

the Bulletin

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*Serving Bloomfield, Friendship, Garfield,
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Coming soon: Penn Ave. performance venue & bar

By Joe Reuben *Bulletin contributor*

Garfield - Renovations to the former Toro's Tavern at 5128 Penn Avenue, which are soon to be completed, will permit the opening of a new, live performance & entertainment venue on the avenue.

Mary's Bar, the name chosen for the new establishment, is a four-year project undertaken by Laura Longenecker, who is originally from Portland, Oregon. She purchased the tavern building, together with a neighboring property at 5130 Penn, and now aims to get everything ready for an opening by Valentine's Day.

At a Dec. 9 meeting, Longenecker told a small group of community representatives that Mary's will offer nightly, cabaret-style entertainment on weekdays. This will consist mostly of movies and a variety of

See **Mary's Bar** | page 2



ABOVE: Guests partake in a blessing ahead of the Albright Thanksgiving Eve Dinner. On Wednesday, Nov. 24, the annual dinner provided more than 300 hot meals to local residents. Photo courtesy of Friends of Albright Church.



ABOVE: Representatives from Lawrenceville United join a coalition protesting Amazon's plans in Churchill, PA. For more on this story, look to page 12. Photo by Dana Dolney.

'Ukrainian Pit Bull' climbs world boxing ranks, settles down in Bloomfield

By Alan Guenther *Bulletin contributor*

Bloomfield – Oleh Dovhun (a.k.a. The Ukrainian Pit Bull) is a tough guy with a tender heart. The fighter, who grew up in Ukraine, has earned his nickname the hard way in the bloody, but thrilling world of professional boxing.

Now 27 years of age, and living a fairly quiet life on Gross Street, the Bloomfield-by-way-of-Ukraine boxer is currently ranked Number 6 in the world [by the World Boxing Association] in the Super Bantamweight category.

This designation means that he weighs

between 119 and 122 pounds when he steps into the ring to face some very nasty competition. Dovhun is undefeated, 13-0, and has never lost a round as a professional fighter.

He started fighting when he was only 10 years old, while living in Ukraine, where he fought an astounding 347 amateur fights and lived to tell about it. At the age of 16, when Dovhun sustained a broken nose in the ring and was supposed to go see a doctor, he fought in a tournament instead.

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*RACIAL DISPARITY COMPOUNDS
COVID RISK IN PITTSBURGH*

*JIM ROGERS' FAMILY SEEKS
ANSWERS FROM PGH POLICE*

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live performances, which she said will be “low-key.” Musical acts that feature bands, which are more likely to be louder, will be reserved for the weekends.

Occupancy of the space will be limited to no more than 65 persons at any given time. Mary's Bar will feature a limited menu of food options, along with alcoholic beverages, for patrons to consume. Guests will be welcome to order food from local restaurants and have it delivered to the bar.

Longenecker said the establishment will be open from 4 p.m. to 2 a.m., Mondays through Saturdays, with all live shows ending at midnight. The one exception to this schedule will be on Sundays, when Longenecker plans to open for a few hours of brunch service. She also intends to have security personnel stationed at the front door to check guests as they enter the premises, and said that security cameras will be mounted at the front and rear exteriors, as well as inside the establishment.

Work has been done to contain noise that will be generated from the bar's operations, Longenecker said; a stage was constructed closer to the center of the space, rather than near the front or rear entrance,

and a window was bricked up at the rear of the structure. In addition, an enclosed front vestibule should help to check sound coming out onto Penn Avenue, she said. Dumpsters will be located inside the adjoining property at 5130 Penn, once the home of Bartlett Products.

Several concerns were raised during the meeting by representatives from the Friendship Community Group (FCG) and the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation (BGC). One was in relation to the bar's

rear entrance on Coral Street, which runs alongside the campus for the Waldorf School and separates the Friendship residential area from the commercial district. Longenecker said the rear entrance will only be used by staff or visitors in wheelchairs. She promised that all other patrons will be asked to enter from Penn.

After the meeting on Dec. 9, some community members [who live or work in the district] expressed concern about Mary's Bar managing patrons outside the main

entrance on Penn Avenue. They fear that shows attracting 100 or more guests could result in people congregating in front of the establishment while waiting for the next show to begin.

This has been a problem, in the same block of Penn, with the Mr. Roboto Project - an under-21, no-alcohol venue that hosts live performances. The BGC serves as the landlord for Roboto, and has had to endure periodic complaints from business owners and residents about youths crowding in front of neighboring storefronts and leaving trash on the street, according to the BGC's executive director, Rick Swartz.

“Mary's will be catering to an older crowd [than Roboto], so the behavior of patrons will hopefully be different than what you might expect from 19- or 20-year olds,” Swartz told *The Bulletin* recently. “The folks at Mister Roboto have pledged to keep things under control. But it's not always easy to control a situation if people are intent on acting like fools.”

Longenecker maintains that Mary's Bar will be respectful of, and responsive to, its avenue neighbors' needs. Look to next month's *Bulletin* for more info on the grand opening of Mary's Bar. ♦

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Proposal to build four new homes in Garfield finds cool response

By Joe Reuben *Bulletin contributor*

Garfield - As reported in the December 2021 edition of *The Bulletin*, a Miami, FLA-based developer - intent on building four new homes in the 500 block of N. Aiken Avenue - met with neighbors at a city-sponsored meeting on Dec. 2. If the representatives from Split Rock Real Estate Partners were hoping to be welcomed with open arms, they most likely felt somewhat disappointed after the meeting adjourned.

The project, as envisioned, would see the construction of four single-family, split-entry homes priced to sell for \$490,000 each, according to Brytten Cook, a local representative for Split Rock. She told the eight community members on the call that Split Rock has not done residential developments as a rule, but that it wanted to see what it could do in a neighborhood like Garfield, which Cook said has become a “more appealing neighborhood” in which to invest in recent years. Each of the homes would have 3 bedrooms and 2 baths, with a deck out front.

To gain zoning approval for the development, Split Rock is asking the city to waive certain “sideyard” setbacks and “minimum lot area” requirements for the dwellings. Only the city’s zoning board can provide these waivers (known as “variances”) after a public hearing is held.

Split Rock purchased three side-by-side lots for the project earlier in 2021, demolished a two-story commercial/residential building this summer at the corner of N. Aiken and Cornwall St., and recently did some drilling to fill subterranean voids - which date all the way back to when Garfield was a site for deep-pit coal mining. Although Cook did not mention it during the meeting, it is believed that her partners have invested close to \$250,000 in the project to date.

Because of the steepness of that particular block of N. Aiken Avenue, Split Rock has designed the front entrances and garages for the new homes to face Elora Way, an alley behind the site. Some residents feel that this alleyway cannot support more vehicular traffic in its present condition. A. J. Monsma, a N. Aiken Ave. resident, asked if the city could possibly improve and even widen the right-of-way, if the project were approved. Phillip Wu, the city planner who organized the meeting, said he would need to research that question further.

Peg Wilson, whose family home adjoins the site, observed that the orientation of the homes towards the alley also “creates the impression that [the new homes are] turning their back on the rest of the neighborhood.” Cook responded that this was never Split Rock’s intention, but that connecting the front entrances of the homes to N. Aiken would involve considerable [read: costly] sitework.

Another meeting participant, Rev. Chad Collins, the pastor at Valley View Presbyterian Church (located at N. Aiken and Black St.), questioned why homes as expensive as these were being built in the neighborhood. The reverend cited an older home nearby that he said recently sold for a price in the mid-\$300,000’s.

“We thought this [purchase price] was out-of-the-ordinary for Garfield, and it caught a lot of us by surprise,” he said, “and now these new homes would cost \$150,000 above that.” The neighborhood’s diversity, “which we’ve all come to treasure,” Rev. Collins continued, “will gradually be lost as more developments like these come to Garfield.”

While there could be last-minute changes to the project before it heads to the zoning board for a hearing, several residents like Monsma and Wilson maintain that they will oppose the granting of any variances and, if necessary, the approval of a new subdivision plan by the city Planning Commission. ♦

BELOW: Elevation drawings of four new homes, each facing N. Aiken Avenue, illustrated by an architectural project design. Graphic courtesy of Split Rock Real Estate Partners.



the Bulletin

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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, and are open to the public. Meetings are currently being conducted online via Zoom; email Nina@Bloomfield-Garfield.org for more details.

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

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Thank You!

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BGC bids farewell to employment specialist Brendan Duckett

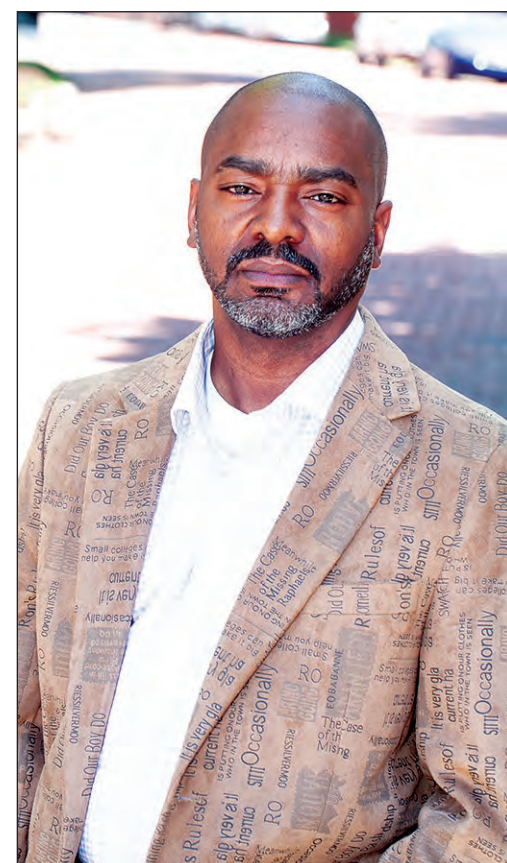
A Message from the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation

Garfield - On Friday, Dec. 10, Brendan Duckett finished his last day of work as Employment Specialist with the East-side Neighborhood Employment Center (ENEC). He has moved on to pursue other professional ventures.

Whether you called him Brendan, “B,” “Bren,” or “Mr. B,” Duckett personified a good neighbor by pouring his energy and care into his ENEC duties for the better part of two years.

We here at the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation (BGC) would certainly not be where we are today without him. On behalf of the entire BGC and ENEC team, as well as our neighbors, we would like to thank Duckett for his service and dedication to the ENEC, and wish him well in his future endeavors.

Paris Wright, who has lived in the Garfield area for almost 20 years [and has been on staff with the BGC since 2018], is taking the reins at the ENEC. He shares Duckett’s zeal for the employment center, as well as the community it serves. ♦



ABOVE: BGC's outgoing employment specialist Brendan Duckett. Photo by John Colombo.

Then & now: Black music in Pittsburgh

By **Destiny Dixon** *The Northside Chronicle*

Pittsburgh - Every great musician gets their start somewhere. Here in Pittsburgh, classical musicians “fostered the birth of American music” [as local website Pittsburgh Music History put it], and Wiz Khalifa and Mac Miller booked small gigs around the city before launching their famous careers.

It’s to be expected, then, that many talented and passionate entertainers would emerge from the Iron City and catapult to stardom, going on to become household names known worldwide for their charisma, uniqueness, and nerve.

These examples, though, didn’t just come around recently. Pittsburgh has been known as the hometown of greats since the 1950s, when jazz and doo-wop sounds were becoming popular.

Pittsburgh on the map

During the early 1960s, a gifted jazz drummer by the name of Roger Humphries helped put Pittsburgh on the map, musically speaking, with his appearance on Horace Silver’s “Song for My Father.” He toured Europe with the band twice and later played with Grant Green, Stanley Turrentine, Shirley Scott, Dizzy Gillespie, and Ray Charles.

Humphries eventually went on to lead his own band, RH Factor, during the 1970s and became a teacher at the Pittsburgh Creative and Performing Arts School (CAPA) and the University of Pittsburgh.

Humphries, who was named the Northside’s 2019 Mardi Gras King, left the City of Bridges to pursue his career, and brought a “New York vibe” back with him. He returned home with an increased understanding of music and the industry and wanted to teach his findings to young and passionate students eager to progress in the music world.

The New York City connection

From a musical standpoint, New York City and Pittsburgh have a connecting chain for inspiration, ideas, and growth for many artists trying to make it big. If you fast forward a few decades from Humphries’ heyday, hip-hop and R&B are now all the rage - not only in Pittsburgh and the Northside, but also in many major cities across the country.

The “Golden Era” of hip-hop is deemed to have taken place between the late 1980s and early 1990s, and industry legend, activist, and Northside resident Paradise Gray experienced all of it firsthand.

After spending time in North Carolina, Gray moved quickly around New York City, from the Bronx to Brooklyn, and then finally settled in Pittsburgh in 1992.

He got his start in the industry as a promoter and emcee at New York City’s Latin Quarter club during the “Golden Era,” and met and mentored many upcoming artists who went on to become legends. Gray has produced nine albums on major labels [including Sony]; he has countless wisdom and insight to give on the industry as a whole.

“Just for Paradise to even know your name was a huge deal,” said MC Lyte in Netflix’s docuseries, “Hip-Hop Evolution.”

Gray explained how it’s different for every person in the industry - who possesses a “star quality” that makes them a contender - to become one of the greats. He’s seen this a lot in the Pittsburgh music scene.

“It’s different for a DJ, a rapper, a dancer, and graphic artists. There are different paths, but if there’s one thing they all have in common it’s putting the work in, taking it seriously at a young age, making your mind up that this is what you want to do, and you commit to putting the time in - to do it the best. You understand the history of what you’re dealing with,” he said. “Nowadays, you can make something and put it on the internet, have no clue what you’re doing, and pop!”

BELOW: *1Hood Media’s Paradise Gray, a steady contributor to the “Golden Era” of hip-hop, helped shepherd the careers of local legends like Mac Miller. Photo by Emma Alaquiva.*



“I would say that the Pittsburgh area has so much of a concentration of incredible, brilliant artists of all ages. It’s amazing,” Gray stated. “I wish that the artists here could see themselves as I see them.”

Mentoring Mac Miller

During Gray’s time in Pittsburgh, he has worked [intently] with young artists as they came up in the industry, including the late Mac Miller.

“I’ve mentored thousands of artists, but Mac... he was a quiet guy. Always intelligent, humble, a real nice guy. I really appreciated him as a person and a human being, as well as admiring him as an artist. He did what I suggested that older-school artists did: He put the work in.”

The world didn’t know Mac Miller until he was a VIP, but Gray knew him when he was around 15 years old. Gray called Mac a “student of rappers.”

“... He memorized songs dating all the way back to the Golden Era and beyond, and he took it seriously... he was a very talented and unique individual.”

Gray explained his take on how New York City and Pittsburgh compare music-wise: While the Latin Quarter club in New York offered a place for new and upcoming artists to begin shooting their shot at becoming well known among the community, here in Pittsburgh, there was the more recent but now defunct Shadow Lounge.

“The Shadow Lounge really gave artists like Wiz Khalifa, Mac Miller, Jasiri X, Formu-

- continued on next page -

Correction: PGH Glass Center expansion

A Message from The Bulletin

Last month, we reported on the Pittsburgh Glass Center’s (PGC) plans to expand its facility (5472 Penn Ave.) in Garfield. Unfortunately, some of the reporting was inaccurate, so we’d like to set the record straight.

The new facility’s third floor will not, in fact, cover the entire complex. The third-floor office addition on PGC’s current roof will only reach the edge of the property border between 106 & 108 S. Fairmount Ave. The roof’s back edge will remain 51 feet away from Clarendon Place. Apologies to PGC - and thanks for understanding.



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- continued from previous page -

la412, and many others that opportunity to have a safe space [for] fellowship and to collaborate,” Gray said.

However, Gray points out some important notes that he feels have held Pittsburgh back from being a launching pad for new artists to become one with their career and passions. Gray stressed how unfortunate it is that, for an artist to make it in the real world, they would have to leave Pittsburgh because of its lack of essentials to make an entertainment industry thrive.

What’s holding Pittsburgh back

Gray said he thinks it’s time for a renaissance in Pittsburgh.

“If you want to know the difference between Pittsburgh and New York, New York is the hub of media and entertainment for the whole entire world. There’s nothing that can compare to that, you know? Not even Chicago or L.A. It used to be a big deal if you could get your song played on WAMO, but it’s extremely difficult to break into the local market here in Pittsburgh because of the [lack of] entertainment industry here.”

Gray commended the Pittsburgh City Paper for their coverage, but said there aren’t enough newspapers that cover hip-hop; radio stations, too, have diminished.

“New York City has the whole entire industry: the news channels, big radio stations, powerful media outlets... all the eyes are on New York. Not only does New York have

the big fish, but they got the small fish to feed off of...Pittsburgh is a different story.

“While you will have breakout artists like Wiz, Mac, Mel-Man, and Sam Sneed, what you don’t find is a bunch of successful independent record labels, managers, stylists, and all the other side things that make an industry,” Gray said.

“Also, in New York, there is a clear understanding that today’s intern is tomorrow’s CEO. There are opportunities that actually exist there. Where in Pittsburgh, nobody respects you unless you’re from out-of-town, you have a whole lot of money, and people know about it, which is stupid in today’s atmosphere...We need to be able to develop, market, promote, and support our artists,” Gray explained.

Hip-hop as a safe space

There’s more than just a lack of entertainment industry essentials within a city, though, that can have an impact on hip-hop and its legacy. Historical incidents of racial prejudice and discrimination toward African Americans have motivated a wide array of entertainers and artists to instill messages of social justice reform - specifically associated with the Black experience - within their music. Hip-hop offers a way for musicians to come together as a community in a safe space designed to encourage them to freely express themselves and their political opinions.

Since its development in the early 1970s, hip-hop has long been tied to stoking civil discourse and speaking out against social injustice - including topics like the war on drugs, police brutality, mass incarceration, misogyny, and poverty. These messages are still present in song lyrics today.

Gray is one of the founders of X-Clan, a hip-hop group from Brooklyn, NY, that is known for its Afrocentrism and assertive activism. Part of the Blackwatch Movement, the band aims to promote Black pride and self-awareness.

“We used hip-hop to voice an awareness about racism and violence because, in our community, we’re faced with a ‘Catch-22.’ We’re, unfortunately, at war with the cops & robbers and, most of the time, we can’t tell the difference between who is who.”

“Hip-hop developed as a cultural entity from elements that existed for hundreds of years predating hip-hop: deejaying, [break dancing], graphic art, and rapping... The sociopolitical, and economic pressures of the South Bronx incubated those ingredients into the culture we call hip-hop,” Gray said. “In the beginning, we used hip-hop to escape the unfortunate realities of our community. As time went on, record labels and the music and entertainment industry figured out that they could make the most money when [capitalizing] on the pain and suffering of the artist. They could market and promote that: the good, the bad, and the ugly...”

Gray went on to emphasize how these messages and stories of sex, drugs, and violence sell in America because, as he said, the country knows exactly how to market and promote them: by taking the most negative, raw, and carnal instincts that exist in hip-hop culture.

Today, Gray continues his work guiding youths and liberating communities with art, education, and social justice via Pittsburgh’s 1Hood Media. Gray’s latest project, the Universal Hip Hop Museum, is based in New York City’s Bronx borough.

This story is published in partnership with the Pittsburgh Community Newspaper Network (PCNN). It was originally printed in The Northside Chronicle, the hyperlocal community newspaper of Pittsburgh’s historic Northside. ♦

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Ukrainian Pit Bull *continued from page 1*

In order to win the tournament, he had to box in four fights with a broken nose. He won them all. The cartilage in his nose soon got infected, so he decided to get the cartilage removed.

"Now, I have boxer's nose," he said, laughing, in his Ukrainian accent.

When Dovhun was 17, after his nose healed, something happened that would change his life forever. He met Ruslana - a quiet, blond-haired woman with a shy smile - in his hometown of Stebnyk in western Ukraine, near the Polish border.

She was so shy that they waited nine months before going out on a first date. All the while, Dovhun said, he knew she was "the one," the love of his life. On their first date, while walking to a movie theater, they made plans that he would be world champion one day, and that she would be at his side. He fought for the next six years, fueled both by his passion for boxing and his love for Ruslana.

And then, due to complicated Visa issues, he lost her for almost two years. Dovhun was just 23 years old when he had to make the journey to America alone. In an interview with the *The Bulletin*, the fighter said he knew only one word of English when he arrived, and that word was: "Okay."

Everything else a mystery in this strange new world, he began to learn English by watching television.

"I was depressed," Dovhun said. "Ten times, I thought of giving it all up and going back home."

Finally, after a prolonged absence, he

BELOW: Ruslana (right) delivers a serious "love tap" to her husband, Oleh Dovhun. Photo by Alan Guenther.



was able to reunite with Ruslana in Italy. They returned to their native Ukraine and got married in a small civil ceremony on Jan. 25, 2020. There was no time to honeymoon, though, thanks to the rigors of boxing.

Three days after his wedding, Dovhun returned to America for an upcoming bout. Ruslana was supposed to follow, but COVID had other ideas. Travel restrictions prevented her from joining Oleh. For nine months, he lost her again.

Mike McSorley, Oleh's manager and owner of the Conn-Greb Boxing Club, picks up the story from there.

"Here's a guy who came over, left his family, spoke no English, and left the love of his life," McSorley said. "I think the transition to professional boxing and a whole new culture, language, and people was very difficult for him at first."

"I went through a divorce during this time," he noted. "And I think that the difficulties that we were going through together kind of empowered us in some ways."

Isolated, trapped by COVID, and suffering through emotional trauma, the two escaped their troubles via intense workouts.

"To me, the gym is a very sacred place," McSorley said. "It was a way for us to get away from the mental anguish we were going through in our personal lives. We could just work out and focus."

The isolation apparently helped Dovhun concentrate not only on boxing, but also on his relationship with Ruslana.

"That was a period where their separation from each other probably made the relationship that much stronger," McSorley said. "A lot of couples would have faltered with that distance, and the lapse in time in seeing each other. He talked about her frequently. It really is a great love story."

For her part, Ruslana, who has been in the country for less than a year and still struggles to express herself in English, says that she traveled halfway around the world to be Dovhun's wife.

"I have love for him. Big love," she said.

Ruslana has trouble watching his fights because it pains her to see him take each hit.

"I believe in him. He is best," she said. "But it is so hard to watch."

McSorley believes Dovhun is perhaps two fights away from winning the world championship. He hopes to schedule a fight for late February in New York City.

For his last bout, in November, Dovhun was paid \$5,000, mostly by sponsors. If he wins the world title, he could earn \$100,000 or more if the fight is picked up by television, McSorley said.

Oleh Dovhun is close to achieving the dream he has followed for the last 17 years: to become the world champion.

"He has all the tools, all the intangibles," McSorley said. "He has the talent, the mental toughness; he is a next-level fighter. I think he can make Pittsburgh very proud, very quickly." ♦



ABOVE: Oleh Dovhun (a.k.a. The Ukrainian Pit Bull) grew up fighting in Ukraine. The boxer is now a Bloomfield resident, and also ranked #6 in the world. Photo by Alan Guenther.

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Assemble: 2022 program update

A Message from Assemble



ABOVE: Kids take a break from making cool stuff at Assemble (4824 Penn Ave.) in Garfield. Photo courtesy of Assemble.

Garfield - Students are encouraged to join Assemble (4824 Penn Ave.) in 2022 for in-house day camp programs. Kids can reclaim Black history on MLK day with lessons from our Afro-Futurism art curriculum on Monday, Jan. 17. This camp is for grades 1st-3rd. Later in the month, we will host sewing expert Jazmerie Bates, the founder of Kin of Duncan dog boutique, who will demonstrate basic fiber art skills in "Sewing: 101." This camp, held on Jan. 31, is for grades 3rd-5th.

Get energized on Friday, Feb. 1 with "What Glows + Goes" day camp [designed for 1st-3rd graders] with special guests from Google. Assemble also has regularly scheduled weekly programs like Afterschool on Mondays-Thursdays (4-6 p.m.) and Saturday Crafternoons (1-3 p.m.).

In addition, we are reopening applications for our paid teen program "Hack the Future." Please visit assemblepgh.org for more information. ♦



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City makes progress on Penn Circle two-way conversion project

A Message from the City of Pittsburgh

East Liberty - On Dec. 15, Mayor William Peduto and the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh (URA) announced that progress is being made on the Penn Circle Two-Way Conversion Project.

The project will convert Station and Euclid Streets from one-way traffic into two-way, multi-modal neighborhood-scale streets. Improvements to the roadways include new signals, bike lanes, curb bump-outs and other traffic-calming measures to increase pedestrian and bike safety.

In November, the URA selected Michael Baker International for construction management and inspection services. Michael Baker recently completed a similar two-way conversion of Allegheny Center in the Northside.

"We can never fully repair the damage done and legacy created by urban renewal projects of the past, but we do have a responsibility to remediate where we can," URA Executive Director Greg Flisram said. "Converting this ring road back to a traditional urban street grid will reconnect the neighborhood for the people who live there, not just those that traverse it."

In partnership with Mackin Engineering and Michael Baker, the URA will issue a bid release for construction services in mid-January. Only PennDOT pre-qualified contractors are eligible for the project; bids will remain open for 4-5 weeks.

Once a construction firm has been selected, work is scheduled to begin in the spring of 2022. ♦



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- Akelea Tillman, ENEC Neighbor

Neighborhood FOCUS

Village Collab: East Liberty designates new community org

By Elizabeth Sensky East Liberty Development, Inc.

East Liberty – Over the last 20 years, East Liberty Development, Inc. (ELDI) has been the steward of plans originally shaped by the neighborhood’s long-term residents in the late 90s. Those residents laid out a collective dream of transforming East Liberty from a place of disinvestment and blight into a diverse neighborhood with a wealth of opportunities and amenities. According to ELDI, those community plans are now nearing completion.

“After decades of hard work from countless community partners, East Liberty has entered a new phase,” Skip Schwab, ELDI’s deputy director, said. “It has been a challenging and rewarding road, and we are grateful for all the lessons we have learned along the way. Now, we believe it is time for us to expand our scope.”

The organization is focusing its energy on making more homes in the area available for affordable homeownership, as well as to helping other Pittsburgh neighborhoods realize their own community plans. To facilitate this, ELDI will be transitioning some of its community planning and development duties to a new organization, the “Village Collaborative of East Liberty.”

The Village Collaborative was founded in 2018 by representatives from three East Liberty churches (Pentecostal Temple Church of God in Christ, Rodman Street Missionary Baptist Church, and Kingdom Light Ministries International) with sup-

BELOW: Pastor Darryl Canady, president of the Village Collaborative of East Liberty, and senior pastor at Rodman Street Missionary Baptist Church. Photo courtesy of ELDI.



‘We wanted to join forces with the city to help people who have been displaced, people who are voiceless, and those who do not have a seat at the table.’

- Pastor Darryl Canady, president of the Village Collaborative of East Liberty, senior pastor at Rodman Street Missionary Baptist Church

port from the HELP Initiative, a multi-stakeholder group advocating for mixed-use, resident-driven development in the East End.

“In the African American community, in particular, the church plays a major role. That’s why we wanted to join forces with the city to help people who have been displaced, people who are voiceless, and those who do not have a seat at the table,” said Pastor Darryl Canady, president of the Village Collaborative of East Liberty and senior pastor at Rodman Street Missionary Baptist Church.

As of November 2021, the Village Collaborative is East Liberty’s Registered Community Organization (RCO). RCOs are an official designation granted by the City of Pittsburgh that ensures community groups’ formal roles in current development projects and planning processes.

Schwab noted that this does not mean ELDI is going anywhere, saying staffers will still be as busy as ever serving the needs of East Liberty. For the moment, the two organizations will be working closely together as ELDI mentors the Village Collaborative on community development.

Over time, the Village Collaborative will assume the duties of East Liberty’s Community Planning Committee: counseling developers, businesses, and individuals who want to move into the neighborhood and ensuring their plans are in line with the community’s vision. Village will also create strategic community planning documents in partnership with residents, community groups, and the business community to outline new visions for the neighborhood.

“ELDI has made a major impact,” Canady said. “Maelene and her staff have worked some miracles, taking East Liberty from blight to where it is today. We feel that our work will supplement theirs.” ♦



BELOW: BGC Board Member Robert Lincoln lends a hand to the coat drive effort on Saturday, Dec. 18. Photo by Jason Sauer.



ABOVE: Volunteers sort through donated goods in order to connect local families with holiday supplies on Saturday, Dec. 18. Photo by Jason Sauer.

Community groups celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. Day in city's East End

By Nina Gibbs Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation

East End - Join your East End neighbors on Monday, Jan. 17, for a day of activities celebrating Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

Hosted in collaboration with the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation, Kelly Strayhorn Theater, BOOM Concepts, and the Pittsburgh Glass Center, the event welcomes guests to enjoy activities independently, or check things out - together, virtually - across all social channels.

From Noon - 4 p.m., participants may drop off winter accessory donations at the Community Activity Center (113 N. Pacific Ave.), and then grab some trash bags. While walking to the Pittsburgh Glass Center, everyone is encouraged to clean up litter along the avenue.

Once they drop off trash bags at the Pittsburgh Glass center (10 a.m. - 4 p.m.), participants can learn about glass - and the importance that teamwork plays in the creative process - with free Glassblowing and Flame-working demonstrations.

Participate in activities, explore the gallery, and celebrate local artists with our current exhibition, "Gathered Locally." Bring a book to donate, or take a book from our Free Little Library, and then grab a fresh trash bag and head down to the next stop.

From Noon - 4 p.m., the Kelly Strayhorn Theater (5941 Penn Ave.) will host "Give Me Liberty: East Liberty Celebrates MLK Day" performances and craft activities.

Partners include BOOM Concepts, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Pittsburgh, the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation, Creative Learning Network, The Alloy School, and Women of Visions.

Please visit kelly-strayhorn.org to learn more. ♦



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EMERGENCY



Data proves what city's Black leaders already knew: Racial disparities compound COVID risk

By Christine Spolar *Kaiser Health News*

Pittsburgh - The ferocity of the COVID-19 pandemic did what Black Pittsburgh — communities that make up a quarter of the city's population — thought impossible. It shook the norms.

Black researchers, medical professionals and allies knew that people of color, even before COVID, experienced bias in public health policy. As the deadly virus emerged, data analysts from Carnegie Mellon and the University of Pittsburgh, foundation directors, epidemiologists and others pooled their talents to configure databases from unwieldy state data to chart COVID cases.

Their work documented yet another life-threatening disparity between white and Black Pittsburgh: People of color were at higher risk of catching the deadly virus and at higher risk of severe disease and death from that infection. More than 100 weeks after advocates began pinging and ringing one another to warn of the virus' spread, these volunteers are the backbone of the Black Equity Coalition, a grassroots collaboration that scrapes government data and shares community health intel.

About a dozen members of its data team of 60 meet twice weekly to study hospitalization rates and employment statistics. Social media advisers turned health equity into a buzzy online effort, with videos and weekly Facebook town halls, to encourage vaccinations. Local ministries are consulted, and volunteers take surveys at pop-up clinics, sponsored by other groups, at barbershops and hair salons. Elected lawmakers seek its counsel.

"We came together because we were concerned about saving lives," said Tiffany Gary-Webb, associate dean for diversity and inclusion at the University of Pittsburgh, who oversees the data effort. "It evolved, with us realizing we can do more than address COVID."

COVID ravaged communities across the United States — more than 787,000 Americans have died, including Colin Powell, the first Black secretary of state and a decorated Army general — and laid bare how marginalized populations lose out in the scrum for public health dollars and specific populations were left vulnerable.

Months before the pandemic began, the Rev. Ricky Burgess led the Pittsburgh City Council to declare racism a public health crisis.

"Institutional racism is for real," the councilman said in a recent interview. "You are talking about generational disproportional investment and generational disproportional treatment. And it impacts all that you see."

The COVID pandemic proved how structural inequities have been missed or ignored, Burgess said.

"I've lost friends, family and a lot of church members. My son had COVID. For me it's personal," he said. "I knew immediately it would have a disproportionate effect."

In 2020, COVID reduced overall U.S. life expectancy by 1.5 years, according to the National Center for Health Statistics. Black and Hispanic people fared the worst, losing more than three years in life expectancy. White people saw a 1.2-year drop.

Using county data, the Black Equity researchers found a sobering racial gap in the Pittsburgh area: Black residents of Allegheny County saw disproportionate hospitalization rates — and were more likely to land in the ICU or on a ventilator — in the pandemic. Weekly hospitalization rates were higher during surges of infection in April, July and December 2020 and again in March and October 2021. Deaths, too, were disproportionate but fluctuated after December 2020.

For much of the pandemic, death rates were higher for African Americans than for other racial groups, the coalition said.

'It's all a shade of bad'

Kellie Ware has long considered health inequity a deadly problem. She graduated from Pittsburgh public schools, left for law school in Boston, and months before COVID began its global assault she was working in her hometown mayor's office as an equity and diversity policy analyst. Ware was at her desk in late 2019 when her phone started ringing. A damning report, compiled by university sociologists and the city's gender

commission, had yet again detailed glaring disparities.

The blandly titled report, "Pittsburgh's Inequality Across Gender and Race," jolted emotions in the city of 303,000 people — and underscored how health disparities track with income.

Among the findings: Black people in Pittsburgh earned far less than their white neighbors and suffered far worse from disease. For every dollar white men earned, the report found, Black women earned 54 cents, making them five times as likely to live in poverty as white men.

With notably higher cardiovascular disease and cancer rates, Black residents' life expectancy was about eight years less than white Pittsburghers'.

The report sparked a furor, which Ware met with perspective shaped over years away from the former steel town. "The report was factual," Ware said, "but I know this: There's not a ton of places where it's great to be a Black woman. Those earnings? It's 54 cents to a dollar for women in Pittsburgh. It's 68 cents nationally. It's all a shade of bad."

The first signs of the pandemic supercharged Ware and others. As COVID devastated New York in March 2020, Karen Abrams, a program officer at the Heinz Endow-

- continued on next page -

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- continued from previous page -

ments, a foundation in Pittsburgh that spends \$70 million a year on community programs, began connecting the dots in texts and calls with nonprofits, business owners and university researchers.

COVID spread quickly in dense multi-generational households and in Black neighborhoods in Chicago, Washington, New Orleans and Detroit. Abrams was among the advocates in Pennsylvania who watched county and state health systems race to prepare and who feared that Black residents would be underserved.

In Philadelphia, early on in the pandemic, volunteer doctors in mobile units began distributing protective equipment and COVID tests in Black neighborhoods.

In Pittsburgh, Abrams asked tech-minded allies to document the reality of COVID infection in Pittsburgh. "We intuitively knew what was happening," she said. "But without that data, we couldn't target our attention and know who needed the help most."

Within days, volunteers were on daylong rounds of video calls and appealing to county and state bureaucrats for more race-based statistics to bolster their research.

Fred Brown, president of the nonprofit Forbes Funds, and Mark Lewis, who heads the Poise Foundation, were stalwarts of a "huddle," a core of longtime advocates who eventually founded the coalition.

Brown emphasized pulling labor statistics to show that the essential workers keeping the city running — among them nursing homes aides and home care staff — were overwhelmingly Black or Latino.

Mapping COVID testing centers and analyzing data proved sobering, he said. It turned out that the people most likely to be tested lived in Pittsburgh's predominately white neighborhoods.

Largely employed in tech, academia and finance, they could easily adapt to lockdowns. They had round-the-clock internet at home and could afford food deliveries to limit the chance of infection. Later, they could access vaccines quicker.

"The communities that had the most tests were the affluent ones," Brown said. And those with the fewest "were the most resilient, the people who had to go out there and work."

Lewis, a certified public accountant who spent years as a corporate auditor, focused on standards. County and state health professionals worked mightily to control the spread of COVID but didn't always gather data to ensure fairness in distribution, he said.

"We realized that, as testing was done, it was not being recorded by race," Lewis said. "Why? A lot of the issue was — at the state and the local level — there was no requirement to collect it."

Gary-Webb said researchers had a sense of where the inequities would be found because they knew the neighborhoods. They first layered in percentages of Black families in poverty as well as data on the locations of federally qualified health centers to advise health authorities on where and when to increase testing.

University and nonprofit researchers found anomalies as they worked. For instance, race was noted on some testing data, with patients designated as Black, white or, inexplicably, unknown. The "unknowns" were a significant percentage. So researchers began layering additional census, labor and ZIP code data, to identify neighborhoods, even streets, at risk.

The ZIP code data took months to shake loose from state databases, largely because government software was slow in the fast-moving pandemic and government data was not updated regularly or formatted in ways that could be easily shared. Their efforts paid off: The group was able to winnow down Allegheny County records that omit race to 12% of positive COVID cases; 37% of statewide records are missing race details, the coalition reported.

Robert Gradeck, who runs the Western Pennsylvania Regional Data Center, a data collaborative managed by the University of Pittsburgh, said COVID should play a lasting role in improving public health reporting. "We kept thinking: What can we learn from this?" Gradeck said. "It's not that you can't answer questions. But you can answer only part of them."

Among the top recommendations to health authorities: adopt software practices to ensure that race and other demographic data must be entered into electronic records. And then refine how to share data among counties, states, research institutions and the public. The coalition attracted support in monthly calls with state Health Secretary Rachel Levine, recently sworn in as a four-star admiral in charge of the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps, which responds to health crises on behalf of the federal government.

"I thought what they did was critically important," Levine said, noting that officials recognized the coalition's research as revelatory. With "a diverse group of professionals, they were able to use and collect data in a very effective way."

See **Racial Disparities** | page 14

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Regional coalition demands Amazon accountability

By Helen Gerhardt *Lawrenceville United*

Perspective/Lawrenceville - Since learning, almost a year ago, about Amazon’s plans for a last-mile delivery station at the former Sears Outlet on 51st Street, Lawrenceville United (LU) has been organizing local residents to voice their concerns about the proposal.

Neighbors are worried about Amazon’s mistreatment of employees, its disregard for community plans, and the environmental impact of its operations on local mobility, air quality, and the small business community in Lawrenceville.

Many of these concerns are shared by other communities in southwestern PA. On Monday, Dec. 6, representatives from LU stood shoulder-to-shoulder with an organizational coalition from across the Pittsburgh region at a press conference in Churchill, PA.

They stood not only to support residents protesting an Amazon facility proposal in Churchill, but also to support coalition demands for responsible development by all corporations and developers across Allegheny County, including:

- *Stable, family-sustaining jobs with health care benefits, vacation time, and paid sick leave, with protections for union organizing without interference or harassment.*
- *Racial and gender equity in hiring practices, advancement, accessibility accommodations, and access assistance for public transit, child care, and jobsite training.*
- *Equitable engagement centered on community plans, values, and priorities; reinvestments beyond paying fair share taxes; local hiring commitments; supporting public infrastructure and public transit; refusing any work with ICE.*
- *Exceeding city, county, and state ordinances on environmental & ecological preservation, and workplace & safety regulations.*

At the press conference, Lawrenceville resident Dr. Emily Howe shared her research on the working conditions at Amazon facilities: “Amazon touts the number of people they employ and their starting wages. But, data from their existing facilities tells us that Amazon is far more concerned with their bottom line than the well-being of their warehouse employees...Amazon’s turnover rate is extremely high, about 150% a year

according to the New York Times, even before the pandemic. This sounds like the exact opposite of providing opportunities for stable employment and professional growth.”

Simon Huntly, CEO of Lawrenceville-based Harvie Farms - a company that delivers fresh, local farm produce to over 2,000 households across the region - asserted that Amazon could indeed behave in more responsible ways. He said that business can be done differently, and that companies can support communities, employees, and producers in a mutually beneficial way.

“In contrast, Amazon leaves small businesses, workers, and communities behind. If Amazon wants to change its business practices to truly enrich the place we all call home, then they are welcome to,” Huntley said. “Until then, we hope our elected officials will make the choice that benefits all of us.”

On Tuesday, Dec. 21, following two hours of public comment, with only one resident speaking in support, the Churchill Borough Council voted [5 to 2] in favor of the Amazon development proposal. The New Year presents an old challenge for local residents seeking to hold corporations, and elected officials, accountable to coalition-building and responsible development across all neighborhoods.

To learn how to join or support this coalition for responsible development, please contact LU at 412-802-7220 or info@lunited.org. ♦

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

Real Estate Sales for the month of October 2021

Compiled by Lillian Denhardt, Residential Realtor

Bloomfield

Alistair Gorst to Do Nascimento Thiago & Ariane Bruder at 431 Taylor St. for \$301,000.

Coleen C Powell to Ross Alexander Songer at 343 Pearl St. for \$260,000.

Coral Row LLC to Douglas Graham & Gina Marie Powell at 5135 Coral St. for \$288,000.

Ct Pacific LLC to Ciro 1975 LLC at 224 S. Pacific Ave. for \$961,000.

D Joseph & Joan P Deandrea to Ridge Avenue Holdings LLC at 349 S. Aiken Ave. for \$200,000.

Frank C & Lisa Platt Cartieri to James Maier at 409 Taylor St. for \$212,000.

Gino F & Kathleen Mazzotta to Holly & David Munson at 333 Darsie St. for \$250,000.

Giorgio & Christine Cardillo to Pgh2 Realty LLC at 256 S. Evaline St. for \$515,000.

Jacob Ward to Mitchell Alan Carr at 4612 Carroll St. for \$295,000.

Mark T Lucero to Jacob H Bachorski at 511 Aspen St. for \$237,000.

Sarah M Skelly to Garrett R Mooney at 4513 Torley St. for \$335,000.

Sherry L & Sarah R Solomon Brower to Sfr3-000 LLC at 214 S. Millvale Ave. for \$200,000.

Tyler W Ashner to Julie R & Cai G Evans at 4783 Yew St. for \$299,900.

Zhao Lang to Derrick Chan at 21 Hemingway St. for \$403,000.

Friendship

Bediako George to L&J The Home LLC at 247 S. Saint Clair St. for \$530,000.

East Liberty Development, Inc. to Allegheny Land Trust at 214 S. Saint Clair St. for \$45,000.

Garfield

Bloomfield- Garfield Corporation to City of Pittsburgh at 0 Broad St. for \$5,000.

Cedrela Properties LP to R Daniel Mooney at 4823 Rosetta St. for \$260,000.

City of Pittsburgh to Bloomfield Garfield Corporation at 0 Hillcrest St. for \$100.

Katie A Charles-Mcgrath to Ethan Jesse

& Lydia Strattan at 4810 Kincaid St. for \$270,500.

Mary Jean Dixon to Dena Bergamasco at 725 N. Mathilda St. for \$217,000.

Penn Pioneer Enterprises LLC to Maggie Lin at 5318 Columbo St. for \$50,000.

Ramona L Satchell to Maria Simonovski at 4724 Kincaid St. for \$88,000.

Sfr3-000 LLC to Cumaru Properties LP at 5131 Broad St. for \$72,500.

Saint Lawrence O'Toole Roman Catholic Church to Childrens Home of Pittsburgh at 170 N. Atlantic Ave. for \$850,000.

Saint Lawrence O'Toole Roman Catholic Church to Childrens Home of Pittsburgh at 5323 Penn Ave. for \$850,000.

East Liberty

Jaih Hunter-Hill to Yien Hao Lock at 420 N. Euclid Ave. for \$41,500.

Katie Shaw to Yu Euclid LLC at 511 N. Euclid Ave. for \$150,000.

Lawrenceville

Annalisa Paese to Gregory Deverts at 174 Lodi Way for \$250,000.

Christine A Rall to Arthur C Kleitz Jr at 614 Kendall St. for \$7,000.

Christine-Lynne Brookline LLC to Grubb-stake --Pa LLC at 6020 Butler St. for \$300,000.

City of Pittsburgh to Lawrenceville Corporation at 0 Ater Way for \$100.

David J & Leah M Kusek to Roger W & Cheryl R Vanhoy at 5547 Butler St. for \$769,900.

Diane D & Richard T Hosfelt to Mazako Nagai at 167 38th St. for \$725,000.

Duncan Ventures LLC to Gray Scott Pipitone at 5312 Duncan St. for \$629,000.

Duncan Ventures LLC to Yonatan Bisk at 5310 Duncan St. for \$660,000.

Edward E Schweizer Trust to Stephen G Neese at 175 41st St. for \$315,000.

Foxwood Realty LLC to Cela 164 LLC at 164 43rd St. for \$300,000.

Frederick E & Sherri Mayer to Joshua V Loccisano at 0 Manion Way for \$43,000.

George F & Eric G Rupert Rupert to Eden Ventures LLC at 188-190 Home St. for \$250,000.

Jeffrey M Uchin to Jeffrey R Hennion at 4232 Sherrod St. for \$655,000.

Jonathan Smith to Andrew D & Donna P Laessig at 4826 Hatfield St. for \$685,000.

Kelly D Carter to Steven & Kristen Reinsel at 4628 Hatfield St. for \$560,000.

Kolocouris Dean to Steven H Smith at 3703 Butler St. for \$200,000.

Leonard J & Shirley M Bodack to Abovepar2 Holdings LLC at 4211 Butler St. for \$385,000.

Megan M McGraw to Joseph A Mccarry at 129

Mccandless Ave. for \$275,000.

Michael J Vandervoort to William R Ulmer Jr at 131 Banner Way for \$214,000.

Norman R & Alice E Schneider to P D Investments LLC at 5712 Butler St. for \$100,000.

One 185 LLC to Max Pipman at 185 44th St. for \$3,370,000.

Paul A Mchale to Donald Kahler at 511 56th St. for \$22,000.

Phyllis & Daniel Renda to Andrew Joseph & Louisa Miller at 261 Fisk St. for \$580,000.

Pittsburgh Malt Industries, Inc. to RSP Pittsburgh, Inc. at 4125 Butler St. for \$100.

Red Oak Group, Inc. to William Harrison Scott IV at 3732 Woolslayer Way for \$197,000.

Richard J & Laurie E Butler Northway to Matthew R Sidow at 127 43rd St. for \$712,000.

Ronald Evan Williams to Kalindi Homes LLC at 136 1/2 44th St. for \$135,000.

Sean P Barrett to Loon Jacob M Van at 4019 Arsenal Pl for \$255,000.

Stanley E & Barbara Grabowsk Irrevocable Living Trust to Pgh Homes Nat LLC at 4220 Calvin St. for \$250,000.

Tb Property Holdings LLC to Sayer Real Estate LLC at 901 Mccandless Ave. for \$85,000.

Vera M Coleman to Sevenofnine LLC at 234 42nd St. for \$165,000.

Win-Win Funding Solutions LLC to Samuel Kline at 5238 Carnegie St. for \$377,500.

Wylie Holdings LP to Prince Gia Del at 247 44th St. for \$465,000.

Stanton Heights

Amber Coppings to William M & Gabrielle Nicole Kaplan at 5509 Celadine St. for \$295,000.

Barbara Lynn Skrinjar to Rosemary Wetherill & Dan Mark Roden at 1334 Woodbine St. for \$338,250.

Carroll LLC to Michael A Trujillo at 1136

Fairfield St. for \$388,000.

Chinedu Nwasike to Lena Marie Dickinson at 4239 Upview Ter for \$240,000.

Dale R & Nancy Jessen Winkels to Joshua J Niese at 4387 Stanton Ave. for \$250,000.

Mark S Stein to Christa Puskarich at 23 Fairfield Ct for \$275,000.

Mark Schafer to Shayla English at 4329 Stanton Ave. for \$179,000.

Stream Two LLC to Sekar & Catherine Garnet Kulandaivel at 4721 Coleridge St. for \$317,000.

William F & Leah L Shannon to Mega Kopke at 1005 Oglethorpe Ave. for \$242,500.

This column, which uses data from Allegheny County's online portal, contains occasional errors. We strive for accuracy every month so, if something looks off, please let us know. Feel free to call with questions, or just to chat, about real estate in your neighborhood. Contact Lillian at lillian@agent-lillian.com or 412-335-6068. ♦

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Racial Disparities continued from page 11

Their early research found the COVID rate among Black people in Allegheny County, which encompasses Pittsburgh, was three times the rate of white people. Hospitalizations among Black people have been as high as seven times the rate of whites, according to “Missing Our Shot,” the coalition’s 2021 report.

A vaccine clinic campaign stop

Ed Gainey, a state legislator from Pittsburgh, was among the first politicians to say African Americans in his hometown were missing out on COVID protections.

Last month, Gainey was elected the city’s first Black mayor, after winning a primary, within months of the murder of George Floyd, that pointed to inequities in health care and policing.

A Democrat who worked for two Pittsburgh mayors, Gainey admits he and other Black elected officials were somewhat ill-equipped in the first weeks of the pandemic.

“I fought hard to get the vaccine into the community last year, but I really didn’t know the language — the health language — to be able to get it,” Gainey said during an interview at a pop-up vaccine clinic in the city.

Vaccinations have risen because of community efforts, he said, but children are still a

source of worry. Gainey, who grew up in a low-income housing complex, said he understands when some youngsters shrug when asked about COVID risks.

“But I will tell you I know this: If you can make a kid believe in Santa Claus, you can make them believe in the vaccine. And you know, I understand some of the young kids’ reluctance. I didn’t grow up going to the doctor regularly either,” he said. “I came from the same kind of environment.”

As the 2019 report made clear, many of the benefits of Pittsburgh’s tech-based economy — a vaunted “ed-and-meds” renewal against the industrial decline of the 1980s — still was largely bypassing African Americans.

The first year of COVID was an iterative process of trying to stay ahead of the virus. Gary-Webb, who earned a doctorate from Johns Hopkins’ public health school, said it was also a time for Black residents to be heard about what they knew and saw in their neighborhoods. The coalition, sustained by thousands of volunteer hours, attracted some funding earlier this year, notably for outreach and to pay for running datasets.

Last month, the Poise Foundation was approved for a three-year, \$6.99 million grant, federal money to be administered by the state health department to support an array of health partnerships in the region and, notably, to improve COVID vaccine uptake in ZIP code areas the Black Equity Coalition identified as vulnerable. Among its goals: demographic messaging, data analysis on COVID testing and education outreach in dozens of counties.

Gary-Webb counts herself among a group of “boomerang” Pittsburghers who have lived other places — in her case, Baltimore, New York and Philadelphia — and COVID has helped them recalibrate how Black residents can participate in public health.

As she put it: “The health planners were saying, ‘Help us get out the message.’ We said, ‘No, we are not just getting out the message. We want to be talking about equity at the same time.’”

KHN (Kaiser Health News, khn.org) is a national newsroom that produces in-depth journalism about health issues. Together with Policy Analysis and Polling, KHN is one of the three major operating programs at KFF (Kaiser Family Foundation). KFF is an endowed nonprofit organization providing information on health issues to the nation.

This story was also published by PublicSource, an independent news organization in Pittsburgh. Visit PublicSource.org. ♦



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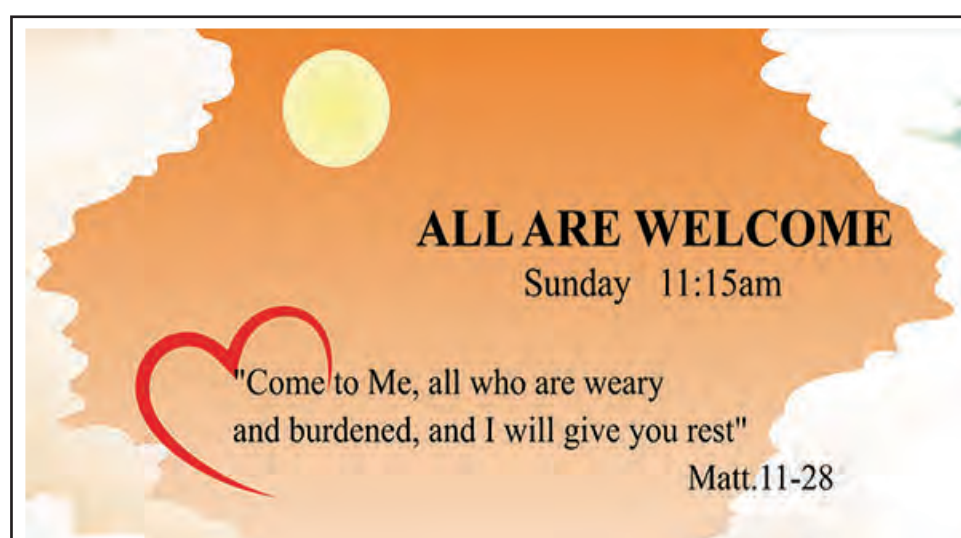
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Protesters seek further investigation of police action prior to Jim Rogers' death

By Alan Guenther *Bulletin contributor*

AT RIGHT: Jim Rogers, a 54-year-old Black man, was tased and arrested on Harriet Street by Pittsburgh Police on Oct. 13. He died the next day. Rogers' family members, including his sister-in-law, Tiffany Hale (left) and his niece, Diamond Rogers, joined about 100 protestors at a Dec. 12 vigil and rally at the First United Methodist Church (5401 Centre Ave.). During the event, sponsored by the Methodist Church and Pittsburgh Quakers, speakers called for the city to release the unedited "body cam" footage of Rogers' arrest, as well as the autopsy report, and to name the officers involved in the incident, which is being investigated by the Allegheny County Police.



Bloomfield - After a Dec. 12 rally and vigil [staged by the Pittsburgh Quakers and the First United Methodists] calling for an independent investigation of police officers' use of force against Jim Rogers, media outlets across the city published reports that questioned police actions during the Oct. 13 arrest on Harriet Street.

In addition, the city released a statement saying that nine officers would be disciplined for their actions during the arrest of Rogers, a 54-year-old Black, unhoused man who died one day after he was tased multiple times by police.

On Oct. 13, officers responded to a report that Rogers had taken a bicycle, which he returned before they arrived on the scene. Rogers lost consciousness while being escorted by police to the Allegheny County Jail.

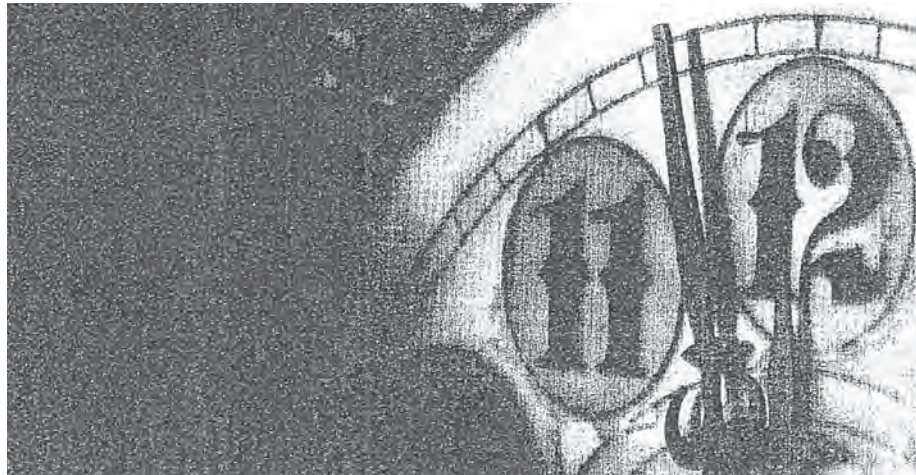
"It is an absolute tragedy that Jim Rogers lost his life while in Pittsburgh Police custody - a failure of a system that should have protected his life," Mayor Bill Peduto said in a statement. "This critical incident included multiple failures."

WPXI broadcast a report saying that police "body cam" footage shows Rogers pleading for medical attention [visit tinyurl.com/RogersCantBreathe to see the report].

TribLive.com published excerpts from a city report that described what transpired during the arrest [visit tinyurl.com/DetailsAboutRogersDeath to see the report].

The Quakers and the First United Methodists have asked Allegheny County District Attorney Stephen A. Zappala to investigate the case, and hold police accountable for their actions. ♦

BELOW: Owen Murphy, 4, holds up a sign as Tim Stevens, chairman of the Pittsburgh Black Political Empowerment Project, addresses the crowd. Photo by Alan Guenther.



My New Year's Resolution is...

It has been alleged that most New Year's resolutions don't last more than a day.

At most, they extent to a few weeks, and for the resolute at heart, they last for a couple of months.

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ABOVE: District Seven City Councilwoman Deb Gross (left, wearing mask) said she attended the Dec. 12 prayer vigil and rally for Jim Rogers in order to show support for his family. Photo by Alan Guenther.

Sounding Off: Pittsburgh's future relies on strong public transit

By Emily Howe *Pittsburghers for Public Transit*

Perspective/Pittsburgh - In the October edition of *The Bulletin*, an anonymous author outlined an argument for why Spin scooters are “good for Pittsburgh.” They discussed the benefits of “multiple forms of alternative transportation,” described the Spin scooters as a “wonderful resource,” and predicted that the “growing pains” of learning how to drive and park the scooters could be overcome with a “proper education.”

Judging by their argument, I don't think the author, or many other local residents, realize that the unsafe riding of Spin scooters is only the tip of the iceberg rather than the root of the problem.

The author does, however, nod to some points that I want to discuss: “Transportation is all about access,” and “our job as neighbors is to make sure that our ‘most livable city’ is livable for absolutely everyone.”

If these are our goals, then Spin scooters and other privatized “alternative transportation” are not the right means to this end. Instead, we must encourage our new mayor to invest in public transportation and other public services and infrastructure that will serve all communities.

Public transit is much more accessible than Spin scooters. In order to ride a Spin scooter, it costs \$1 to start a trip, plus \$0.39 per minute, or \$24.99 per day for a “Spin Pass.” Since the scooters’ top speed is 15 miles per hour, a two mile trip -- at top speed and with no traffic -- will cost \$4.12. Meanwhile, one Port Authority bus or light rail fare is \$2.75, and an unlimited weekly pass costs \$25.

Given the scooters’ costs, who can afford to access this service? This high price point suggests that the scooters are geared towards occasional and recreational riders and/or people who can drop hundreds of dollars a month to regularly commute by scooter. Along with a cost much closer to that of owning or leasing a car, Spin scooters are not complementary to other forms of public transit like buses and light rail.

In addition to being financially inaccessible, these scooters are also physically inaccessible to elderly folks and people living with disabilities - two groups of city residents who rely on public transit to meet their daily needs. Spin scooters cannot serve, for example: people in wheelchairs, people with limited mobility, and people with vision impairments. And while they can be parked anywhere, the scooters are not equally accessible in all neighborhoods.

Let me be clear: my point is not to call out the op-ed's author. I'm only highlighting a broader issue with the city of Pittsburgh's dominant policies and rhetoric around “alternative transportation.” Spin scooters are a symptom, not the cause of this problem.

One root cause comes from assuming that the transportation needs of all residents are the same - when the truth is that scooters, ride-hailing, and other micro-mobility schemes promoted by the city primarily benefit upper-income, able-bodied white men. These new forms of “alternative transportation” also cannibalize public transit riders and critical transit agency funding.

If we truly think that it's “our job as neighbors is to make sure that our ‘most livable city’ is livable for absolutely everyone,” then we must remember how local research illustrates that Pittsburgh is currently one of the worst cities in the U.S. for Black women to live in, particularly for those who are low-income residents.

As a result, we should be centering the needs of low-income Black women when we are aiming to improve transit and other essential services like housing, food access, and healthcare. By focusing on spending public money on public services, and investing in neighborhoods that have historically suffered from disinvestment, we can truly make Pittsburgh a livable city for all.

For the #VoteTransit initiative, local residents and community organizations will be working together with the new mayoral administration to promote public transit in city policy and funding. Visit pittsburghforpublictransit.org to learn more about how you can support this work and join the coalition. ♦

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