

the Bulletin

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*Serving Bloomfield, Friendship, Garfield,
East Liberty, and Lawrenceville since 1975*

East Liberty primary care doc pulls plug on insurance

By Sarah Boden

90.5 WESA

East Liberty - Kim Stanley shook out a white pill from a prescription bottle and poured herself a glass of water, at the kitchen sink of her North Huntingdon Township home. The antibiotic was to treat an infected cut on her leg.

Stanley lost her insurance after she quit her accounting job earlier this year to work part-time for herself, in order to spend more time with her teenaged daughters.

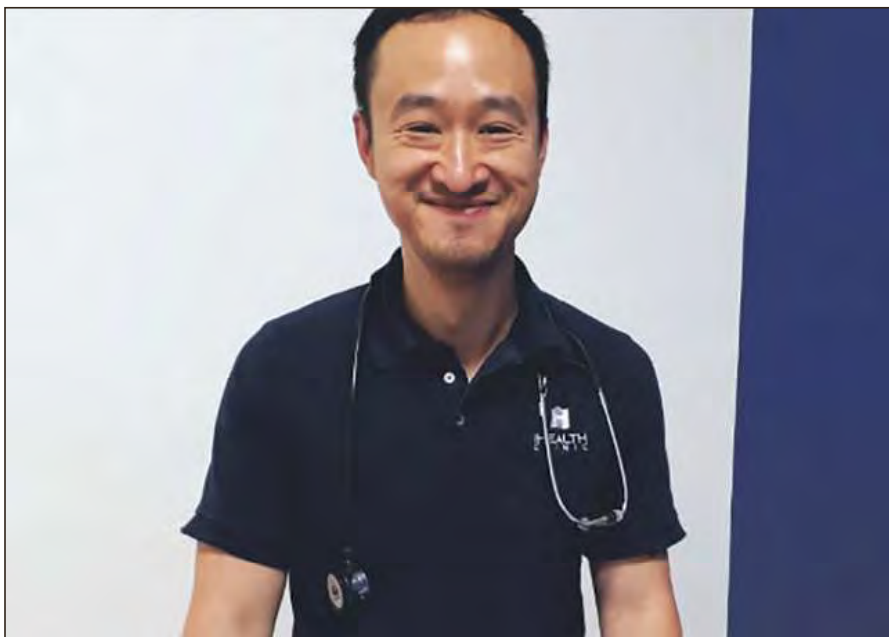
“Yes, it was a calculated risk. I’m a widow,” she said. “All my girls have is me.”

Because of that calculated risk, Stanley said she was thrilled to only pay \$35 to see Dr. Timothy Wong [pictured below], a primary care physician, who wrote her a prescription for the antibiotic.

See **Primary Care Doc** | page 2



ABOVE: The East Liberty skyline, with the site of the former Penn Plaza Apartments in the foreground, might look different in the near future. The site’s developers want to begin construction of a retail-office complex by December. Read more in this month’s “Neighborhood Focus,” beginning on page 8. Photo by John Colombo.



ABOVE: Dr. Timothy Wong opened iHealth Clinic in East Liberty in August. His practice does not accept insurance and charges a flat fee of \$35 per medical issue. Read the full story above, and on page 2. Photo by Sarah Boden, 90.5 WESA.

Bloomfield’s ‘mobility principles’: guide for neighborhood development

By Sam Spearing Bloomfield Development Corporation

Bloomfield - Thanks to generous funding from The Heinz Endowments, Bloomfield Development Corporation (BDC) is launching a new project to create “mobility principles” for the neighborhood.

Aiming to engage the community in conversations around transportation, BDC is now working to identify local residents’ priorities for future developments in Bloomfield.

The resulting mobility principles will center on the Bloomfield Bridge intersection, which encompasses portions

of Liberty Ave. and Main St. BDC will use these principles to advocate for transportation infrastructure and real estate development that supports all Bloomfield residents.

The organization is advocating for a street design that could help the neighborhood become a safe place for everyone to live, work, and walk.

When it comes to mobility, Bloomfield already has several advantages: bike lanes, bus routes, and a relatively flat landscape. Since the neighborhood

See **Mobility** | page 6

- PAGE 7 -

FATE OF ‘PGH PARKS FUND’
RIDES ON NOVEMBER BALLOT

NEW ‘KILN SHELTER’ HEATING
THINGS UP @ UNION PROJECT

- PAGE 11 -

Primary Care Doc continued from page 1

In August, Wong opened a “micro” practice in [East Liberty] on Centre Avenue, called the iHealth Clinic. The office has dark blue walls and still smells faintly of new paint.

“Purple and green were already taken,” joked Wong, in reference to the branding of UPMC and Allegheny Health Network, two integrated health systems that dominate the medical and insurance markets in western Pennsylvania.

Wong’s practice is about as opposite of UPMC and AHN as a physician can get in Pittsburgh. He’s doesn’t accept any form of insurance. Patients pay up front for care at an iPad station when they check themselves into the clinic.

For each medical visit, Wong charges a flat fee of just \$35.

Before opening iHealth in August, Wong had been a doctor at Indiana Regional Medical Center in Indiana County, where he was also the director of quality for the hospital system’s physician group.

Insurance companies, he said, routinely argued with him about what was medically necessary for patients. This meant hours of paper work.

“After about four-and-a-half years of dealing with some of the insanity of the system, I was like, ‘You know what? It is not ethical, in my opinion, to be a part of a system that was failing,’” said Wong. “I felt kind of emotionally drained and physically drained.”

A 2016 study found that for every hour a doctor spends on direct patient care, they spend another two hours on paperwork.

“Everybody wants slightly different information,” said Julie Sakowski, a health care economist at Seton Hall University, in South Orange, N.J.

Sakowski has researched how much medical practices spend on communicating with insurance providers. Sa-

kowski puts it between 10 and 20 percent of a practice’s income.

“They’re requiring different documentation. And they have different policies on what they’re going to cover,” she said. “Keeping track of that is very work- and labor-intensive.”

Wong said his business model allows him more time to see patients and generate income.

And he has no employees.

Patients pay up front, so Wong’s practice doesn’t employ a biller. And since he doesn’t accept insurance, he also doesn’t have a medical coder, which is a person whose job is to submit documentation to insurance companies. These are the reasons, said Wong, why he can charge patients so little.

After contacting several medical associations and health policy experts, it’s still unclear if there are any other primary care doctors that have iHealth’s exact business model.

“It’s definitely a niche market,” said Sakowski.

Even with less paperwork and no payroll, Wong’s \$35 fee per medical issue is minimal.

If iHealth averaged 20 patients a day, it would gross \$182,000 annually. That income would have to cover rent, utilities, malpractice insurance, medical and office supplies, taxes, and Wong’s salary.

Right now, about four patients walk through iHealth’s doors a day, and it might be a while before Wong is generating enough to pay his bills.

He said he got iHealth off the ground using his personal savings. With his current patient load, and by forgoing a salary, Wong said he’s breaking even. He explains that his wife’s salary helps cover their personal expenses.

“I think the estimates are that it takes maybe two years to get fully busy for a

new medical practice. So, I’m waiting,” he said. “But I’m hopeful.”

Out-of-pocket costs for insured patients continue to increase, and 2019 is the first year U.S. taxpayers won’t be penalized for being uninsured.

Therefore, more under-insured and uninsured patients might end up needing Wong’s low-cost care.

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City launches program to recover lost/missing City records, artifacts

A Message from the City of Pittsburgh

Pittsburgh - The Office of the Mayor and Office of the City Clerk are seeking the public's help in recovering lost or missing city records and artifacts.

In 2016, the City of Pittsburgh began the process of evaluating and cataloging its vast collection of historical materials and records. These records, some of which are over two hundred years old, range from maps to minute books chronicling some of the earliest days of Pittsburgh's history.

As steps were taken to secure this heritage, it became apparent that materials had likely been taken from City offices and facilities over the course of centuries. On Oct. 1, the City launched efforts to reclaim such records and artifacts.

Inspired by a 2016 push from the Pittsburgh Public Schools and The Friends of Art to reclaim stolen art from public schools, the City of Pittsburgh will offer amnesty to those who return suspected City- or Authority-owned property.

The City Clerk's Office has already been successful in ensuring the safe return of a long missing minute book chronicling the Borough of Pittsburgh from 1794 to 1802. First reported missing in 1895, it was later discovered that the book was sold to the Pennsylvania Historical Society in 1912. The Society graciously returned the book upon learning of the theft.

More recently, the Meanor Family of North Carolina donated a collection of papers and photographs from the City's first "City Recorder," Adam Mercer Brown. Brown was appointed to the executive position in 1901 after state-sanctioned changes to the City's charter replaced the position of Mayor with that of Recorder. The donated items notably include Recorder Brown's original oath of office.

"This initiative is about recovering pieces of our history," City Clerk Brenda Pree said. "It will complement the work we've been doing over the past several years to better manage City records and to ensure the public has access to them."

Members of the public who believe they may possess or know of historic City- or Authority-owned records and materials are encouraged to contact City Archivist Nick Hartley at nicholas.hartley@pittsburghpa.gov or 412-255-0873 with a description of their findings. ♦

the Bulletin

Serving Pittsburgh's
East End neighborhoods
since 1975

with the mission of reporting on issues affecting underserved communities and facilitating local residents' exchange of ideas.

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Board Meetings are held by the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation at 6:30 p.m. on the second Monday of each month, at the BGC Community Activity Center (113 N. Pacific Ave.), and are open to the public.

The opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the publisher.

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ELDI awarded grant to expand affordable homeownership opportunities in Garfield

A Message from East Liberty Development, Inc.

Garfield - The Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA) recently awarded a \$200,000 grant to East Liberty Development, Inc. (ELDI).

Funds for the Pennsylvania Housing Affordability and Rehabilitation Enhancement (PHARE) grant come from the Commonwealth's portion of the realty transfer tax that is paid when buying or selling real estate.

The PHARE grant will assist ELDI in the rehabilitation of seven vacant or abandoned homes in Garfield [a plan outlined in the July edition of *The Bulletin*]. It will also be instrumental to leveraging additional grant funds and loans for these projects.

The seven homes, which range in size from three to five bedrooms, will be available for sale to qualified buyers; eligible buyers must earn 50-80% of area median income. Located in a neighborhood on the rise, the homes will provide buyers with not only a safe, comfortable home, but also an asset that is likely to appreciate in value.



ABOVE: A home that has been rehabilitated by ELDI on N. Fairmount Ave. in Garfield. Photo courtesy of ELDI.

ELDI is working with Circles Greater Pittsburgh and Open Hand Ministries to help first-time homebuyers prepare for their important purchase.

Those interested in becoming a homeowner in Garfield, East Liberty, or Larimer may contact ELDI at 412-361-8061 or mary.hester@eastliberty.org. ♦

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for the latest neighborhood information and community updates

Black women & femmes say Pittsburgh's inequity report exemplifies the problem: Black voices are left out

By Juliette Rihl *PublicSource*

Pittsburgh - Researchers, nonprofit leaders and advocates who gathered Monday [Oct. 14] continued to criticize a September report on racial and gender inequity for its predominantly white research team and the failure to engage Black leaders and community organizations already working on similar issues.

More than 75 people attended the community outreach meeting at the YWCA Greater Pittsburgh in Homewood. The meeting was prompted by a September response to the City of Pittsburgh Gender Equity Commission report, which was signed by a group of 19 Black women and femmes after the report's release. The intention of the meeting was for researchers to explain the methodology behind the report and give an opportunity for attendees to voice their concerns. "The goal of this is to listen, to understand and not to respond," said Allyce Pinchback-Johnson, founder and CEO of Pinchback Consulting LLC, who helped facilitate the meeting and was encouraging active listening.

The response letter referenced a PublicSource first-person essay by University of Pittsburgh sociologist Junia Howell, who is white and wrote about "racism being a core issue." The letter said the report "has actually decentered the labor of Black women and femmes, exploited and ignored those same people, while centering white scholars as 'validating' Black people's experiences, which is a manifestation of racism and the appropriation of knowledge and scholarship from Black women and femmes."

The meeting was a public follow-up to a meeting with the authors of the letter and the commission on Oct. 1.

Jada Shirriel, CEO of Healthy Start Pittsburgh, said the report is "not the beginning or the end of where these frustrations stem from, or where they continue to go."

The Gender Equity Commission's report was the first of what was planned to be a three-part series; future research is now on hold until the commission decides its next steps, said Kathi Elliott, a commission member and the executive director of the local nonprofit Gwen's Girls.

Report co-author Sara Goodkind explained Monday that the gender analysis research did not set out to focus specifically on Black women.

"Sadly and not surprisingly to most people in this room, the results of this report highlight stark racial inequities in Pittsburgh that must be addressed," said Goodkind, an associate professor at the University of Pittsburgh.

Indeed, the inequities described in the report were not a surprise to many attendees. "For some of us that report was, 'In other news, water is wet,'" said Felicia Williams, who works for Allegheny County Controller Chelsa Wagner. "So my question is, where are we going from here?"

Writer and designer Tereneh Idia said if equitable policy and power shifts were prioritized, the Gender Equity Commission, which is majority white, would have a different makeup. "Unless some of y'all are willing to lose your jobs, then we're really not talking about equity and justice," Idia said.

Goodkind said the research team was open to reconfiguring its makeup or letting others take the lead on the research.

Other concerns voiced Monday included the level of funding to complete the research, the conflation of non-Black minority groups in the research data, the University of Pittsburgh's role and the report's alignment with OnePGH, the city's resilience strategy. OnePGH is Mayor Bill Peduto's idea to pool funding from the city's largest nonprofits and corporations and spend the money on Pittsburgh's social problems.

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The city gave the Gender Equity Commission \$45,000 to complete the report, a number that many felt was too low. "We Black women work in communities for free and cannot do that and dismantle these systems of oppression for free," Shirriel said.

Elliott said the goal of the report was to pressure individuals to increase funding for the commission's work.

"Our fight and our frustration is the same as you all's as far as, where's the money to do this work?" Elliott said.

Another point of concern: The report combined non-Black minority groups into a single group. Goodkind explained that in the data sets used, the federal government does not release data on minority groups that are deemed too small, in order to protect individual privacy. This included Pittsburgh's Asian, multiracial, Latinx and Native American populations. The research team grouped these populations together in order to include residents that would otherwise have had to be excluded, Goodkind said. The report was also criticized for using data that only included male and female gender identities.

"I'm particularly concerned about the decision to sweep the whole gender identities and minoritized racial groups under the rug," said Sueno Viveros, the co-founder of OKRA Ethics and chair of the Infant Mortality Collaborative at the Allegheny County Health Department.

After Goodkind's research team proposal was selected, the Gender Equity Commission asked them to alter the proposal to align with the OnePGH initiative, which Goodkind said examined inequalities across health, income, employment and education. The University of Pittsburgh team agreed to change its plan and include a series of reports, the first of which builds off of the OnePGH equity report. Several advocates questioned the inclusivity of OnePGH.

Several attendees also criticized the University of Pittsburgh's involvement in the research. Dara Mendez, an assistant professor of epidemiology at the university and an author of the response, said ownership of the work should be taken out of the hands of the university moving forward. "I believe this should be a community-owned and operated research process," Mendez said.

Commission member Megan Block acknowledged the problems of "centering white women when releasing a report about issues that affect Black women and girls" and not ensuring that "Black women are part of every phase of the research."

"I think it's really important to acknowledge there were a lot of missteps," Block said.

Activist Brittani Murray said the solution is to "just invite us into the space."

"I'm tired of finding out after the fact that somebody had the audacity to talk about my life like I'm not here living and breathing right now," Murray said.

Elliott encouraged anyone who would like to be involved with the Gender Equity Commission's work to email genderequity@pittsburghpa.gov or call the Mayor's Office within the next two weeks. The commission's next steps will be subsequently determined.

Notes from both meetings and all future updates from the commission will be posted on the New Voices For Reproductive Justice website (newvoicespittsburgh.org).

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Mobility continued from page 1

boasts a significant population of older neighbors, along with several schools, it is important to ensure that people of all ages can travel safely through the Liberty Ave. corridor.

Local residents expressed concern about pedestrian safety at the Bloomfield Bridge intersection, and at points throughout the neighborhood, in various BDC surveys conducted over the last three years.

Serving tens of thousands of cars every day, the Bloomfield Bridge intersection also serves as an important junction for transit users, pedestrians, and cyclists.

Improvements to the intersection's safety will help protect children on their walk to school, as well as older adults that frequently travel through the corridor "vortex" to visit doctors' offices and shop for groceries.

Still, many crossings in Bloomfield remain inaccessible, or unsafe, to the area's most vulnerable residents. The new mobility principles aim to in-

crease safety for all users - while also creating a cohesive, walkable passage between North and South Bloomfield - to connect people to neighborhood sites like Sciullo Memorial Park.

Committed to fostering local residents' connections with other city neighborhoods, BDC will point to these new principles in its advocacy for affordable, accessible public transit.

As a means of accommodating every Bloomfielder's commute to workplaces throughout the city, the organization strives to improve the public transit experience - specifically, local pedestrians' access to vital bus routes.

By considering all modes of transportation, the new principles are designed to ensure that all Bloomfield residents have good access to any number of affordable means of mobility.

BDC is currently choosing a consultant to lead the process; community meetings will proceed in early 2020. Learn more about Bloomfield's mobility principles at bloomfieldpgh.org/. ♦

Bonner Fellow learns new skills from teachers, students at Assemble

By Sophie Barner Assemble

Insight/Garfield - Last fall, when I began taking freshman classes in art history and museum studies at Chatham University, I also became a Bonner Leaders Program Fellow, placed with Assemble (4824 Penn Ave.). Operating in a national network of over 80 colleges, the Bonner Leaders Program aims to combine a student's community engagement with their academic and career goals.

Originally from the Buffalo, New York area, I moved to Pittsburgh to attend Chatham University. With my very limited knowledge of the Pittsburgh bus system, I somehow managed to get to Assemble on my first day of work. When I walked in, I instantly felt welcomed; my supervisors, Nina Barbuto and Adeshwa Metzger, introduced me to everyone and helped encourage me to come out of my shell.


At first, I found myself being a passive assistant in the afterschool classroom, just trying to get used to the new environment. But, as the semester went on and my co-teachers pointed me to some more effective teaching methods, I felt my skills in the classroom evolving. Soon, I started facilitating icebreakers and demonstrations, and even got the chance to write and teach my own lesson plan.

Since I will be placed at Assemble for the entirety of my four-year Bonner Fellowship, I have developed a list of goals to complete for my remaining years of service. I would like to create new lesson plans, learn more about the administrative and marketing side of nonprofits, and eventually help the organization write grants.

My favorite part about working at Assemble is that I feel like I have gained a whole new support community in the Garfield and Bloomfield neighborhoods. Having a place in Pittsburgh where I feel at home has meant the world to me. The relationships that I treasure the most are the ones that I have formed with my students. Whether we are dissecting owl pellets or designing Rube Goldberg machines, I am always blown away by the resourcefulness and intelligence of the third, fourth, and fifth graders that I teach.

Some of my most meaningful interactions have been with frustrated students, helping them go back through the design process and rework their ideas. It is truly a privilege to work with, create with, and learn from all of the students at Assemble. To learn more about Assemble, visit assemblepgh.org. ♦

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We promise not to overshare!

November ballot initiative aims to revitalize city's parks system

By Elizabeth Sensky *East Liberty Development, Inc.*

Perspective/Pittsburgh - Some of the talking points driving the city's new initiative to restore its park system – “parks are free,” “parks are for everyone,” and “parks transform cities” – might seem like universal truths. But as Jayne Miller, president & CEO of the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, maintains, these truths have fallen on deaf ears for decades.

The 165 park and recreation sites located throughout Pittsburgh, Miller said, have steadily fallen into disrepair ever since the collapse of the steel industry in 1980.

“Five decades of underfunding has resulted in the parks’ \$400 million capital project backlog,” she observed. “Park amenities that should have had repair and restoration, as well as capital investments over the past 50 years, have seen little or no investment.”

As a result, the City and the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy collected data on the condition and needs of all 165 parks, along with demographic data about the neighborhoods, and embarked on a “Parks Listening Tour” program last year.

The listening tour was designed to share park and community conditions

with the public and to gather Pittsburghers’ priorities for park investments.

During the first leg of the tour, which ran from last December through April, City and conservancy staff shared information about park conditions with local residents and then asked for their input through a park survey.

The conservancy held 128 meetings and events across the city, reaching over 10,000 people and receiving 3,400 survey responses.

In May, the City began analyzing the park data and survey results in order to develop the “Parks Plan” – a long-term, park investment strategy.

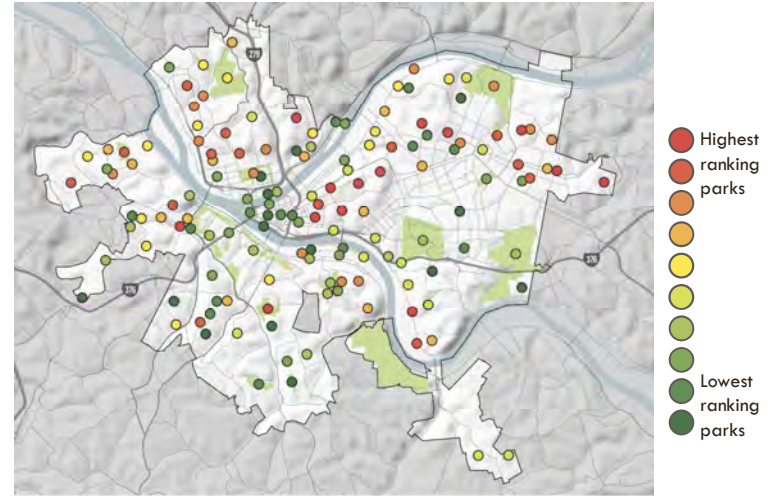
In July, the Parks Listening Tour proceeded with more community meetings, where the conservancy shared the Parks Plan it had developed from the data and public input; meetings will continue through Nov. 4.

One key outcome from these efforts will arrive in the form of a ballot question on the November 2019 ballot. On Tuesday, Nov. 5, voters will be asked whether or not they support the creation of a dedicated Pittsburgh Parks Fund to help improve all City parks.

If approved, the fund would create an

Where did parks rank highest based on community and park need?

Final Investment Priority Scores for Capital Projects in Pittsburgh Parks



ABOVE: The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy conducted a “Parks Listening Tour” last year to gather data on all City parks and their surrounding neighborhoods. The community data has helped the Conservancy formulate its “Parks Plan,” prioritizing capital investments by individual park and neighborhood need. Graphic courtesy of Elizabeth Sensky.

additional 0.5 property tax levy (\$50 on each \$100,000 of assessed real estate value) beginning in 2020; it is estimated that this tax would generate about \$10 million every year.

The Parks Conservancy’s stated goal is to raise an equal amount of funds, \$10 million annually, through fundraising activities.

“More than 95% of the people who took the survey said our parks need more resources,” Miller noted. “The Parks Conservancy believes it is time to make high quality parks a reality for all.”

If the ballot passes, park investments will be made in four major categories: maintenance, rehabilitation projects, capital projects, and recreation programming.

While every park will see investments, and every neighborhood will enjoy the same level of service, capital projects will be prioritized by park and neigh-

borhood need.

In an effort to invest in neighborhoods that have historically been underserved in the city, capital project investments will first be made in parks and neighborhoods with the greatest need.

Some taxpayers have voiced opposition to the Parks Plan ahead of the Nov. 5 vote. Miller urges those who are skeptical of the plan to consider the parks’ value to the city’s overall health and wellbeing.

“Parks fuel the economy of cities; parks make us healthier; parks clean and cool the air; parks clean and manage stormwater; parks renew the spirit; parks create community; and parks are free,” she said. “They’re here for everyone.”

To learn more about the Parks Plan, and the related ballot measure, and to get details on upcoming community meetings, visit pittsburghparks.org/parksplan. ♦

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NeighborhoodFOCUS

Penn Plaza development to move forward in East End

Fate of reconfigured park, setup of housing fund uncertain

By Joe Reuben *Bulletin contributor*

East Liberty - Four years have passed since the Mayor’s Office announced the execution of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the owners of the Penn Plaza Apartments.

The Sept. 2015 MOU allowed the owners to seek all the necessary approvals for construction of a mixed-use, commercial-residential development on the site at Penn and S. Negley Aves., in exchange for providing more time for the eviction of over 200 tenants from the existing complex.

In addition, the MOU contained a pledge from the City to transfer ownership of an adjoining 2.2-acre parklet to the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) for eventual sale to the owners of the Penn Plaza Apartments - the proceeds from which the City said it would hold for creation of a fund to be used in helping to build more affordably-priced housing in the East Liberty area.

Much has happened in the intervening years:

- The owners of the apartment complex were able to terminate the leases of all of the tenants and cooperated with outside parties in arranging for their relocation, helped by over \$300,000 in public funds committed to the process by the URA. The tenants’ relocation was eventually completed in the spring of 2017.
- The Penn Plaza site was re-zoned by a 4-3 vote of the city Planning Commission in the fall of 2015, paving the way for the dense, mixed-use development that was the focal point of the Sept. 2015 MOU. The owners, Pennley Park South, Inc. (PPSI), eventually decided that housing would not be part of the first phase of their project, and instead returned to the city Planning Commission in early 2016 with plans for a large-scale, retail-office complex at the site, to be done in two phases. PPSI confirmed they were in discussions with Whole Foods to lease 50,000 square feet in the new development.
- The Planning Commission voted down the first edition of the developer’s plan in December of 2016, citing little evidence of tangible community input into it, and lawsuits between the owners and the City followed in the wake of that action. The owners contended that they had already met all of the city’s criteria for approval of their plan, and asked the court to allow the project to move forward. Three community groups and several nearby residents filed a petition to intervene in those lawsuits, and eventually Common Pleas Court felt it best to hand over the dispute to a mediator, an attorney by the name of William Pietragallo.



ABOVE: Enright Park, as it will look after being rebuilt. The new street running along its northern edge will be a private roadway owned by Pennley Park South, Inc. (PPSI). Graphic by PPSI.

BELOW: A view of Enright Park looking east. Many of the trees in the foreground will be taken down to make way for a new retail-office development. Photo by John Colombo.



- Several months of negotiations followed among the city, Pennley Park South, Inc., and attorneys representing the community groups - East Liberty Development, Inc. (ELDI), Friendship Community Group (FCG), and the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation (BGC) - and nearby neighbors, moderated by Pietragallo. A compromise was reached in October of 2017, and a consent decree was issued by Judge Joseph James.

The outlines of the settlement were as follows:

- The developers would return to the Planning Commission to obtain its approval of their development plan. They agreed to participate in several community meetings to allow for input by the public at-large. The developers complied with that condition, with the last of those meetings occurring in April of 2018. Very little in the way of substantive changes to their development plan were made as a result of these meetings.
- The city’s sale of Enright Parklet adjoining the PPSI site would not occur. Instead, the parties agreed that the park would be reconfigured, lopping off the portion that extends into PPSI’s site. The PPSI site would, in essence, be squared off, and the park would take some portion of PPSI’s land closest to Penn Circle West (now known as S. Euclid Ave.) so that it could run parallel to the development site from S. Negley to S. Euclid.

The swap of land was to be made as evenly as possible in order to comply with state law governing the sale of public assets like parks. Judge Lawrence O’Toole held a hearing on Oct. 4 at Common Pleas Court to determine whether to authorize the land swap.

However, the nearby neighbors and two of the community groups who were party to the consent decree learned over the summer that a new street, to be built alongside the park on land currently owned by PPSI, would be a private road. The FCG and BGC asked Judge O’Toole to postpone the hearing to another time because the ownership of the new street had not been discussed during the negotiations overseen by Attorney Pietragallo. Judge O’Toole ultimately refused to delay the hearing, and issued an order the same day, authorizing the land swap.

- The owners of the site held to their original commitment to allow for diversion of real estate tax revenues generated by their new development to be used to rebuild the park (up to \$1 million) and to capitalize a fund for affordably-priced housing developments. The city would be responsible for funding the rest of the cost entailed in the park’s reconstruction, which some believe could run as high as \$2.5 million. PPSI believes as much as \$4 million could find its way in the coming years into the housing fund, which would be managed by the city. The city would also endeavor to extend the boundaries

- continued on next page -

- continued from previous page -

of the area in which those developments could be located to include all of East Liberty, and portions of Garfield and Friendship. And the city agreed to pursue formation of a community advisory committee to oversee the housing fund's operations.

Still waiting for answers:

Two years later, none of the commitments made by the city have been fulfilled, according to Jennifer Haven, a representative of the FCG, who addressed City Council on October 23rd as it considered approval of the land swap now authorized by the court.

When queried via e-mail recently by an attorney for the neighbors and community groups on these and other matters, Mayor Peduto's chief of staff, Dan Gilman, instructed the attorney, Jon Pushinsky, to take the matter up with the city's law department.

City Council did give its preliminary approval to the land swap at the Oct. 23rd meeting of its Finance Committee, chaired by Councilman Rev. Ricky Burgess, whose Council district includes East Liberty and parts of Garfield and Friendship.

After the meeting, Councilman Rev. Burgess told radio station WESA-FM that the community groups and neighbors were suffering from "paranoia," and that their outspokenness on the project was "nonsensical in many ways," and a "smokescreen for their not wanting the development to occur."

[Editor's Note: As of press time, the city solicitor is calling together a meeting of the attorneys representing the developers and the community for Tuesday, Oct. 29. Also, the online version of the city's capital budget for 2020 now contains \$300,000 for "upgrades to Enright Park."]

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PA charter schools: taxpayers deserve better

By Lisa Lightner *Bulletin contributor*

Letter-to-the-Editor

Pennsylvania - Recently, Gov. Wolf announced some pending executive actions to accomplish charter school reforms. Many think tanks and pundits across the Commonwealth have attacked him for this, stating that his agenda is to protect the *status quo*.

Several [newspapers] ran Lowman Henry’s op-ed piece, titled “The Education Establishment Targeting Charter Schools.” However, Henry offered no facts to support his argument that Gov. Wolf is targeting charter schools with his proposed reforms.

I, for one, support the governor’s reforms - and I see this [executive action] as a politician finally stepping up and holding charter schools responsible and accountable. Finally, it’s Pennsylvania taxpayers getting their tax money protected, instead of some wealthy charter school owners and private interests.

Before any reader leaps to judgment, please research the facts about charter schools. I’d also like to remind all taxpayers that school choice does not automatically equal a better option because, statistically speaking, charter schools are not holding their own.

First, Gov. Wolf’s proposed actions will save PA taxpayers almost \$290 million a year. How? Simple. It costs about \$5,000 to educate one student via cyber charter schools.

However, those cyber charters receive anywhere from \$7,000 to \$11,000 per student of taxpayer money. A cyber charter may receive as much as \$40,000 for each student - identified with a disability - that qualifies for special education.

Unlike most states, PA school districts pay charter schools, both brick-and-mortar & cyber, per-pupil tuition from their taxpayer levy; the payment is not based on the school’s instructional costs, but rather on how much the district pays to educate its own students.

Because cyber charters incur little-to-no costs to maintain buildings or provide transportation, and because class size in some cyber charters is substantially higher, the system provides an extraordinary opportunity for profit. It’s time for reform.

For starters, some Pennsylvania charter school operators have donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to Republican state legislators. They also spend, on average, more than \$500 per pupil on advertising.

Several charter school operators have been indicted on charges of racketeering and fraud. Some of them even own private jets, yachts, and luxury homes. And who paid for it all? You did.

The Pennsylvania Cyber Charter School (PA Cyber) system does not get results, even by the most basic measure: graduation rate. PA Cyber’s graduation rates range from 31% to 70% (Stanford University study, 2018); the statewide average of PA’s public schools is 86%. Public education is not perfect. We certainly need some change.

With Gov. Wolf’s proposed changes, the state’s taxpayers could save almost \$300 million annually - money that could be spent educating our kids rather than funding some legislator’s campaign to keep this racket going forever.

It’s time to hold Pennsylvania’s charter schools accountable, and I applaud our governor’s efforts. For the last 20 years, the PA taxpayer has been played for a fool, so please look into the facts before declaring these reforms an “attack.”

I think [Republican legislators] are upset that, thanks to Gov. Wolf’s executive action, their overflowing gravy train might be coming to an end. ♦

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Union Project breaks ground on new, state-of-the-art 'kiln shelter'

By Sam Laffey Union Project

BELOW: Plans for a new "kiln shelter" will help Union Project (801 N. Negley Ave.) expand its ceramic arts programming in the East End. The organization anticipates a December unveiling of its new clay-focused facility. Graphic courtesy of Sam Laffey.



Highland Park - In July, Union Project (UP, 801 N. Negley Ave.) broke ground on a long-anticipated "kiln shelter" project, with designs on creating a new ceramics facility, to provide more arts education programming for its East End neighbors.

The existing kiln shelter - a deteriorating, alleyway structure - will be replaced with a cutting-edge facility in UP's side yard along N. Negley Ave.

This project aims to deepen the organization's support of aspiring, emerging, and established clay artists.

The new shelter will house up to three kilns, with more kilns planned for the future. Plans include a covered classroom area, a loading dock with ample room for loading/unloading, and ramps leading to the outdoor parking area and courtyard space.

In an effort to enhance the safety of

both its expert and beginner ceramists, UP is installing a new ventilation hood system - a metal mesh "surround" that can be locked during and between every "firing" - in the new kiln shelter.

Thanks to a number of lighting improvements, the new facility will bolster UP's studio capacity, allowing the organization to host night-time firings, classes, and clay-throwing demonstrations all year long.

In December, when construction is expected to be completed, local community members can look forward to learning new ceramic methods and enjoying new class offerings.

Following the addition of a safer gas kiln, as well as a "Raku" kiln, new classes will be offered to students at every skill level.

The improved kiln shelter can help UP

bring ceramics out of the basement studio, and into the spotlight.

By providing a more accessible, visible space where hobbyists feel safe to learn about ceramics, the facility can help UP expand its state-of-the-art programming to engage more of the city's East End residents.

Highland Park neighbors can look forward to seeing clay art in action - kiln loading, clay workshops, ceramics demonstrations, etc. - whenever they pass 801 N. Negley Ave. this winter. In the warmer months, the facility will be outfitted to serve as a stage for various community events.

Support for the kiln shelter project is being provided by the Eden Hall Foundation and the Richard King Mellon Foundation, along with an anonymous foundation.

Visit unionproject.org for more info. ♦

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'Love Your Block' grant applications now open to local nonprofits

By Keyva Clark *City of Pittsburgh*

Pittsburgh - The City of Pittsburgh is excited to announce that applications are now open for the "Love Your Block" mini-grant program, which aims to revitalize the city, block-by-block.

Nonprofit organizations across Pittsburgh are invited to propose projects for up to \$1,500 in funds, along with the support of key city departments. Funding supports volunteer-fueled, neighborhood improvement projects [for spring and summer 2020] that combat blight and build community resilience.

Projects may include but are not limited to: community garden maintenance, neighborhood cleanups, or tree and flower planting. Successful projects will build strong partnerships, leverage donations, and most importantly, engage neighbors.

Find more information on Love Your Block, including detailed project guidelines and project ideas, at pittsburghpa.gov/oca-lyb. Questions may be directed to Leah Friedman at leah.friedman@pittsburghpa.gov or by calling the Office of Community Affairs [OCA] at 412-255-4773.

Stay up to date with Love Your Block and all OCA programs at newsletter.pittsburghpa.gov. ♦



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Connecting seniors to transit options

A Message from State Rep. Adam Ravenstahl *D-Allegheny*

Allegheny County - One of the toughest challenges people ever face is the loss of mobility, of the ability to order their lives. In many ways, it can feel like a loss of independence.

This is one of the reasons I am a strong advocate for the Port Authority's new ConnectCard program for seniors 65-plus – a small plastic card that can grant someone the freedom to navigate our region and regain their independence.

The new ConnectCard replaces the old blue or yellow bus passes and allows seniors to travel on public transit for free. My office stands ready to help folks apply for these passes and fill out any needed paperwork. I want to make sure that everyone who can has the opportunity to retain their independence, even if they cannot drive.

I also want to make people aware of a recent change to Pennsylvania's voting process, which I think will make it easier to ensure that everyone who is eligible, and wants to, can vote. The state has launched an online application for an absentee ballot at votesPA.com/ApplyAbsentee. This means that if a voter is unable to make it to their local polling place in person on Election Day, they can still cast a ballot.

The PA Election Code allows registered voters to apply for an absentee ballot up until one week before an election. This is an exciting new program which will help ensure all eligible voters have access to the ballot, one which I hope will encourage more voters to participate in our democracy.

My office is always here to help with any state-related issues that readers may have. Please feel free to stop by the district office at 3689 California Ave. or call us at 412-321-5523. ♦

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LOCAL REAL ESTATE BLOTTER

- Bloomfield, Friendship, Garfield, East Liberty, Lawrenceville, & Stanton Heights -

Real Estate Sales (for the month of September 2019)

Compiled by Lillian Denhardt, RE/MAX Select Realty

Bloomfield

David W Brown Family Trust to Howley Street Partners LLC at 4429-4431 Howley St. for \$300,000.

Deborah & Joseph F Meskel to Victor Raymond Powell at 4044 Cabinet St. for \$150,000.

Eko Development LLC to 393 40th LLC at 393 40th St. for \$105,000.

Julia Lenore Scanlon to Phillip & Katherine Phillips at 4048 Mintwood St. for \$172,000.

Kenneth R & Sarah Landis to Lucas R Camp at 4617 Torley St. for \$165,000.

Matthew S. Musial to Joseph Putila Jr at 4006 Howley St. for \$220,000.

Nancy J Goldberg to Quanhong Sun at 4776 Yew St. for \$158,000.

Patrick T & Geraldine E Allen to Fifth Avenue Property Group LLC at 4008 Woollayer Way for \$95,000.

Real Estate Pho to Kimberly A Schepner at 235 Edmond St. Rear for \$185,000.

Ryan J Gibson to Jeffery M Garofalo at 453 Cedarville St. for \$242,000.

Santo C Policicchio to Wendt LLC at 321 Ella St. for \$235,045.

Santo C Policicchio to Wendt LLC at 4903 Sciota St. for \$154,000.

Steve Maggio to Peter Cody Hunt at 4424 Milgate St. for \$152,500.

Tracie Fountain to Pacific Rental LLC at 409 S. Pacific Ave. for \$369,500.

Friendship

No sales to report.

Garfield

BFB Enterprises Inc to Katie E Holler at 5025 Rosetta St. for \$112,270.

Joseph A & Dorothy J Eubanks to Penn Pioneer Enterprises LLC at 4912 Broad St. for \$140,000.

Kenneth & Virginia Ong to NCRC Housing Rehab Fund LLC at 5115 Dearborn St. for \$127,000.

Laurence A & Mary A Kramer to Christine C Ho at 5139 Kincaid St. for \$329,000.

Ronald E Jones to Penn Pioneer Enterprises LLC at 4819 Dearborn St. for \$180,809.

Walter G Arnold to Jennifer L Carnes at 214 N. Winebiddle St. for \$255,000.

East Liberty

Atlanta As Is LLC to Stephanie M Sheffield at 512 N. Sheridan Ave. for \$177,000.

Bank Of New York Mellon to Steel Town Properties Md4 LLC at 6320 Saint Marie St. for \$90,250.

Janell Hinton to 298 Kenmont Ave. LLC at 816 Collins Ave. for \$220,000.

Suntrust Mortgage Inc to Dan Alexander Herstig at 710 N. Beatty St. for \$136,040.

Urban Redevelopment Auth Of Pittsburgh to Mellon's Orchard Housing LLC at 244-270 N. Beatty St. for \$600,000.

Urban Redevelopment Auth Of Pittsburgh to Mellon's Orchard Housing LLC at 5820-5830 Station St. for \$600,000.

Zarifa Tn Elahi to Costello Properties LLC at 517 N. Saint Clair St. for \$130,000.

Lawrenceville

5515 Butler Street Development LP to Bing Jui Ho at 5543 Butler St. for \$454,900.

5515 Butler Street Development LP to Brian William Castello at 5531 Butler St. for \$440,801.

5515 Butler Street Development LP to Cong Ma at 5529 Butler St. for \$489,900.

5515 Butler Street Development LP to Lee W Bannister at 5527 Butler St. for \$499,900.

Andrew J & Maureen L Knapp to Steel Town Properties M3 LLC at 511 and 519 54th St. for \$90,000.

Anthony & Erica Sciulli to Ethan Douglas Huhn at 5120 Holmes St. for \$235,000.

Brad Mitchell Pollack to Wylie Holdings LP at 5266 Butler St. for \$276,450.

Brian R Pierce to Laurence A Kramer at 260 42nd St. Unit 8 for \$319,000.

C&N Real Estate LLC to Peter D & Shanel

J Divito at 3464 Ligonier St. for \$304,000.

Carlton Court Development LLC to Thomas H Welsh III at 4620 Carlton St. for \$605,000.

Donna Dott to LPGM Limited LLC at 4751 Butler St. for \$252,500.

Ellis Wesley Kunka to Meghan Mccord at 162 38th St. for \$286,000.

Erin R Predis to Thomas J Krumpolc at 3929 Woollayer Way for \$185,000.

Fortune Foreclosures LLC to Teresa Meng at 5146 Dresden Way for \$224,900.

Harrison Street Associates LLC to Deeann M Culp at 5250 Harrison St. for \$279,900.

I & M Charlotte Partners LLC to Desai & Stacy Snechal at 3722 Charlotte St. for \$639,000.

Justin Pasay to Siri & Nitant Sethi at 3411 Butler St. for \$595,000.

Kathleen A Dicesare to Kyle E & Brianne K Gaylor at 190 49th St. for \$552,500.

Krygowski Properties LLC to Lee C & Constance Hess at 341 46th St. for \$350,000.

Linda F Turowski to Daniel E Chapman at 134 41st St. for \$255,000.

Martin Caridi to Michael R Czachowski at 356 42nd St. for \$225,000.

Nickolas J & Cheryl Beckas to David Schach at 902-908 Mccandless Ave. for \$335,000.

Rachel Hallas to Skelton HQ LLC at 179 43rd St. for \$650,000.

Roy J Kowalski to Northparc LLC at 421 52nd St. for \$300,000.

Smokey Joe Properties LLC to Tian Jin at 5233 Dresden Way for \$204,000.

Stephen E Hilty to Rachel P Tindall at 36 48th St. for \$462,500.

Tomas A Castillo to Chalmer L Pivik II at 143 42nd St. for \$267,000.

Stanton Heights

David P & Nora D Dinuzzo to Logan D & Lauren E Plath at 1509 Trinity St. for \$275,000.

Deborah L Logan to Gergana Nenkov at 4710 Stanton Ave. for \$125,000.

Joseph W & Diane L Bridge to Joseph Patrick Fridy at 932 Woodbine St. for \$161,300.

Mahaca Development Group LLC to Benjamin Michael Voytko at 970 Oranmore St. for \$355,000.

Michael A Abbitt to Robert J & Melissa A Wanker at 184 Stanton Ct. E for \$140,000.

Richard L Johnson to Centrella & Michael E Ziegler at 965 Oranmore St. for \$1.

Robert Malkin to Marissa Soisson at 973 Oranmore St. for \$265,100.

Tamara Alkhattar to Feras Alkhattar at 5136 Rosecrest Dr. for \$260,000.

This column uses data from Allegheny County that contains occasional errors (sale price, owners' names, etc.). We strive for accuracy every month so, if something looks off, please let us know.

For questions, comments, or just to chat about real estate in our neighborhoods, feel free to email Lillian at lillian@agent-lillian.com or call 412-335-6068. ♦

THE BULLETIN WANTS YOUR FEEDBACK!

This publication begins and ends with you, local community members, so we respectfully invite your opinions & insights.

We'd love to hear from you, so drop us a line anytime!

Please email our tip-line/suggestion box:

Bulletin@Bloomfield-Garfield.org.



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Sorry, but we do not accept listings by phone.

The Bulletin Board publishes listings of volunteer opportunities, free or low-cost events & classes, fundraisers, and services that are of particular interest to our neighborhoods. Listings are published on a space-available basis; we cannot guarantee placement or thorough edits of any listings. **Announcements for the December edition are due by Friday, Nov. 22.** Please submit listings using the online form at bit.ly/bulletin_submit.

NOVEMBER 1 - FRIDAY

BLOOMFIELD

‘#CoffeeConnectPGH’

Join Age-Friendly Greater Pittsburgh, Bloomfield Development Corporation, Bloomfield Livable Streets, and Rep. Sara Innamorato for #CoffeeConnectPGH, a day of connection and conversation in Bloomfield. From 8-11 a.m. on Friday, Nov. 1, head to the Crazy Mocha coffee shop at 4525 Liberty Ave. and look for a “Join Me” table tent. Grab a coffee (on us), set down your phone, and connect with someone who lives in your neighborhood. Whether just for three minutes or 30 minutes, a chat with a neighbor means a lot. The accessible entrance is located at the Taylor St. side of the building.

NOVEMBER 4 - MONDAY

GARFIELD

Girls’ Maker Night

On Mondays, from 4-6 p.m., Girls Maker Night welcomes girls (grades 5-8), non-binary, and trans students who like to make art, build things, and get tech-y at Assemble (4824 Penn Ave.). It is a special STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, & math) program that empowers girls by making connections between hands-on STEAM learning and the world around them. Students will also have the opportunity to share their own skills and learn from guest experts. Visit assemblepgh.org to learn more.

NOVEMBER 6 - WEDNESDAY

LAWRENCEVILLE

Computer Workshop: Excel Intermediate

Goodwill of Southwestern Pennsylvania offers free computer workshops to area residents. These workshops are a great opportunity for those looking to add new skills to their resume or those simply wanting to brush up on their current skills. The Excel Intermediate workshop is designed for students who have attended the Excel Basics class or who already have basic knowledge of Excel. On Wednesday, Nov. 6, the workshop will run from 6:00 to 7:30 p.m. at Goodwill’s Workforce Development Center in Lawrenceville (118 52nd St.). Walk-ins will not be accepted. Please call 1-877-499-3526 to save your space.

NOVEMBER 7 - THURSDAY

GARFIELD

Land Trust Meeting

At 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, Nov. 7, the Garfield Land Trust will hold a meeting at the Community Activity Center (113 N. Pacific Ave. at Dearborn St.). Read more, and become a member today, at GarfieldLandTrust.org. Contact 412-345-3831 or GarfieldLandTrust@gmail.com to learn more.

LAWRENCEVILLE

Computer Basics Course

Are you interested in learning how to use a computer? This course starts with the basics; it is designed for people who may be out of practice or new to using computers. Learn how to use a mouse efficiently, recognize different devices and their parts, use an operating system, email, internet, and word processor. On Thursday, Nov. 7, the workshop will run from 6 to 8 p.m. at Goodwill’s Workforce Development Center in Lawrenceville (118 52nd St.). Walk-ins will not be accepted. Please call 1-877-499-3526 to save your space.

NOVEMBER 8 - FRIDAY

EAST LIBERTY

‘Bullet Journaling’ Workshop

On Fridays, Nov. 8 & 29, the Carnegie Library’s East Liberty branch (130 S. Whitfield St.) will host a “bullet journaling” workshop. It is part of a series of programs where adults can learn creative skills at the library, using their collections, databases, or software. In this session, you will learn different methods of bullet journaling and talk about which one would fit your needs. Bring your own journal or call 412-363-2832 to register and receive a journal during the program.

NOVEMBER 9 - SATURDAY

EAST LIBERTY

Jazz Concert

Pittsburgh jazz legend and favorite Mike Tomaro returns with his combo for an evening of jazz favorites and sweet des-



Give Thanks

On Thanksgiving we are supposed to give thanks.
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COMMUNITY MEETING:

BLOOMFIELD’S LITTLE ITALY DAYS

On Wednesday, Nov. 13, the producer and staff of Bloomfield’s Little Italy Days will host a community meeting to gather input on the annual neighborhood festival. Running from 4:30 to 7:00 p.m. at Lombardozzi’s Restaurant (4786 Liberty Ave.), this meeting is open to the public. Prior to attending, please visit LittleItalyDays.com to view the producer’s community report and supporting videos.

Volunteer Announcements Shout-Outs Opportunities Services Open Calls Classifieds

serts at East Liberty Presbyterian Church (116 S. Highland Ave.) on Saturday, Nov. 9, at 7 p.m. Join us in the Social Hall for this fun and relaxing evening of jazz and sweets; please bring your favorite dessert to share. A freewill offering will be received. For more info, please visit ELPC church, or call 412-441-3800.

NOVEMBER 15 - FRIDAY

GARFIELD

Assemble Learning Party: Story Lab

Join Assemble (4824 Penn Ave.) to meet and learn from storytellers, designers, and more for an evening of storytelling and art. This month's Learning Party partners include: Union Project and Women for a Healthy Environment. The goal of Learning Parties is to make science, technology, engineering, art, and math (STEAM) accessible, understandable, inspiring, and fun for students of all ages. Story Lab runs from 4 to 6 p.m.; all materials and snacks provided.

NOVEMBER 17 - SUNDAY

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CAREER-BUILDING BLOCK: NOVEMBER

The Eastside Neighborhood Employment Center (ENEC) offers many career-building opportunities. We encourage job-seekers to attend this month's scheduled events at the ENEC (5321 Penn Ave.) in Garfield. Call 412-362-8580 for more info.

• **Computer Basics I & II: Monday, Nov. 4th; 10:30 a.m. - Noon** •

These courses will cover all the skills needed to navigate computers, like understanding hardware and saving/storing files.

• **Computer Basics III: Monday, Nov. 11th; 10:30 a.m. - Noon** •

Computer Basics III will cover the ins-and-outs of the internet, like how to sign up for an email account and how to use a search engine.

• **Resume Workshop: Tuesday, Nov. 12th; 3 - 5 p.m.** •

• **College & Trades Fair (at CLP East Liberty): Tuesday, Nov. 19th; 2 - 5 p.m.** •

• **Resume Workshop: Thursday, Nov. 21st; 11 a.m. - 1 p.m.** •

BLOOMFIELD

Free Repair Clinic

On Sunday, Nov. 17, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., "Fix It PGH" and "True T PGH" present a free repair clinic at True T Studios (4623 Liberty Ave.) in Bloomfield. Community members are encouraged to bring projects for repair, including bicycle repair, clothing & textile mending, small appliance repair, etc. Guest experts will be available to guide participants to real solutions. Tools and troubleshooting resources will be provided. For more details, email FixItPgh@gmail.com.

NOVEMBER 19 - TUESDAY

LARIMER

Public Needs Hearing

The City of Pittsburgh is currently preparing its FY 2020-2024 Five Year Consolidated Plan and FY 2020 Annual Action Plan (April 1, 2020-March 31, 2021). The City will apply for the following Federal funds: Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Home Investment Partnerships (HOME), Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG), and Housing Opportunities for Persons With AIDS (HOPWA) from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The City will hold a public needs hearing on Tuesday, Nov. 19, at 6 p.m. at the Kingsley Association Community Room (6435 Frankstown Ave.) in Larimer.

NOVEMBER 20 - WEDNESDAY

LAWRENCEVILLE

Free Lecture: The Churchill Cult

The Lawrenceville Historical Society will host author and historian Dr. Joseph Coohill, a Winston Churchill expert. Most of the stories, legends, and quotes

that surround the memory of Winston Churchill are not true, greatly misunderstood, or misinterpreted. Dr. Coohill will show how the popular worship of Churchill skews our understanding of the man, the war, and the complications and pitfalls of the "great man theory of history." This event takes place on Wednesday, Nov. 20, at 6:30 p.m. at the Carnegie Library (279 Fisk St.).

GARFIELD

Land Trust Committee Meeting

At 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday, Nov. 20, the Garfield Land Trust will hold a committee meeting at the Community Activity Center (113 N. Pacific Ave. at Dearborn St.). Read more, and become a member today, at GarfieldLandTrust.org. Contact 412-345-3831 or GarfieldLandTrust@gmail.com to learn more. ♦

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**NOV.
19**

**COMMUNITY
AMBASSADORS**

**STARTS
6PM
ENDS
8PM**

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Public Safety, Green Initiatives,
Community Events, and Volunteer Opportunities.

Meet at Primanti's on Penn Ave.



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Do you have questions?
Contact Nina at the BGC Office
5149 Penn Ave, PGH PA 15224
412-441-6950 x 17

'True T Studios' finds home for LGBTQ+, POC advocacy in Bloomfield

Interview by Sam Spearing Bloomfield Development Corporation

Bloomfield – In early June, True T Studios opened its first brick-and-mortar headquarters, right in the heart of the neighborhood at 4623 Liberty Ave. True T exists as a resource for the LGBTQ+ community, working to ensure safe spaces for arts, activism, and entertainment can thrive in Pittsburgh.

As a means of introducing the organization and its programming to Bloomfield, one of the founders, co-executive director John “Dezmanian” Easter III, recently expanded on True T’s mission and its journey to Liberty Ave. *[Editor’s Note: the following transcript, conducted by the Bloomfield Development Corporation (BDC) has been edited for length.]*

BDC: How would you describe the “origin story” of True T Studios as an organization?

Dezmanian Easter III (DE3): “True T Pittsburgh was created to address a lack of positive leadership - and the need for safe spaces, resources, and opportunities for LGBTQIA+ and POC (people of color) - in Pittsburgh. Duane “Naheen” Binion and I [John “Dezmanian” Easter III] founded True T at the ages of 23 and 20, respectively. We started this organization out of fun, from our living room couch - as a blog talk radio show for the community to voice unfiltered opinions, no matter how harsh the reality might be. From this radio show, we created a Facebook group that gained a social following with over 4,000 members. This group allowed people to unify, educate, and create positive change for marginalized individuals, including ourselves. It became a central place for the exchange of information and current happenings of our community.”

BDC: When did you begin elevating True T’s physical presence in the city?

DE3: “We turned this digital connection into a physical manifestation when we began to curate special events and social activities, and then created outreach programs to help provide services like HIV/STI testing and prevention. We attracted people from many different regions of the Northeast and Midwest...Fast-forwarding 10 years, True T has developed into a community organization that provides an abundance of different resources and services for local residents. We serve the ‘Underground Ballroom Scene,’ which is a safe haven for marginalized LGBTQIA+ and POC that have been kicked out of their homes or ostracized by society. Al-

though we serve this particular community, our crowd is still very diverse and composed of many different races and sexualities.”

BDC: What brought True T Studios to the Bloomfield neighborhood?

DE3: “This is an interesting story because we’d been searching for a space since the winter of 2017. We knew that we wanted to be located centrally, and near a bus line, but also in a neighborhood that felt safe - and maybe even one with a historical aspect. We viewed about 20 properties and, for every space that we were even remotely attracted to, we were basically turned down. People seemed to feel uncomfortable renting to us; we didn’t know if it was because we were black, gay, or both... We never thought Bloomfield would end up feeling like home, but our landlords are the most amazing group of people that we’ve met on this journey to find a space. We immediately felt comfortable, and it almost seemed too good to be true, because they fully support everything that we do.”

BDC: Now that you’re in Bloomfield, what are some of your favorite local spots?

DE3: “Bloomfield has a lot of great businesses. At first, we were nervous about how Liberty Ave. would accept us, but it’s only been a positive experience. We love Ms. Gina at Linea Verde. The Fudge Farm, which is a very unique, beautiful space, has amazing milkshakes and the owners are great people. Pizza Italia has great pizza - and the counter guy already knows my name and my favorite order - and Tessaro’s has some of the best employees. Honestly, we get lunch from Baby Loves Tacos at least twice a week.”

BDC: Any upcoming True T projects that you’d like to broadcast to Bulletin readers?

DE3: “Yes! True T hosts a free event on the last Friday of every month, from 7-11 p.m. in Bloomfield. It’s called “Artistic Integrity,” and it’s a monthly artist mixer that provides a platform to highlight local fashion designers, creators, and visual artists based in, and/or, around the Pittsburgh area. This monthly event is always free and open to the public. We also want people to know that they can rent our [4623 Liberty Ave.] space at an affordable rate. All of our information is available at truetpgh.com.” ♦

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