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Magazine

January/February 2024

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Commentary
2024 ushers in “interesting” times – will it also bring a curse?

By Paul Rozycki

As the 2024 election year begins it reminds one of the ancient curse, often attributed to the Chinese, which says “May you live in interesting times,” suggesting that those interesting times will arise from much conflict and turmoil. There is little doubt that 2024 will be an “interesting” one politically. Whether it is a curse or not remains to be seen, but the threat will be there on the national, state, and local levels.

On the national level we are looking at a rematch of the 2020 election, with both candidates having high negative ratings and several third parties at the margin that could throw the election in unpredictable ways.

On the state level, it’s likely that a number of state legislative districts in southeast Michigan will be re-drawn, and several special elections will hold the Democratic State House majority in limbo until they are completed.

On the local level, for the first time in almost 50 years, there won’t be a Kildee running for Congress, in what may become a competitive district. The Flint City Council will be trying to get a quorum in order to set a special election for the 7th Ward, as members attempt to recall each other, and

both the Flint Community School and Mott Community College boards will hold elections in the midst of division and controversy.

On the national level

Pundits are searching for new adjectives to describe the upcoming 2024 presidential election. ‘Historic’ and ‘unprecedented’ are among the most common, but both seem inadequate as an 81-year-old incumbent president seems likely to face a 77-year-old ex-president who has 91 criminal charges hanging over him as the campaign begins, and who threatens to be a dictator “only on day one.”



President Joe Biden outside of Berston Field House in Flint during a 2020 campaign stop
(Photo by Paul Rozycki)

On most issues and based on his record over the last three years, President Joe Biden should be in a much better position than he is right now. The economy is improving, unemployment is low, inflation is falling, the stock market is near record highs, and the pandemic is receding. Yet most polls show that even within the Democratic Party a significant number hope for another candidate.

Even though he defeated Donald Trump by seven million votes last time, several polls show him behind as we begin 2024. This may be due to his age, a general anti-incumbent attitude in the nation, as well as division

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Photo of the Month: Frosty window (Photo by Edwin D. Custer)

Education Beat Analysis

Flint Schools Start 2024 with new board President, two new rules for students, remodeled website

By Harold C. Ford

Flint Community Schools (FCS) moved into 2024 with a new Flint Board of Education (FBOE) president,



Joyce Ellis-McNeal
(Photo Source: FCS website)

two new rules for students that ban possession of cellphones and hoodies, and a newly-remodeled website.

President, vice president switch chairs

Joyce Ellis-McNeal was chosen the FBOE’s new president at the board’s annual organizational meeting Jan. 10. McNeal had served as the FBOE’s vice president during 2023.

Two board members were nominated for the FBOE’s top spot: McNeal was nominated by Claudia Perkins; Terae King was nominated by Michael Clack.

Voting for McNeal on the seven-person panel were: McNeal; Perkins; Dylan Luna; and Laura MacIntyre. Votes for King came from: King; Clack; and Melody Relerford.

Two board members were nominated for vice president: Clack was nominated by MacIntyre; King was nominated by Relerford.

Clack received votes from:

Clack; Luna; MacIntyre; Perkins; and McNeal. Votes for King came from: King; and Relerford.



Terae King
(Photo Source: FCS website)

Thus, Clack and McNeal switch chairs on the panel as

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Clack had served as FBOE president in 2023.

Claudia Perkins was the only nominee for the secretary position that she held in 2023. All seven FBOE members voted for Perkins who was nominated by Luna. Luna was the only nominee for the treasurer position that he held in 2023; he was nominated by MacIntyre. All seven FBOE members voted for Luna.

Finally, MacIntyre – nominated by Luna – was returned to her assistant secretary/treasurer position by a 7-0 vote.

FCS bans hoodies and student use of cell phones

Earlier at its Dec. 13, 2023 meeting, the FBOE adopted two significant changes to the FCS Student Code of Conduct. The



Ernest Steward, FCS director of student services
(Photo source: Flashintel)

changes – imposing a ban on student use of cellphones and the wearing of hoodies starting in calendar year 2024 – were both adopted by a unanimous 7-0 vote of board members.

Public statements at the Dec. 13 meeting indicated that the

bans received virtually unanimous support from the leaders of most constituent groups within the FCS community: central administration; Congress of School Administrators (building-level administration); the United Teachers of Flint; and Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 517. Even the student council at Southwestern Academy backed the measure.



Michael Clack
(Photo Source: FCS website)

A sampling of comments:

- Ernest Steward, FCS director of student services: “Both of these requests are for the safety of our children ... They [cell phones and hoodies] are causing so many problems ... It’s constant, every day ... It’s a fight you continue to have with students ... [It] takes up manpower and time ... It also becomes [instances of] insubordination every single time and now we’re suspending students for hoodies, constantly ... This [changes in the student code] is the result of them [some students] not being responsible.”

- Anupa Shantaram, school improvement coordinator: Shantaram spoke of a “typical day of how these students are misusing their cellphones ... The minute they get past that [metal detectors

at school entrances] the earbuds go back in, the phones go back on, and they’re constantly distracted by their cellphone. I cannot tell you how many calls I get from teachers who are saying that the kids are on their phones.” Shantaram spoke of “premeditated conversations that encourage fights.”

- Kevelin Jones, superintendent: “There was fights ... a three-hour lockdown because of cellphone conversations ... [Cellphones] is a big part of bullying ... a big part of why scholars are not on task in class.” Additionally, Jones reminded FBOE members that FCS provides coats and other winter garments for students that substitute hoodies for winter coats. He advised that, “Students are using their hoodie as a measure to not get caught in their behaviors ... It’s causing us not to be able to identify students ... It was happening too often that kids were going to other bus stops with their hoods on and



Dylan Luna
(Photo Source: FCS website)

assaulting kids.”

- McNeal, a former educator: “They [cell phones and hoodies] are such a distraction ... when you have 20-something, 30-something kids in a classroom.

- Clack, also a former

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educator: “When you go into Southwestern and you see a wave of kids with hoodies on, it makes you start to think, ‘Is this a professional learning environment?’”



Laura MacIntyre

(Photo Source: FCS website)

• Luna, another former educator: “Cellphones in classrooms tend to be a distraction ... The teacher oftentimes is constantly addressing this issue and it takes away from classroom management and student learning ... Some kids will begin this bullying behavior in the classroom.”

Strong voices of dissent and support

Following a soliloquy of nonsupport for the bans by MacIntyre, Relerford rallied some wavering board members to support for the administration’s proposals. Following her comments, the FBOE voted unanimously in support of the measures. Snippets of their comments:

• MacIntyre: “I understand putting your phones away during the school day ... [but] I’m a little dismayed; I didn’t think it [the ban] was so draconian. I don’t like

treating our students this way ... This is school-to-prison pipeline stuff ... That’s a horrible look ... We’re doing our students a disservice.”

• Relerford: “You all [FCS educators] are in the buildings ... I will not dare stand in the way and say ‘no’, because, God forbid, something happened and we didn’t do anything, because it sounds like kids communicate trouble in the building. We do know there’s a gang issue and that’s their way of communicating ... It’s not a



Melody Relerford

(Photo Source: FCS website)

matter of if it’s going to happen, it’s a matter of when ... It sounds like this administration took their time and communicated with everyone they needed to speak to and now we want to nitpick it and pick it apart.”

(Evidence for support of cell phone bans can be found online -- for examples see links in the online version of this story.)

Revamped FCS website

The FCS website has been dramatically upgraded with new, up-to-date information, enhanced graphics, and more color.

An October 2021 review

of the website by *East Village Magazine* revealed “sparse and inaccurate information” and other woefully outdated details. Individual webpages of “FCS buildings were in similar stages of development, or lack thereof.”

Management of the website by Lambert, a pricey, out-of-town public relations firm was frequently the target of searing criticism by then-FBOE Treasurer MacIntyre. According to MacIntyre, the monthly charges assessed the school district totaled nearly \$10,000 each month.

Interested persons can visit the enhanced FCS website and explore the improvements for themselves. (Most of the graphics included in this report were taken from the FCS website.)

* * * * *

FBOE meetings in the first half of 2024: Jan. 10 (annual organization meeting), 17; Feb. 14, 21; March 13, 20; April 10, 17; May 8, 15; June 12, 19 (annual budget hearing). All meetings start at 6:30 p.m. at Accelerated Learning Academy, 1602 S. Averill Ave., Flint, MI 48503. Meetings can be accessed online at YouTube; visit the FCS website for information.

EVM *Education Beat* reporter Harold C. Ford can be reached at hcford1185@gmail.com.



“Focused on ensuring Flint kids thrive” Ja’Nel Jamerson, Executive Director of the Flint Center for Educational Excellence

By Canisha Bell

Flint kids are about to get a boost in educational opportunities and experiences through the Flint Center for Educational Excellence (FCEE).

“The Flint Center is the only organization in this community that is purpose built and unapologetically focused on ensuring that Flint kids thrive.” Ja’Nel Jamerson, Executive Director of the Flint Center for Educational Excellence (FCEE) said in his remarks at the opening of FCEE located on the first floor of the Rowe building on Saginaw Street downtown.

The Flint Center leads and coordinates six cooperative efforts:

- a community education initiative,
- afterschool programming,
- the Flint Early Childhood Collaborative,
- a parent collaborative,
- a community council on education, and
- a Network for School Excellence.

These programs and initiatives are designed to work together to improve academic outcomes and well-being for Flint kids. They are closely aligned to better serve students, parents, caregivers, and families, explained Ridgway White, president and CEO of the C.S. Mott Foundation.

According to the Foundation, the Network for School Excellence is working to disrupt the links between poverty, race, and educational opportunities that systematically disadvantage children of color from low-income families by partnering with public school leaders to ensure

Flint kids thrive regardless of where they attend school.

The network aims to develop and test strategies to improve outcomes for students and build supportive schools for all families, such as ensuring that families have after



Ja’Nel Jamerson, executive director of the Flint Center for Educational Excellence (FCEE)

(Photo by Tom Travis)

school care, lowering class sizes, or developing a pipeline for teacher recruitment.

Network schools will serve as demonstration sites of how different types of schools can best serve Flint children and families and lessons learned from network schools will be shared with other schools and districts in the area- this dissemination of information about what works will be a key part of this pillar.

The C.S. Mott Foundation will support the Network for five years,

with the expectation that the investment will lead to more open, transparent communication about success and significantly improve Flint student outcomes. The center seeks to transform Flint- area schools into community hubs through a strategy that leverages Mott’s previous Flint-area education grants by consolidating community education and afterschool programs under one integrated strategy.

The Flint Center for Educational Excellence is building an educational ecosystem that works for all Flint kids by providing programs, research, and advocacy that ensure Flint kids, their families, schools and communities thrive, according to Jamerson.

“We need more, these kids deserve more... at the end of the day Flint kids deserve the best and at the Mott Foundation we’re not going to rest until every child born in Flint has an equal opportunity at success of a child born in more affluence...” White said in his remarks at the opening

of FCEE.

FCEE welcomed community partners and stakeholders to an open house on Wednesday, Oct. 18 to celebrate the formal opening of the Flint Center’s office and provide an opportunity to learn about their mission to build an educational ecosystem that works for all Flint Kids. The FCEE works with integrated efforts for thriving communities, thriving schools and thriving families.

“Flint has a rich history of

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Rozycki commentary ...

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within the Democratic Party over the Israel-Hamas war. On the plus side for Democrats, the public reaction

many season and move to the national conventions this summer, Trump will also be on track for a series of court appearances that could result in criminal convictions and prison time as he faces 91 criminal charges on both the state



Trump merchandise at a Vice President Mike Pence 2020 campaign stop at Bishop Airport in Flint

(Photo by Tom Travis)

against Trump and his turmoil might be enough to turn the polls around come November.

At this writing, in early January, Donald Trump appears to be the all but certain nominee of the Republican Party. Most polls give him a 50% margin over his nearest competitors Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, who seem to be competing for second place. Yet, while Trump has a vice-grip on his core supporters within the party, he remains unpopular with independents and more than a few traditional Republicans. The feeling is that his cult-like support may serve him well to win the nomination but will hurt him in November. From Trump's recent statements, the implications of a second Trump term are more worrisome and ominous than his first term, as he promises to seek revenge against his opponents, and be a dictator on "day one", but that is a topic for another column.

Trump and the courts

As we go through the spring pri-

mary season and move to the national conventions this summer, Trump will also be on track for a series of court appearances that could result in criminal convictions and prison time as he faces 91 criminal charges on both the state

and national levels. We may see competing newscasts of primary results and court rulings during the spring and summer.



U.S. Representative Dan Kildee at the Flint Farmer's Market in 2022

(Photo by Tom Travis)

the 14th Amendment that prohibits those engaged in insurrection from holding federal office. So far two states, Colorado and Maine, have barred him from the ballot, while Michigan and a number of others have kept his name on.

Third parties role

To make things even more unpredictable and unprecedented, there are a number of third parties which may run candidates for president. Though the No Labels Party, the Green Party, or the Libertarians are unlikely to win, they could draw just enough votes away from the major candidates to influence the outcome, especially in some key states. Third parties often do better when there is dissatisfaction with the major party candidates.

On the state level

For the first time in 40 years Democrats have a majority in the Michigan State House and the State Senate. However, recently two Democratic members of the State House were elected to local office in suburban Detroit, resulting in a 54-54 deadlock until special elections are held in the spring. Democrats have a good chance of winning those special elections, but nothing is certain.

This year the state will also be required to redraw election districts for as many as 13 state legislative districts in time for the 2024 election. Courts have ruled that a number of election districts in the Detroit area were drawn in violation of the Voting Right Act and needed to be redone. How that will be done and how quickly that will be done remains an open question. In any case it may have a major impact on the state legislature.

At the moment the Michigan Republican Party is deeply divided and in turmoil over the attempted ouster of party chair Kristina Karamo. Whether she is finally removed, who replaces her, and whether the divisions can be healed are all matters remaining to be seen.

Senator Debbie Stabenow announced that she is not running for reelection this year. Among the Democrats running to replace her are Elissa Slotkin, who is considered the frontrun-

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Rozycki commentary ...

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ner. Also running for the Democratic nomination are actor Hill Harper, state Rep. Leslie Love of Detroit; Dearborn businessman Nasser Beydoun and Ann Arbor lawyer Zack Burns.

Former U.S. Rep. Mike Rogers is the leading Republican contender to run for Stabenow’s seat and is expected to win the nomination over a half-dozen other Republican hopefuls.

After the November election, we will likely see those who wish to succeed term-limited Gov. Whitmer in 2026 begin their campaigns.

On the local level

While it’s not a local government office, those of us in the 8th



Councilpersons Tonya Burns (left) and Eva Worthing (right)

(Photo by Tom Travis)

Congressional District, which includes Flint, Bay City, Saginaw, and Midland will have a new representative next year. Current Congressman Dan Kildee announced that he is not running for reelection and, for the first time since 1976, the Kildee name will not be on the ballot for the U.S. House in this area.

So far three Democrats and two Republicans have announced they are running for the seat. Democrats Kristen McDonald Rivet, a Bay City State Senator; Pamela Pugh, State Board of Education president; and Dan Moilanen, director of the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts are seeking the Democratic nomina-

tion. Flint Mayor Sheldon Neeley has said he is exploring the possibility of running.

Seeking the Republican nomination are Martin Blank, a Saginaw area surgeon, and Paul Junge, who lost to Kildee in 2022 by 10 points.

What is surprising is the number of likely candidates who said they would not run for Kildee’s seat. Those stepping aside included Genesee County Sheriff Chris Swanson, State Senator John Cherry, and former Mayor Karen Weaver. While the district has voted Democratic with the Kildee name on the ticket, it is listed as a toss-up by many polling organizations and could be quite competitive this year.

Flint City Council

Beyond the race for Congress, the Flint City Council continues to produce conflict and chaos as several members face potential recalls in the year to come. In the 7th Ward, Allie Herkenroder recently resigned and was replaced by Candice Mushatt, who was appointed. Mushatt is expected to face a special election to finish her term, but the council has yet to produce a quorum to schedule the needed election. It might be held in August rather than in May. Eva Worthing, 9th Ward, said she would remove her name from an attempted recall ballot in May, and leave the council. Also facing potential recalls are Eric Mays, (1st Ward), Ladel Lewis, (2nd Ward), and Jerri Winfrey-Carter, (5th Ward). There are also lawsuits over Eric Mays’ three-month suspension.

In addition this year will see election for some members of both the Flint Board of Education and the Mott College Board of Trustees. Both have seen conflict in recent months

and the elections will likely be more contentious than usual.

And that’s just the short list. There may be more surprises along the way.

There is no doubt it will be a year of “interesting times”. Let’s hope it won’t be a curse as well.

EVM Political Commentator Paul Rozycki can be reached at paul.rozycki@mcc.edu. Rozycki also is president of the EVM board.

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Flint kids ...

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leading community education as a response to the needs and desires of the community to provide integrated supports for our Flint kids,” according to Kerry Downs, director of Community Education and Out-of-School Time learning for the FCEE.

“At the Flint Center for Educational Excellence, we center our work on Flint kids thriving by partnering with 16 Flint area schools and two early childhood centers to provide integrated supports for youth, families and the community,” Downs said. “At each school, a Community School Director and a team of dedicated youth specialists are working collaboratively with school staff, families, and community partners to ensure that each school is a place where Flint kids want to be.”

The Community Education Initiative fosters collaboration among

students, families, educators, residents and organizations to provide comprehensive academic, social and health services tailored to unique needs and interests, according to Jordan



Ridgway White, President and CEO of Mott Foundation

(Photo by Tom Travis)

Munerlyn, Community School Director at Freeman Elementary. After-school programming ensures children are safe, enriched, and engaged during out-of-school time by providing experiences and activities that enable students to develop their talents, form

positive relationships with peers and adults, and connect with their communities.

“Our work is truly important in helping Flint kids survive and thrive... we have to recultivate that community of ‘the village’, right, so creating the shape of that ecosystem is so important today.” Munerlyn said.

“I think about a kid that we’ve served through Community Education... a teacher reached out stating a student was being disruptive during classes and saying that he couldn’t see. I had just assisted another student to get some glasses through our partnership with GHP, so the teacher reached out and thought this other student may need glasses as well.

“We took on the case and we looked into it deeply. And unfortunately the father did not have transportation to get to the eyeglass appointment, so my community health service worker picked the father and student up to get them to those appointments.

And we found out it wasn’t just an eyeglass problem. The student had cataracts. He was in the first grade, so through the leverage and power of Community Education, not only were we able to service that family and get them to every appointment we were also able to cover the surgery that that student needed.


“That’s the power, the true power of Community Education, ensuring that all families, schools, and communities thrive,” Munerlyn said.

The Flint Early Childhood Collaborative works to ensure the highest quality standards apply to the Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations Early Childhood Center, and is exploring ways to enhance quality and increase access to early childhood programs for all Flint children. Decades of research and prac-

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NARRATED BY RICHARD DORMER

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Flint kids ...

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tice in early childhood development affirm the experiences children have in their first five years of life shape their brains and bodies in lasting ways. Even as it has come to our understanding more of what children need to thrive, several factors—economic, social, and demographic—make it difficult for low-income parents to give it to them. This opportunity gap, if unaddressed, becomes an achievement gap. The Flint Early Childhood Collaborative has committed to partnering with families, schools, funders, and community-based organizations to ensure that income does not determine Flint kids' destinies.

The Flint Parent Collaborative plays an instrumental role in amplifying the voices of parents, caregivers and other caring adults in the lives of Flint kids to raise awareness about the issues and opportunities that impact the educational success of Flint kids, according to Ta'Nesa Betts, Implementation Manager for Family partnerships at the FCEE.

Developed and led by Flint families, the Flint Parent Collaborative advocates for improvements in services and policies that make the best possible educational opportunities available to Flint kids.

"The focus and the point of the parent collaborative is to make sure that we are hearing the voices of the families, or the caretakers, or the adult taking care of the children whether that's foster care, adoption, older sibling, step parent," Betts said.

"We want to make sure that you have a voice in what the needs are for your family so that you can successfully support your child and that you are successfully being supported as a parent or caretaker of children."

The Community Council on

Education aims to cultivate local champions in co-constructing strategies that improve access and outcomes for Flint kids by shifting and sharing power with the community in a way



Mark Miller, vice chair for the Board of Trustees and interim president and CEO of the Community Foundation of Greater Flint

(Photo by Tom Travis)

that transcends the current dynamics of Flint's education ecosystem..

The Community Council on Education fulfills a vital role in ensuring Flint kids thrive by amplifying the needs, perspectives, and current realities of Flint kids and creating opportunities that position Flint kids to thrive in any path they choose. The overarching aim of the Community Council is to improve access and outcomes for Flint kids by shifting and

sharing power with the community in a way that accounts for and transcends the current dynamics in Flint's educational ecosystem.

"I am extremely elated to be in collaboration with building such an essential organization for our community, I gladly reaffirm our deep commitment to the well-being and prosperity of our community which starts with investing in our future and our future will always begin with our kids." according to Mark Miller, vice chair for the Board of Trustees and Interim President and CEO of the Community Foundation of Greater Flint.

The Community Foundation is the fiscal sponsor for the FCEE and leads its pilot phase of work until it becomes an independent nonprofit organization.

"The Community Foundation role here is a clear testament to our dedication to improve educational opportunities and outcomes, very specifically, for Flint kids," Miller said. "We at CFGF have leaned in and we're here to help get the work done."

Learn more at www.theFlint-Center.org.

EVM Reporter Canisha Bell can be reached at canishajbell@gmail.com.

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East Village is a nonprofit publication, one of the oldest in the country, composed of local volunteers including distributors, editors and writers who see value

in helping their neighbors and doing their part to make sure that crucial element of democracy, a **FREE PRESS**, is alive and well here.

As we near our half-century birthday, we are looking to assure a vibrant future for the magazine. We need new energy.

We need more help.

There are roles available for ad salespeople, social media managers, editors, reporters, and more. While primarily a volunteer commitment, grant funding and donations make it possible to provide stipends to some of our staff.

This work could help fill out your portfolio with valuable real-world experience – experience that plays a

critical role in keeping our democracy vibrant and trustworthy.

The same goes for our support functions: selling ads, soliciting donations, and writing grants are a valued trust for us – crucially keeping us going in our day to day devotion to providing excellent local journalism. If you have any of these skills, if you are curious, and maybe need a new adventure, check us out. The cost of all this is your time and dedication.

We also can use donations, the purest form of support. Please consider a contribution to *EVM* via PayPal via our website, eastvilagemagazine.org, or send a check to Village Information Center, 720 E. Second St., Flint MI 48503.

We want you and your help! If you are interested, contact *EVM* board chair Paul Rozycki, paul.rozycki@mcc.edu or *EVM* consulting editor Jan Worth-Nelson, janworth1118@gmail.com.

“What the hell is going on here?”

We live in some very interesting and volatile times, and staying informed has become a vital interest. One of *East Village Magazine's* major journalistic goals is to shed some light on things and now the light must shine on us.

We need new editors, reporters, ad sellers, grant writers, and back patters. Although none of these positions come with a salary, *EVM* has funds available for stipends and story payments.

If you are looking for something to broaden your life and your contact with others, and have some talent to offer, let's talk!

Contact us at:

Paul Rozycki, paul.rozycki@mcc.edu
or Jan Worth-Nelson, janworth1118@gmail.com.

Bring a little bit of adventure to your life.
Sharpen old skills and learn new ones.
Help to save democracy and preserve a free press!

Get involved!

“Building the Dream”: Mayor Neeley partners with Financial Plus to help Flint kids access bank accounts

By EVM Staff from recent press release

Flint Mayor Sheldon Neeley is launching a new partnership with Financial Plus Credit Union to expand a youth financial literacy program for Flint kids.

The “Building the Dream” program began with Mayor Neeley challenging Flint schoolchildren to fill up piggy banks, with the promise to help them open a bank account and will contribute \$5 to their accounts.

Financial Plus Credit Union is building on that promise by offering a \$10 deposit for every new Kids Club membership, with an additional \$5 for students who bring in their full piggy bank.

Mayor Neeley said he hopes the program will help children develop early habits of saving money and build financial literacy, with a larger goal in mind of helping close the racial wealth gap in Flint.

“Having a shortage of financial institutions in our community leads to many unbanked households in Flint, and this is a systemic issue that contributes to the racial wealth gap,” Neeley said.

“Through this partnership, we are directly connecting Flint kids to a financial institution,” Neeley added. “We want to make sure that every family in Flint has an opportunity to build generational wealth.

“When we start by giving our young people basic financial literacy tools, this knowledge can spread through a family and create a foundation for growth. If we can get kids involved with a banking institution, asking their parents to take them to deposit any change they are able to collect, that’s a powerful influence for families,” he said.

“At Financial Plus, we’re committed to helping our members reach their financial goals, a big part of which is providing financial liter-

acy at every stage of life,” said Brad Bergmooser, President and CEO of Financial Plus.

“We’re incredibly proud to partner with Mayor Neeley on the Building the Dream program because we share in the belief that it is an opportunity to empower children here in Flint. By teaching the importance of saving, children get hands-on experience managing their money and learn essential skills that help develop good financial habits for their future.”



To open a Financial Plus Kids Club Account, families will need to provide the following forms of ID:

- Child Social Security Number
- Parent/Guardian Michigan ID/Driver’s License with Current Address
- Parent/Guardian Social Security Number

Neeley has visited three schools in Flint so far, delivering lessons along with piggy banks and activity books about financial literacy. He has encouraged classrooms of children to work together to fill up every classmate’s piggy bank.

Piggy banks and financial literacy activity books are available for children to pick up at Flint City

Hall, 1011 S. Saginaw St. in downtown Flint, open Monday-Friday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

Families will also be able to pick up piggy banks and activity books at the new City of Flint Service Center at 4805 Clio Rd. Flint, MI 48504. Beginning Jan. 17, the location will be open Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m. and Saturday, 10 a.m.-2 p.m., offering bill pay, public health, and police resources.

According to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC)’s 2021 National Survey of Unbanked and Underbanked Households, unbanked rates are higher among lower-income households and Black and Hispanic households.

The FDIC also consistently finds that unbanked rates between Black and White households and between Hispanic and White households are present at every income level.

In 2021, among households with income between \$30,000 and \$50,000, 8% of Black households and 8.4% of Hispanic households were unbanked, compared with 1.7% of White households nationwide.

About Financial Plus Credit Union

Formed in 1952 as Chevy-Flint Federal Credit Union serving the employees of Chevrolet Motor Company in Flint, Financial Plus today is owned by more than 81,000 members. With more than \$1.3 billion in assets, the credit union provides banking products and services throughout the state of Michigan. For more information, visit myfpcu.com or call (800) 748-0451.

EVM staff can be reached at eastvillagemagazineflint@gmail.com.

THIS MONTH IN THE VILLAGE

A selection of events available to our readers is highlighted — beginning after our publication date of Jan. 15. It's a sampling of opportunities in the city. To submit events for our March issue, email info about your event to pisenber@gmail.com by Feb. 26.

UM-Flint Hockey

Jan. 27, 8:00 - 10:30 pm, UM-Flint vs. University of Michigan Ann Arbor
Tickets at the door (cash only) General Admission \$7, UM-Flint Faculty & Seniors \$5, UM-Flint Students \$3
Crystal Fieldhouse Ice Arena
5371 Daly Farms Dr., Burton
Phone 810-744-0800

Flint Institute of Arts

Jan. 21 through April. 14 the FIA will have on exhibit "Revolutionary Times," a collection of works by Detroit-native, Mario Moore showing the black experience at that time. In the Hodge and Henry Galleries.
Feb. 1, 6 pm
"The League," a film about Negro League baseball in the early 20th century with rare footage and interviews.
Flint Institute of Arts
1120 E. Kearsley St., Flint
For more info visit flintarts.org or call 810-234-1695.

Full Moon Hike

Jan. 26, 5:30 pm to 7 pm
Join a For-Mar staff for a full moon hike and see firsthand how beautiful and peaceful the park is after dark. A limited number of snowshoes will be available for the hike. For all ages.
Cost; \$5 per person
For-Mar Nature Preserve & Arboretum
2142 N. Genesee Rd., Burton
For more info visit geneseecountyparks.org or call 810-736-7100.

Capitol Theatre

Jan 26, 7 pm, "O Brother, Where Art Thou?"
Feb. 3, 8 pm, Music from The Fabulous Thunderbirds
Feb. 15, 8 pm, Singer-songwriter Jay Allen
Feb. 16, 7 pm, "The Princess Bride"
Capitol Theatre
140 E. Second St., Flint
For more info visit thefim.org/event/ or call 810-237-7333.

Totem Books

Dan Devins and the Blues Delegation
Sunday, Jan. 28, 2 - 4 pm
Blues and Jazz from Bob Conner, Stuart Tucker, Nick Tabarian, Mark Loduca, Dave Huber and Dan Devins on vocals.
Totem Books
620 W. Court St., Flint
For more info visit totembooksflint.com or call 810-407-6402

Music in the Heart of the City

Sun. Jan. 28, 4 pm
"Broadway Backwards" is a performance by tenor, Michael Idalski. This concert features songs normally sung by a female and some favorite Broadway tunes.
St. Pauls Episcopal Church
711 S. Saginaw St., Flint
For more info call 810-234-8637.

"Into the Side of a Hill"

Feb. 2 through 18, 8 - 10 pm
This play was developed in Flint Rep's New Works Festival and takes place at a black university in 2004. Fraternity brothers while rehearsing for a step show experience emotional challenges testing their brotherhood.
Tickets: \$10 - \$27
Flint Repertory Theatre (The Rep) Elgood Theatre
1220 E. Kearsley St., Flint
For more info visit ticketsthefim.org/side-of-a-hill or call 810-237-7333.

Flint Handmade Annual Valentine's Craft Market

Feb. 3, 10 am to 4 pm
20+ local artisans with handmade goods that make great gifts for loved ones.
Free Event
Flint Farmers' Market
300 E. First St., Flint
For more info visit facebook.com/events/909679517468854.

"Get Cozy" Used Book Sale

Feb. 17, noon to 4 pm
Gloria Coles Flint Public Library
Sponsored by
Friends of the Flint Public Library
1026 E. Kearsley, Flint
For more info visit fpl.info or call 810-232-7111.



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

Village Life ...

(Continued from Page 16)

some formal piano lessons at the Flint Institute of Music. It was just the challenge I needed. My playing improved and I learned some new Bach and Chopin pieces.

I tried an app this year to help people reduce their alcohol consumption. There's apps for all our habits. Weight Watchers has an app, smoking reduction has an app, alcohol and more. People famously cheat on these apps by lying. For instance on Weight Watchers you can enter that you ate one cup of broccoli and not enter that you ate five Reese's Peanut Butter cups.

I tried not to lie on the alcohol reduction app that I used. I really wanted to reduce and even incorporate dry days. It was helpful to me to chart my honest consumption and set goals for reduction. It was especially helpful to honestly reply, most of the time, on the app when I went over my goal of drinking and report how I felt. Maybe the guilt or disappointment was what inspired me to begin evaluating my consumption.

A lot of our own personal improvement comes from little decisions that we make in our minds every day. Maybe it's not the big decisions but all the little ones we make each day...slow down and don't speed, eat one muffin instead of two, bite your tongue instead of cuss out someone. Getting out of debt, drinking less, eating less fast food can reform a life as can improving your family's recycling habits, attending a local protest for a social justice issue, writing a letter to your senator or representative for changes in policy.

Here's a cliché inspirational phrase we all see on Facebook from time to time: "Every day with the sunrise brings a sense of renewal." But in reality, the harsh truth is some things don't change with a new sunrise or a flipping of the calendar page. From presidents, city governments,

family matters, unruly neighbors we just never know what's coming down the pike.

Some things are here to stay; things we just have to live with and learn to process as a new reality and that too can forever change us. Those things can change us as much as a new resolution to eat healthier or to curb our spending habits. The pain and hurt of life changes us as much as the hopeful renewal of a new habit.

As Michael Jackson sang, any

change begins with me and with you. We feel impossibly inadequate to alter national leadership even with our one, measly, powerful vote. Cities and neighbors and aunts and cousins and brothers may be unhinged. But for 2024 I'm asking, "What can I do? I want the world to be a better place so I'll look at myself and make that change."

EVM Editor Tom Travis can be reached at tomntravis@gmail.com.

Donate to *East Village Magazine*

A nonprofit organization, *EVM* operates on a very tight budget, allowing for only minimal stipends for our staff. Please help us keep these dedicated citizen journalists and local journalism Live in Flint.

**PLEASE DONATE \$50 OR MORE NOW
and receive a free autographed copy of:**

**That's My Moon Over Court Street
Dispatches from a life in Flint
by Jan Worth-Nelson**

**To give, go to eastvillagemagazine.org
and click on "Donate"**



"Jan Worth-Nelson chronicles the ordinary, and sometimes extraordinary, experience of life unfolding in Flint with breathtaking beauty. This exquisite collection is brimming with grace and humor, turbulence and curiosity, insight and spirit. I just loved it." — Anna Clark, Author "The Poisoned City: Flint's Water and the American Urban Tragedy"

"Worth-Nelson is a gifted storyteller—the author's columns reflect the best that local journalism has to offer in her coverage of local events, people, and community. A timely homage to local journalism and a fitting tribute to the resiliency of a beleaguered Midwestern city." — Kirkus Reviews

"A powerful, intimate, deeply insightful and darkly humorous documentation of recent history with the good heart left beating true. In large doses or small, sweet medicine for the reader." Thomas Lynch, author of Depositions, Bone Rosary and many others.

Village Life

Take a look at yourself, make a change

By Tom Travis

With every flipping of the calendar page to January First, my music jam is these words from Michael Jackson, “I’m starting with the man in the mirror. I’m asking him to change his ways....If you wanna make the world a better place; take a look at yourself and then make a change.”

A lot of things around us never seem to change. Important things, things that need to change. Political campaigns don’t get better but keep getting worse and more volatile. Our local city council has a beautifully renovated council meeting room but the behaviors and conduct of the council seems almost decimated of civility.

Then we have our own personal lives in the ebb and flow of everyday life, some days up and others really far, far down. Here we go, 2024 is here and revving it up to deliver another roller coaster ride. Are you ready? I am, I think...

The beginning of a new year brings a sense of a “clean slate” from the previous 12 months. The clamoring barrage of holiday activities roll on and on, beginning with Halloween until the dropping of the ball on Dec. 31. All aim to make us feel ‘merry’ and ‘joyful’ for a moment.

The “merry” and “joyful” fade into blue haze of depression for many of us in January.

In moments of reflection during the holidays many will think about the way they may want to live differently in the coming year. We’ll be asked, an annoying number of times, “What’s your new year’s resolution?”

For me, I make resolutions for change all year long, every month, sometimes every week. I’m inspired by the idea to renew and remake myself. I live with an awareness of my own

brokenness and believe that change is possible.

I’m initially turned off by the notion of making new year’s resolutions because I don’t like to be told what to do and they seem cliched. Yet, I’m inspired to make some resolutions of new goals. My resolutions and new goals are not only made the first week of January but in February, around my birthday in April, when summer is arriving, and when the fall colors begin to appear.



One new year’s resolution that I’ve already seen some friends adhering to is a reduction or complete fast of social media activity. I get it, social media can be fuel for anxiety and depression to say the least. We all know the trick of social media algorithms by now. If you ask Alexa, Siri or Google how you can lose weight, drink less alcohol, have a better attitude, fall in love, save more money, you’ll start to get emails, text messages, phone calls and social media ads bombarding your life for the very things you Google search. If you want to know what people Google search for just look at their Facebook page with them and you’ll see ads for those things they search for in private.

For me, 2024 is panning out to be a very different year. My new year

already has a new job for me, a new trajectory in my ongoing career, a departure from an occupation I’ve spent some years learning, a new group of friends, the loss of some other friends. That’s just the first few weeks of January 2024....there’s 50 more weeks yet to come. Who knows what’s to come?

Since 1995 I’ve worked in the non-profit world in various capacities. I’ve spent most of my career either self-employed or as a contract employee. That will continue, in part, but I’ve begun a new job working in the bowels of capitalism, the corporate for-profit world of retail. I worked retail all through my college days.

But now, 25 years later, I’m headed back to working in retail. I’m a different person now, more aware, woke(er), more insightful, wiser and more mature now than I was in 1995 (at least I hope I am).

I enjoy the fast pace of retail and the interaction with the public on an

almost continual basis. I also appreciate that I can leave the work or retail completely when I clock out. When I’m there, I’m there. But when I leave, I’m not there. So much of my other work that I’ve done is the type of work you never really “clock out.” For instance, when you’re a reporter or work in a church you’re never really “off” from that work; it’s constantly “on.”

Most of us reflect from time to time and attempt changes or adjustments in our habits and lifestyles. A few years back the change I longed for was to improve my piano playing. I studied piano my whole life and all through college. I know how to play but had not challenged myself or really “studied” any new piano music. I committed to

(Continued on Page 15)