them focused on the importance of doing their best in school, on gaining job experience, on discovering their gifts and talents at an early age."

Barbershop and youth center

King Milan's Barbershop is committed to helping neighborhood kids reach their full potential. Dennie said, "I've been mentoring young people for about 15 years. In addition to offering haircuts in a friendly atmosphere for all ages and ethnicities, the barbershop houses a youth center focused on developing young entrepreneurs."

Called "It's Our Neighborhood," the non-profit organization has been serving Frogtown youth since 2015. Dennie looks forward to using the resource center again as a place where kids can go after school while their parents are working – once COVID-19 is under control.

Located in the barbershop basement, the resource center has nine computer stations and a quiet area where youth can get tutoring. There are chess boards too, and an on-site chess master.

'It's Our Neighborhood'

The mission of It's Our Neighborhood is to build and develop entrepreneurs at a young age. That starts with encouraging academic success in creative ways.

Artis Martin is a fixture at King Milan's and a steady pres-

ence in the resource center. He worked for Dennie as a barber in Gary, Ind., and followed him to St. Paul a few years ago. He gives a lot of haircuts, and he plays a lot of chess. He volunteers in the resource center teaching kids how to play the game. Chess is strategic, slow, and methodical. It proves that necessary steps must be taken to reach a goal.

The work of It's Our Neighborhood is provide mentoring relationships with trusted adults, as well as academic opportunities and field trips out into the community for young people. To learn more or to donate, visit www.itsourneighborhood.com.

Dennie said, "We are expecting to really grow this program by June or July. I'm working on grant applications right now to help secure funding, but we have a robust calendar already lined up. We have great relationships already in place with partners like the Wilder Foundation, the city of Saint Paul's Right Track (employment opportunities and professional skills training for youth), and the Rondo Community Library."

"We'll be offering entrepreneurial mentoring with established business leaders. We'll be showing the kids how to create businesses, really digging deep into entrepreneurial skills development."

Resources to make a way

Dennie acknowledges it would have been tough to accomplish all this without the community resources he has found in the Twin Cities. He said, "When I started the process of forming It's Our Neighbor-

KING MILAN'S >> 11



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"I am the first of my family to become a homeowner, breaking a generational cycle of renting and lacking equity. NeighborWorks Home Partners has been directly involved in every step of the process and has empowered me to secure my dreams of ownership and equity that has ultimately allowed me to change my life." ~ Kali Terry

'It's a gamechanger'

Rondo man flips the script to become first in his family to own a home

By AMANDA WELLIVER
NEIGHBORWORKS

Not having access to homeownership can mean missing out on decades of opportunity to grow family wealth through equity. When Kali Terry became the first person in his family to own a home, he flipped that script.

Terry used down payment assistance from NeighborWorks Home Partners to purchase a property where he could live and also build income. The spacious duplex where he now lives overlooks what once was Rondo Ave., the heart of a historic and thriving Black-owned business district and neighborhood that was razed to make room for the freeway.

Recently, Terry was preparing the first floor unit for a new tenant, a teacher, who would be moving in soon. He beamed at the tall ceilings and fresh paint in the light-filled living room, and showed off the built-in desk and storage unit he'd just installed, hoping that it would be a good place for his new neighbor to work. He takes pride in the de-

tails, in creating what will be a nice place to live and housing that will be affordable for the neighborhood.

Terry also recognizes that while he's providing an affordable rental unit, he's building economic security for himself.

"I've turned a potential liability – my housing expense – into an income producing asset," he marvels. "Now I'm in a position of power to build this income. It's a total game-changer for me."

Terry said that access to information about buying a home, like what he learned in the Home Stretch workshop he took, made him feel more confident about the purchasing process and was key to seeing the possibilities. It was easier than he expected, though it did take a few tries before he had an accepted offer. He was a back-up offer on this particular house, and when the initial buyers fell through, he was prepared to act quickly.

At the workshop, Terry learned about some of the other services NeighborWorks provides,



including home improvement financing, and not long after closing on his home he came back to apply for funds to cre-

ate more finished living space in the attic. He is hoping that with a proposed zoning change, he'll be able to eventually offer it as



Kali Terry owns a duplex that provides him a home and also generates income. (Photos submitted)

a third living unit. His goal is to keep the rent a little lower than other places, to offer opportunity to other people just starting out. But he plans to tell others about how owning a home is possible, and that there are resources in the community that make it easier.

"Homeownership has put me in a position of power," he said, smiling. "It's the ultimate home hack."

Note: This article was reprinted courtesy of NeighborWorks Home Partners and originally appeared on their website.

Set your own special days and intentions

Hello, Monitor readers,

Happy Groundhog Day, Valentine's Day, President's Day, Mardi Gras/Fat Tuesday, and Happy American Heart Month, Black History Month, National Bird Feeding Month, National Grapefruit Month and.... In fact, we could provide an official Happy Day greeting every day, as well as an official Happy Month greeting for every month.

Out of curiosity, I decided to do a quick Google search of official national holidays and special named days and months. At first, I was surprised with the number of ideas, causes, and values that we have learned to give recognition and honor; however, I also felt myself questioning some of the meaning of these special named months and days. For instance, I could fully understand honoring Black, Indigenous, Hispanic, Asian, Women, Pride, or medical-related named months and of naming special days and weeks, in order to provide awareness on important and meaningful topics and issues. However, instead of questioning the meaning of these special official months, weeks, and days, I decided to focus on my theme of Being Optimistic for 2021, which gave me an idea and inspiration.

The idea was to invite the Monitor readers to also conduct an internet search to discover for yourself the hundreds of national holidays and special named days, weeks and months, or perform a state or city search since we have truly evolved into a digital and online society. Hopefully, this type of activity might spark some new learning, general respect, a

little humor, and maybe cultivate a wee-bit of cultural and individual humility for each other and for our great Planet Earth.

And, my inspiration was to encourage us to start creating and naming our own special days, weeks, and months. In other words, choose a day you want to honor; choose a topic you can explore for a week; choose an issue that you can become aware of for a month. I have a chosen twin who celebrates her birthday every day, I have a dear friend who honors moments of reflection and meditating weekly, and I know folks who are dedicated to reading a different book each month for the purposes of learning and understanding other cultural and ethnic groups or issues that were previously unknown to them.

The www.worldpeace.org motivates their peacemakers to name, visualize, and practice the world we want to see and live in. I definitely, would like to have a National Voter's Day Holiday during a summer month. I would also like to have a State or Local Parent Day Holiday every month. I would really enjoy every other day as Sweet Potato Pie Day. There are so many serious and meaningful or fun and joyful or mournful and grieving or forgiving and healing or compassion and kindness days that you/we can name for our special day, week, or month. I believe/hope that doing an internet search on holidays and special named days, weeks, and months will energize you into making 2021 a year of freshness and getting us back on track for bending Minnesota's

and America's Arc of Justice forward.

This month I particularly honor the birthdays of my niece, Georgia, my nephew, Metric the second, my twin, Diane, and my garden s/heroes, Megan, Nate, Seitu, and Valentine. I also respect President's Day and I'm grateful for the awareness of Black History Month. Although, I am looking forward to celebrating Earth Day in April, I want to start today, right now, with imploring you to please join me in "Call, Write, Text the Governor's Day" to Honor Minnesota First Nation Peoples, in particular our Red Lake and White Earth Nations sisters and brothers. "Call, Write, Text the Governor's Day" must be every day until the governor steps-up and stop the destructive action that Pipeline 3 will cause the Nations and to Mother Earth. This is 2021. We can find and use alternative energy for our livable needs and wants. We can also transfer outdated job skills to 21st century job skills.

As we celebrate and acknowledge Valentine's Day and American Heart Month, let us also truly put love into our heartfelt recognitions. Let's breathe authenticity into our special days, weeks, and months; this is not an act of kindness, this is an Act of Respect and Survival for our daily lives. We are interwoven and intertwined with all life. I thank the Water Protectors for reminding us that Water is Life and Pipeline 3 threatens all life. Be well and start choosing and creating each day in a bright, loving, and peaceful way.

Peace bubbles

By MELVIN GILES
peacebubbles@q.com



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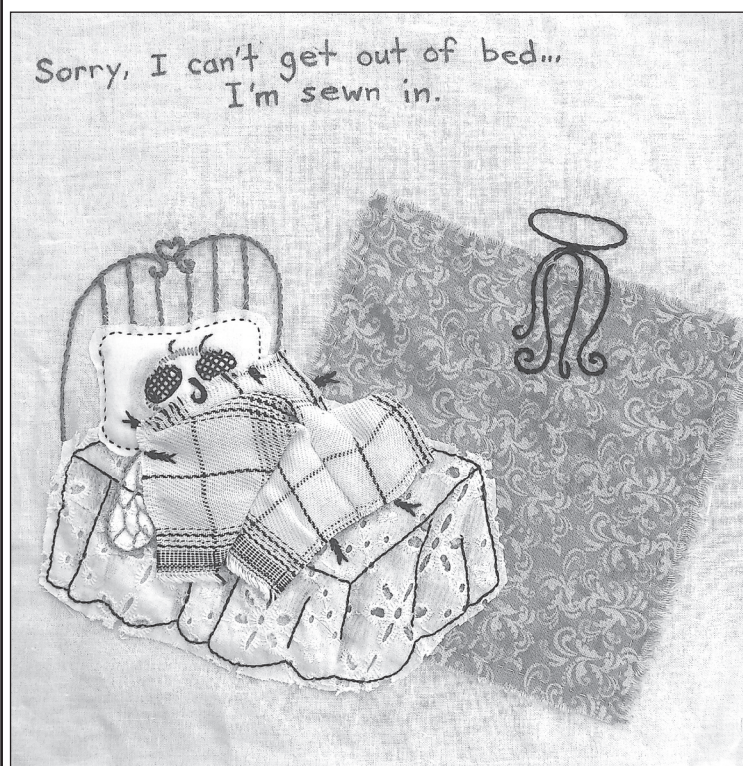
KING MILAN'S >> from 10

hood into a non-profit organization, I got help from Legal Corps on a sliding fee scale. The first time we offered the free back-to-school haircuts, we made the front page of the Pioneer Press. I offered the same event in Gary, Ind. for four years and no media stations ever picked it up.

"And the people here, just regular people, have been abundantly helpful to me and my team."

King Milan's Barbershop is located in the Frogtown neighborhood at 511 University Ave. W. Call 651.336.1663 to make an appointment and get a quote. Haircut styles are limited only by the boundaries of imagination.

Frog Food by Z Akhmetova



DEBATE TO STATE!

The Como Park debating duo of Chikamso Chijioke and Sam Skinner concluded their junior year of competition as participants in the Minnesota State High School League Tournament.

They've made steady progress through high school, from participating in the novice division as freshmen, to junior varsity as sophomores, before succeeding at the varsity level this year.

Debate at Como Park is organized by veteran teacher Ms. Deb Hansmeier. She's happy to have support from partners in the Urban Debate League, who provide additional coaching staff and resources. The community coach working with Como was Josh Lamet, a University of Minnesota student with a passion for policy debate.

That passion has been developing within both Chijioke and Skinner. As they dove deep into research for this year's topic, they enjoyed building their cases and producing compelling arguments

for both sides.

To prepare for each tournament (all competitions at all levels were virtual this year) they refined their positions on the resolution: The United States federal government should enact substantial criminal justice reform in the United States in one or more of the following: forensic science, policing, sentencing.

"We constructed affirmative arguments advocating for ending the death penalty, abolishing ICE, and educating people about jury nullification," Skinner said.

"We always thought about what the other side could say, and how we could defend against it or use it to our advantage," Chijioke said.

Coach Hansmeier explained how prepared and adaptable debaters must be to succeed. "They don't know what side they'll have to argue until right before the debate. Then they present evidence and have to argue why their side is a better choice for the judge."

The top two teams at each

Como Park Senior High School

By ERIC ERICKSON
Social studies teacher

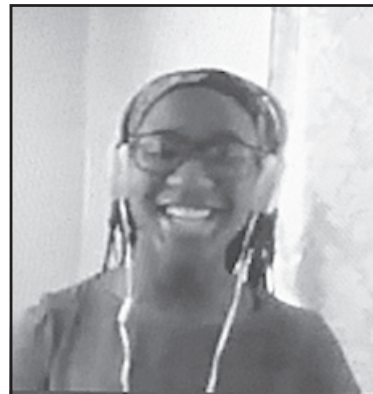


section tournament qualify for state. Chijioke and Skinner felt good after each round. When they secured second place after two days of competition, they were rightfully proud. At state, they wound up winning two of five debates against the premier competition across Minnesota.

But the trophies aren't why they compete. Nor are they the highest point of pride.

"I'm proud anytime we have a good round. We don't even have to win. If I felt I did a good job I was proud. If I learned something that I can use later on I was proud," Chikamso said.

"My baseline for an accomplishment was feeling that I did my best, did not give up, and



Chikamso Chijioke



Sam Skinner

used my skills and knowledge in an efficient way."

Skinner expressed similar sentiments. But most of all, he's grateful for the collective experience of debate with a dedicated group of Como peers.

"I am most proud of how the debate team has grown this year," Skinner explained. "We expected that the COVID-19 pandemic would lower participation, but instead our numbers have grown. Each of our teams have performed consistently well at all levels of debate."

Como's junior varsity debaters this season were Kayla Kerr,

Lily Anderson, Caitlyn Coyle and Allie Rognerud. Novice debaters included Colleen Reynosa Shaw, Ikram Mohamed, Ti'Yanna Booker, Thay See, and Gus Ostby.

Two years ago, Chijioke and Skinner debated at the novice level. For those willing to put in the time and practice, there's clearly a path for growth at Como in the team's supportive and collaborative environment.

"Debate can be a home for anyone seeking education, competition, and/or community," Skinner said. "Its inclusivity and opportunity is unparalleled."

Housing issue hits close to home

Finding, creating, and maintaining safe, affordable housing for all residents in Saint Paul is not getting easier, especially in a pandemic and recession. But in a conversation Jan. 27 with the Como Community Council's Anti-Racism Work Group, Ward 4 Councilmember Mitra Jalali talked in detail about city and county efforts to provide more housing stability, especially for residents who currently are homeless or are on the brink of becoming so. You can watch the conversation through the "This is a Recording" article at www.district10comopark.org. The discussion covers:

- What's necessary to change the hearts and minds of residents, including in communities such as Como, to accept and advocate for a larger range of housing options across the city
- The funding, policy, and political hurdles to reducing homelessness, creating more housing for a wider range of people, and preserving affordable housing
- Innovative, affordable housing options under consideration (and the challenges to making them happen)
- The complexities that affect decisions by unhoused residents, the professionals trying to

find appropriate indoor homes for them, and what more the city and residents could do increase safety and support at encampments

4 join Neighborhood Honor Roll

Congratulations to Rita Amendola, James Cowles, Molly Fitzel, and Olivia Morawiecki, who are the newest members of the District 10 Neighborhood Honor Roll. The new honorees were selected Jan. 19 by the Como Community Council board, based on nominations from District 10 residents.

- Amendola was nominated by multiple neighbors "for her many efforts over many years to build a strong, safe, and welcoming neighborhood and Como Park community."
- Cowles also was nominated by multiple neighbors. They cited his "tremendous neighborly generosity" – including middle-of-the-night snow removal on his block – and his bicycle advocacy.
- Fitzel and Morawiecki, of the North End South Como Block Nurse Program, were nominated for their creative efforts to make sure seniors are not alone during the pandemic.

Normally, there is a citywide celebration for honorees from across Saint Paul. Because of

District 10 Como Community Council

By MICHAEL KUCHTA,
Executive Director
district10@district10comopark.org



pandemic restrictions, that won't happen for a while. Locally, however, the Como Community Council will add the latest honorees to a permanent plaque that will be displayed in the Como Park Streetcar Station.

Students return to Job Corps

The U.S. Department of Labor has cleared the Humphrey Job Corps Center to begin siphoning students back for classroom training for the first time since last March. More than 30 students are on campus now, and groups of no more than 10 will return every two weeks. All students must quarantine for 14 days upon arrival, and all staff are tested for COVID-19 before interacting with returning students.

Meanwhile, construction is wrapping up – with elevators and work in the gym the last major projects. Crews expect to remove the temporary office trailer from the Arlington park-

ing lot in February.

New Western District leaders

The Saint Paul Police Department's Western District has new command staff. Joshua Lego replaces Steve Anderson as senior commander, and Salim Omari replaces Kent Cleveland as patrol commander.

Anderson and Cleveland are being transferred after four years in their Western District roles. Lego and Anderson essentially are switching jobs; Anderson takes over the citywide property crimes unit. Cleveland takes over the citywide records unit.

Lego has nearly 25 years' service in the department, including assignments as a station commander, commander of property crimes, and in the special operations and family and sexual violence units.

Omari has roughly 14 years' service, including as senior commander of the internal affairs unit; he has spent nearly half his time on the force in the Western District.

Free Food Fridays continue

The Como Community Council and Sanneh Foundation are partnering to again distribute free meal boxes on the remaining Fridays in February. The meal boxes are available to Ramsey County residents dealing with financial hardships because of

COVID-19.

The meal boxes will be distributed in the north parking lot of Niem Phat Buddhist Temple, at Dale and Front, on Feb. 19 and 26.

Distribution will be 1:30-3:30 p.m. (or until supplies run out). Reservations are highly recommended; to reserve your box, fill out the form at www.district10comopark.org/mealbox.html. The boxes provide two meals of six servings each.

Call or link into D10 Meetings

Pandemic or not, renters, homeowners, and other community members are always welcome to participate in District 10's board and committee meetings. You can join either by video conference or by phone.

To obtain links, phone numbers, or other access information, send a request by email to district10@district10comopark.org. Or, call 651-644-3889. Upcoming meetings:

- Board meeting: Tuesday, Feb. 16
- Neighborhood Relations: Tuesday, March 2
- Land Use: Wednesday, March 3
- Environment: Wednesday, March 10

All meetings begin at 7 p.m. Whenever possible, agendas and other relevant documents are posted in advance in the "Board News" section of District 10's website: www.district10comopark.org

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Swap seeds with neighbors Feb. 20

Seed swapping between neighbors has been happening in the Midway this winter and one more date remains.

Hamline Midway residents Anna McLafferty (of Hothouse Horticulture) and Stephanie Hankerson, along with the Como Community Seed Library's organizer Dawn Lamm, came together last fall with a shared disappointment on how COVID-19 has restricted regular gatherings for seed saving, cleaning and swapping. For the past two seasons, local community growers would look forward to off-season gatherings to handle and share seeds. Out of this, three Cyber Seed Crawls were born, one last fall and two in winter of 2021. These distanced and virtual seed swapping events happen online as a Facebook event. Ahead of swapping day, participants submit a list of seeds they have available. On event day, the combined list of all submissions is released and traders use the event discussion and private messaging to connect with others.

So far, 74 folks have participated in two Cyber Seed Crawl swap dates, and have selected seed from 300 plant species being shared by fellow traders.

Hamline Midway Coalition

By KATE MUDGE
kate@hamlinemidway.org



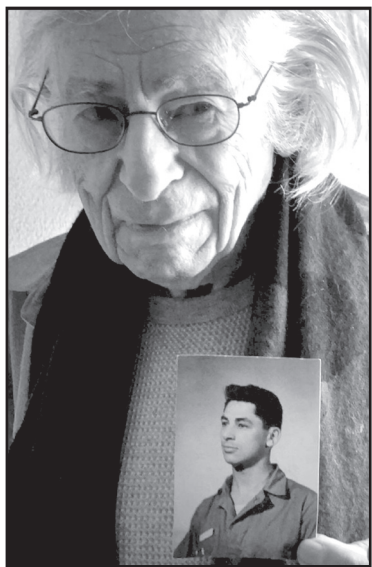
Many of these seeds were from the HMC seed saving events held last fall where community members helped harvest 66 types of native plant seeds for neighborhood use. The swap days are fun diversions, and a great way to get seeds at no cost (or the cost of postage stamps if mailing).

The next MSP Cyber Seed Crawl is the Urban Edibles Edition on Feb. 20, 2021. For this swap, the focus is on Produce, Herbs, & Medicinal seeds. Connect to the event and its pre-event to-dos here: <https://www.facebook.com/events/975245849550248>

Anyone can participate, even if you do not have seeds to share. For those not on Facebook, connect to someone who is and they can make your trades for you.

LEGENDARY

Al Milgrom remembered by those in the Twin Cities film scene



Al Milgrom holds his 1943 photo. "I was in the Air Corps boot camp at Yale University taking a course in photography," he recalled.



>> from 9

wanted photos of him and got all his information. Then he recognized a street person he knew, and he gave him a couple of dollars. Then he saw a young lady with a puppy, and he ran across the street to pet the puppy."

"The saddest thing for me to see after he died was his kitchen calendar. Al loved calendars, and he had them all over and would give them as presents. His calendar was always over-filled with events he was going to. And I looked at the month of December, and he only had two entries."

Bayliss recalled that when Milgrom was 96, they were up near Pine City and he wanted to shoot a scene for one of his films from the water to the shore. He found a paddle boat, and they went out in the boat to make the shot. "Nothing could stop him," she said.

Agreeing with others who knew him that Milgrom was always taking notes, Bayliss commented that his notetaking is complete.

"There are people who touch your soul like no other.... They've taught you so much about life that their disappearance is unfathomable.... Al was one such person."

THE MIDWAY COMO FROGTOWN MONITOR'S

Summer Camp Guide

WILL RETURN IN 2022

Tesha@LongfellowNokomisMessenger.com • Denis@LongfellowNokomisMessenger.com

In Brief

International Film Festival

MSP Film Society announces the 40th Minneapolis St. Paul International Film Festival (MSPIFF40) will take place Thursday, May 13 through Sunday, May 23, 2021. Due to the ongoing pandemic, MSPIFF40 will be a hybrid festival, with films and panels presented primarily in the virtual world, while plans are in motion for several outdoor screenings, as long as state and local COVID-19 orders allow. Details will be released in the coming months. MSPIFF40 Festival Passes are on sale now at mspfilm.org.

Mysticism in music

Sophia Pendergast, a board member of the Minneapolis Theosophical Society, will lead a discussion on esoteric influences on music in a Zoom webinar 7 p.m. Monday, Feb. 22 sponsored by local Theosophists. For more information, call the Minneapolis Theosophical Society at (612) 208-6485 or go to facebook.com/minneapolis-theosophical-society.

Classes at Mississippi Market

Mississippi Market transitioned its in-person cooking and wellness class program to a virtual platform starting in April of 2020. The co-op has served 2,860 people through its online education program since the pandemic began. This is an over 200% increase in participation. Class instructors are local and over 50% identify as BIPOC, bringing a rich variety of culinary skills and recipes to the community. Register for upcoming classes for free at msmarket.coop/event.



HOPE Community Academy and Hmong community leaders broke ground on Thursday, Jan. 21, 2021 on a 60,000-square-foot building expansion at 720 Payne Ave. HOPE is expanding from a K-8 format to include pre-K program space, high school classrooms and other amenities. Shown is the school's executive director Maychy Vu. (Photo submitted)

Career Labs continue in 2021

The Community Career Labs program will be extended through 2021, thanks to Community Development Block Grant funds. The Career Labs provide free workforce and career support to residents who have experienced job loss, a reduction of hours, a change or loss in income, or faced job insecurity. Career Labs are available by reservation at the Saint Paul Public Library Dayton's Bluff, Rice Street, Rondo Community Library and Sun Ray locations.

Umbrella exhibit at SMSP

The Smallest Museum in St. Paul is hosting an exhibit from the Umbrella Cover Museum through February 2021. The exhibit includes umbrella covers (sleeves)

from around the world, a vintage fire hose umbrella cover from Bristol, England and a banana-shaped umbrella cover, marketed as the "Um-Banana." The exhibit is viewable seven days a week, 24 hours a day, as the SMSP is viewable from the sidewalk. It is located at 2399 University Ave., just outside Workhorse Coffee Bar.

Aim to improve food access

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) has awarded a \$35,000 planning grant to Campus Compact of Iowa and Minnesota and Hamline, St. Catherine, and Augsburg Universities, to strengthen food insecurity programs and support student-led efforts to collaboratively explore next steps.

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Book explores racism, social justice and George Floyd's killing

ORIGIN OF RACISM

By JAN WILLMS

Floyd Williams describes himself as a student of life, a revolutionary on many different levels: mentally, spiritually and socially. "I am definitely a person who is about my roots, and bringing to fruition the vision of the ancestors, which I describe as liberation," he said.

With that in mind, and with the current atmosphere of concern about social justice, Williams has released a second edition of "The Origin of Racism," a book he first wrote in 2012. "The book has a new introduction and includes what is happening up here in Minnesota in 2020," he said. Williams has written four books. He is also the owner of Thought Healing, where he teaches kinetic yoga and reiki, and does aura photography.

Williams claims he is very much a reflection of his father, who was the first Black policeman in the Metropolitan Airports Commission. He served there from 1968 to 1998. "My father



Floyd Williams of St. Paul (Photo by Jan Willms)

loved history, especially Black history," said Williams. "One of the things I remember him telling me was about the power of taking notes." That note-taking has led Williams to write books.

He said his father experienced racism from the beginning of his job and filed discrimination suits a couple of times

during his career. "A sergeant on the force told him you have to send out a boogie to deal with a boogie," Williams recalled. "They would send him out to quell or calm down other Black people. He had to fight discrimination the whole time he was there."

First-hand observer of prison

When his father died in 1999 from a heart attack, Williams was just 16. He left the Merriam Park neighborhood in St. Paul where he had grown up and headed for Little Rock, Ark., to live with an aunt.

The loss of his father left Williams traumatized, and he eventually got into trouble, ending up serving a sentence of nine years in a Mississippi prison. That experience gave him an opportunity to be a first-hand observer of the racial disparities in the penal system.

Williams compares prisons to plantations, a continuation of slavery. "The prison system was created simultaneously with the Emancipation Proclamation," he said. "It was used as a convict lease system. The prisons were filled with Blacks, the same as today, in cells for minor infractions. You could be arrested back then for congregating in groups of two or three, or for eyeballing a White or European. The convict lease system did not end until 1918."

When he was serving his sentence, Williams said the prison in Mississippi was called "the farm." Prisoners would work in different parts of the town. "They'd pick you up in the morning, pull you out to a farm on a tractor bed that held about 40 people. You would be out there from sunrise to sunset." Williams said the prisoners would pick everything, from beans to corn to okra. "And it was scorching hot," he recalled. He said there were 40 deaths of prisoners in two to three months.

"Blacks are 14 percent of the general population, but almost 90 percent of the prison population," he added.

Williams also laments the education gap between White and Black students. "We still have many Black and Brown kids who can't read at a third grade level," he said.

"One thing that stands out and bothers me about Minnesota, and that should prick everyone's conscience, are the two institutions that stand side by side," Williams stated. "On Energy Parkway, you have the Minnesota Department of Education and the Minnesota Department of Corrections right next to it, and they're not on the same team."

No all-Black jury for a Black prisoner

According to Williams, systemic racism was an earmark of the Dred Scott Decision in March 1857. The enslaved Dred Scott sued for his freedom, since he had traveled with his owner to Illinois and Wisconsin Territory, where slavery was illegal. The case went all the way to the Supreme Court, which ruled against Scott, claiming that an African American was not a citizen.

"They said no Black man has any rights that a White man should consider," Williams said.

"There has been an imbalance and an indifference in the justice system ever since. There has never been an all-Black jury for a Black woman or man, but there have certainly been all-White juries for a White prisoner."

"Even today in 2021, Black people have to search for themselves, ask who they are. They have to painstakingly connect the dots about who they are," Williams continued.

George Floyd: Modern-day lynching

Reflecting on the recent killing of George Floyd, he said the tragedy unfortunately is nothing new for America. "It was definitely a modern-day lynching," Williams said. "There was no rationale for kneeling 8 minutes and 46 seconds on a person's neck, and no one helped."

He said the phrase "I can't breathe," should not exist. "It's the same mantra, the same chant, the same cry for different generations," Williams said.

Williams expressed hope that racism can be fought, and that each race has a role in dealing with it. "For Blacks, our means of dealing with racism is self-love, loving on each other, basking in the glory of who we are, operating collectively and aspiring towards liberation."

Williams said Blacks have to change the relationship, that a majority of them worked for the White man at the time of the Emancipation Proclamation and still do today. "We have to change the dynamics of the relationship or it's not going to stop."

He said the killings and injustice Blacks face globally will not change until they move like everybody else, putting race first. "Spend your money first with people who look like you," Williams said.

"But racism is not something Black people can fix," Williams continued, noting that Whites have a role to play. "Racism is not something Black people created or are perpetuating."

"Even before slavery ended, the Black man strived to co-exist with his master. There were slave revolts and insurrections, then reconstruction and the Civil Rights movement. We have not kept up the racism."

Williams said slavery was put into practice by Whites and Europeans who have been dead for centuries. "Their progeny have come into power, and we have not been able to strike a moral chord," he said. "We have been struggling to be a part of the American fabric. We've been fighting wars, coming home to be lynched."

The only way racism can end, according to Williams, is when the progeny admit that what happened under their ancestors was not right, and say "No more."



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Local non-profit trains service dogs for vets and kids

By MARGIE O'LOUGHLIN

Anyone who has ever owned a dog knows that training one is hard work. Most of us are satisfied with the basics – but Tom and Julie Coleman, co-founders of Pawsitivity Service Dogs in St. Paul, have a taller order to fill.

Since 2012, they have dedicated themselves to rescuing and training service dogs for U.S. military veterans and children with a range of physical and psychiatric disabilities.

According to Tom, about one out of every 1,000 dogs is suitable for service dog training. He said, "The list of desirable personality traits is pretty long. We prefer low-energy dogs, for starters. Most service dogs tend to be Labrador retrievers or golden retrievers. They are bred to be duck-hunting dogs. Historically, their job has been to lie down quietly in the bottom of a boat and wait. They are people-focused, patient, and big enough not to get stepped on."

Tom and Julie have graduated 27 service dog/handler teams since they formed their non-profit organization almost a decade ago. Service dogs are trained to improve the quality of life for people living with disabilities such as autism, blindness, epilepsy, PTSD or other psychiatric disorders.

Tom explained, "To be eligible to receive a service dog, a person has to have an ADA recognized disability (Americans with Disabilities Act.) The law specifies that each dog must be trained for a specific person and their disability. One of the things we specialize in is training dogs for people with multiple disabilities. This requires personalized training for the whole family."

How can a service dog help?

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can affect veterans returning home from service, and is one of the disabilities a service dog can help with. PTSD can also affect people who have experienced trauma or violence unrelated to military service. Tom said, "PTSD often involves hyper-sensitivity to sound, and unexpected sounds can trigger a series of panic reactions. While more research needs to be done, service dog intervention is increasingly being recommended by clinicians for people with PTSD."

"A service dog can provide some of these benefits: reduced depression, reduced need for medication, improved sleep quality, reduced thoughts of suicide, reduced isolation, improved social skills, and improved ability to volunteer or work."

Changing careers

A chance conversation led the Colemans down the path to becoming professional dog trainers. They trace the beginnings of their career change to a conversation with a friend whose son had autism. The little boy's quality of life started to improve when his family got him a dog. The family had dreamed of a service dog trained to anticipate the unique needs of an autistic child, but there wasn't one available.

Both Tom and Julie decided to pursue training at the national CATCH Dog Training Academy in positive reinforcement and force-free training methods. Their idea was to start a non-profit; they would rescue dogs and train them to be service dogs for children with autism. They quickly realized the need was broader than that.

An editor before she became a dog trainer, Julie does most of

PAWSITIVITY SERVICE DOGS



Executive director Tom Coleman with Winston, a service dog-in-training. (Photo by Margie O'Loughlin)

the hands-on stuff. Her personality is sometimes likened to a border collie because of her precise, organized work style. As executive director, Tom, who has a theater background, fundraises and works one-on-one with families receiving service dogs. Friends say he has the temperament of a golden retriever: people-focused and enthusiastic.

The Pawsitivity team trains 2-3 dogs each year. Tom said, "There are millions of people in the U.S. who qualify as having a disability. We might be the smallest training organization in the state of Minnesota. Can Do Canines is the largest, and they train maybe 10 times as many dogs

each year. The need for trained service dogs is tremendous, but the supply is very limited."

He continued, "We are not currently taking applications for service dogs. In fact, we have found that wait lists don't work. When we have a dog ready to be placed in the community, we post that on our website and social media channels. Every time, we get a flood of applications. We use a 10-point list of questions to evaluate who is the best choice to receive a particular dog. Once the dog is placed with an individual or family, that's when the person-specific training begins."

Outreach to those underserved

Pawsitivity's newest program funds a Black U.S. military veteran who trains service dogs for other Black U.S. military veterans. Tom said, "The service dog training community is not diverse at all. People of Color are very under-represented in both training and receiving service dogs. As far as I can tell, ours is the first service dog organization focused on increasing diversity. We are committed to helping train service dogs for Black U.S. military veterans."

The power of community

According to Tom, "The key to our success has been leveraging the power of community. The Grand Avenue Veterinary Center has donated spaying and neutering services for years. We receive pro-bono legal consultation, and help with fundraising from organizations like the Minnesota Wild."

"People who have pets understand the value of those relationships – how having a pet can be life changing, even in the absence of a disability. Imagine what it would be like to be a child with autism. Having a service dog could open doors to making a friend and being a friend. If it's true that it takes a village to raise a child, it can also be said that it takes a village to raise a service dog. And that service dog has the potential to change people's lives for the better."

Pawsitivity is a full member of Animal Assisted Intervention International (AAII), and is committed to positive reinforcement training methods.

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