



A publication of the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation

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

**Volunteers paint
asphalt, create safe
passage in Bloomfield**

By Sam Spearing
Bloomfield Development Corporation

Bloomfield - As the leaves began changing colors in Friendship Park, more than 70 volunteers gathered to accent these autumnal changes on the asphalt.

Over two weekends in September, neighbors participated in the painting of a community art project on Friendship Avenue.

Bloomfield Development Corporation (BDC) received funding from AARP Livable Communities to help enhance crosswalks, with the purpose of increasing pedestrian visibility.

Eco-artists Ann Rosenthal (of Bloomfield) and Joann Moran (of Connecticut) were hired to lead the community design and installation process. These artists have



ABOVE: Volunteers adorn the asphalt around Friendship Park with colorful decorations in an effort to enhance pedestrian safety. Neighbors pursued creative solutions for safe passage across the Bloomfield transit hub. Their story begins at left. Photo courtesy of Sam Spearing.



ABOVE: Ed Nusser (left), City of Bridges Executive Director, speaks with Garfield residents about affordable housing. The Sept. 14 meeting is recapped at right. Photo by Alan Guenther.

**State-of-the-Neighborhood in Garfield:
shooting, flooding, affordable housing
among residents' top concerns**

By Alan Guenther *Bulletin contributor*

Garfield - Roughly 75 people attended a community meeting seeking answers following an Aug. 23 shooting - when a man died after police and sheriff's officers tried to evict him from a home (4817 Broad St.).

William Hardison, Sr., 63, died from a bullet wound after a six-hour standoff, during which he exchanged hundreds of rounds of gunfire with police. Miraculously, no one else was seriously hurt.

But residents attending the Sept. 14 "State of the Neighborhood" Meeting, spon-

sored on by the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation (BGC), had plenty of questions.

"Who will pay for the damage to our homes?" asked Mary Sauer. Other residents complained that windows and the front of their homes were raked by bullets during hours of frightening gunfire.

"Where were the people checking in on us as a community?" asked Sarah Moe, who lives on Dearborn Street, about a block from the shooting.

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Asphalt Art continued from page 1

guided many community art projects to success, both independently and in collaboration as LUNA (Learning Urban Nature through Art).

The design of the murals came together over the course of multiple community events and engagement opportunities. Community partners led educational events in Friendship Park to teach neighbors about our native birds, trees, flora, and fauna.

Community members then submitted their own drawings to be incorporated into the final mural designs. The designs include birds, insects, and leaves that are specific to Bloomfield - such as Purple Coneflowers, Chimney Swifts, and Ginkgo leaves.

On Sept. 9, 10, and 16, community volunteers participated in two-hour blocks of mural painting. The volunteer painters - whose ages ranged from 2 to 78 - applied environmentally-friendly traffic paint, called "Bio-Stripe," to the asphalt.

Many neighbors who were out for a walk, bike ride, or drive stopped by to get a look at the action, asking questions and expressing their excitement about the art. Residents who have lived within a block of the park for their entire lives came together with new Pittsburgh residents to paint and connect.

The addition of this community-centered art serves another purpose; as studies

have suggested, it could even help improve safety, particularly at "unsignalized" intersections like those at Friendship Park. For instance, a study commissioned by Bloomberg Philanthropies found that, when asphalt art was present at crosswalks, drivers were more likely to yield to pedestrians.

City residents are now aware of the measured and perceived benefits of asphalt



ABOVE: A young painter adds color to the asphalt. Photo courtesy of Sam Spearing.

art, as it has become more visible across Pittsburgh in recent years. An asphalt art project led by Friendship Community Group was installed at Baum Grove in 2021, and another project is in the early planning stages on the Northside.

While painting the park in mid-September, volunteers were approached by various passersby who inquired about bringing asphalt art to their own neighborhood, school, or park.

BDC will take care of art maintenance, as needed, with "community touch-up" days.

This project, which comes on the heels of BDC's recent installation of eight benches along Liberty Avenue, is part of the organization's goal to build a safe, supportive community of pedestrians and transit-riders.

BDC will install an additional 10 benches in the spring of 2024 and, down the road, it aims to install more asphalt art at the intersections on the other end of Friendship Park (abutting Edmond Street). ♦

BELOW: Artists carefully apply traffic paint, enhancing pedestrian safety on Friendship Avenue. Photo courtesy of Sam Spearing.



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'Aggie Awards' luncheon: BGC honors women shaping local arts scene

A Message from the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation

Pittsburgh - The Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation (BGC) is thrilled to announce the 19th annual "Aggie Awards" luncheon, celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Penn Avenue Arts Initiative and the #Unblurred art crawl.

Named after the late Aggie Brose, the awards honor outstanding contributions to community activism. Brose, a BGC founding member, dedicated over 40 years to advocating for better housing, safer streets, and more employment opportunities in Garfield and beyond - leaving a remarkable legacy that inspires positive change to this day.

The keynote speaker for the event is La'Tasha D. Mayes, a trailblazer in Pennsylvania politics and the first woman to represent House District 24, which includes Garfield and Penn Avenue. As the first openly lesbian member of the Pennsylvania General Assembly, Mayes tirelessly advocates for marginalized communities.

To mark the Penn Avenue Arts Initiative's milestone 25th anniversary, the Aggie Awards will proudly celebrate the exceptional women who have been instrumental in transforming Penn Avenue into a thriving arts hub, leaving an indelible mark on Pittsburgh's arts and culture scene. The distinguished awardees for 2023 are as follows:

ANQWENIQUE influences Penn Avenue's arts scene by working with BOOM Concepts - supporting the community, connecting various collaborations, and championing arts education - while also showcasing her talents in opera, jazz, and soul music.

Heather McElwee's transformative work, as Executive Director of the Pittsburgh Glass Center for over 20 years, has fostered a community of thousands of visitors and students making a continued impact in the Penn Ave. Arts & Commercial District.

janera solomon's visionary leadership has helped shape the Penn Ave. arts community through the Kelly Strayhorn Theater & Fieldwork Gallery, enriching the East End's cultural landscape.

Sheila Ali leads the Irma Freeman Center for Imagination, a thriving artistic hub on Penn Avenue, by empowering diverse talents, sparking creative collaborations, and addressing social issues.

The Aggie Awards will also acknowledge Jason Sauer, Nina Barbuto, Jennifer Quinio-Hedges, Laura McLaughlin, and the late Shirley Gleditsch - all of whom were previously honored at BGC awards luncheons for their invaluable contributions to the Penn Avenue Arts Initiative.

Going back to its formation in 1976, the BGC has a long history of community development. Through workforce development programs, affordable housing construction, mentorship for local youths, new business development, and neighborhood beautification projects, the BGC continues contributing to the overall growth and vibrancy of the Garfield neighborhood and Penn Ave. business district.

The BGC will host the 19th Annual Aggie Awards Luncheon on Friday, Nov. 3, from 11:30 a.m.-1:45 p.m. at The Omni William Penn Hotel (530 William Penn Pl., Downtown). The event promises to be a remarkable celebration of the arts, East End communities, and the spirit of positive change that Aggie Brose embodied for so long. See the flyer at right for more information. To purchase luncheon tickets, please visit bloomfield-garfield.org/luncheon. ♦

the Bulletin

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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; these monthly meetings are open to the public. For more details, email Pam@Bloomfield-Garfield.org.

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

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Keynote Speaker

La'Tasha D. Mayes, PA State Representative

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2023 Awardees

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Neighborhood Meeting continued from page 1

Lindsey Aquino-Robles, a community liaison for Mayor Ed Gainey, said the mayor had personally visited with Garfield residents, and community and city social workers had spoken with many people who lived near the shooting.

She encouraged residents to contact the City of Pittsburgh's law department if, after filing a claim, they needed money to pay the deductible for their homeowners insurance.

"We're making that money available," Aquino-Robles said.

Rick Swartz, executive director of the BGC, offered additional aid.

He said the BGC will try to raise money to pay for repairs - so that residents would not need to file a claim with their insurance, noting that the very filing of a claim could drive up their premium payments for years.

Swartz said the BGC and other agencies were talking with the owner of the property where Hardison - known as "Mr. Bill" to family and some neighbors - died. The owner, Swartz said, was considering working with a nonprofit agency to convert the house into an affordable home that would provide housing for local residents, though nothing has been finalized.

New 'permanently affordable' homes coming

During the meeting on Sept. 14, residents and officials addressed a variety of other topics, including a plan to build three new homes and renovate two existing duplexes, which will be turned into "permanently affordable housing" for the community.

Ed Nusser, executive director of the City of Bridges Community Land Trust, explained how the program would work, and how it was different from other affordable housing ventures. In an interview, Nusser told *The Bulletin* that the three homes will be built at the intersection of North Pacific Avenue and Columbo Street.

Each of the homes will feature three bedrooms and two bathrooms, and provide about 1,600 square feet of livable space. They will be insulated and designed to reduce energy costs. One house will stand alone. The other two will share one common wall. The three homes will sell for about \$200,000 each, Nusser said.

Two units that comprise a duplex at 438 N. Fairmount St. will also be renovated in the coming months. Each apartment will be smaller - with two bedrooms, one bath, and about 900 square feet. They will sell for around \$140,000, according to Nusser.

To be qualified to buy these "permanently affordable" properties, a family of four would need annual income of \$80,300 or less.

Subsidies of between \$20,000 and \$90,000 are available from the Urban Redevelopment Authority if the buyers fall within the 80% income threshold. The properties would be deed-restricted to remain affordable, Nusser explained, meaning that their re-sale could increase by only 1.15% annually.

The three Columbo St. homes should be on the market by Sept. 2024, Nusser said. The duplex units - renovations of an existing structure - could be available sooner.

PGH Land Bank moving forward

During the community meeting, Swartz said that the Pittsburgh Land Bank will finally be gearing up to dispose of larger numbers of City-owned properties - after more than 11 years of delays and questions as to what the extend of its powers would actually be.

The potential to transform abandoned homes or vacant lots into livable structures is especially important to Garfield, Swartz explained. There are about 500 city-owned vacant lots and abandoned homes in Garfield, he said. The Land Bank has been given enough funding by City Council to negotiate the transfer of up to 160 properties for eventual sale to nonprofit agencies or private interests who want to turn them into something useful.

311 calls

The City tells residents that, if they have a complaint about a property or flooding in their basements, they should call 311 for help. At the meeting, residents complained that their calls were not being returned, and that no action has been taken by the city.

Aquino-Robles, the mayor's representative, said that 311 operators were handling as many as 300 calls per day, and that, in her opinion, they are doing their best with the resources they have been given. Residents were advised to be persistent and also contact their local City Council representative for help.

Kelly Strayhorn Theater

The executive director of Kelly Strayhorn Theater (KST), Joseph Hall, reminded the audience to take advantage of the theater's classes and performances.

As part of its "Brave Actions, Bold Voices" theme, in collaboration with Dreams of Hope and PearlArts, the theater will host a series of educational workshops to offer queer creative people, from the ages of 13 through 26, "a space to learn about, discuss, and connect through a plethora of topics" concerning theatre and the performing arts.

Some of the performances at the theater are offered on a "pay what moves you" basis, starting as low as \$10. Smaller performances are offered at the KST Alloy Studios (5530 Penn Ave.); large-scale performances take place at the theater's home (5941 Penn Ave.). Additional information is available at kelly-strayhorn.org.

Contact Alan Guenther at guenthera30@gmail.com. ♦

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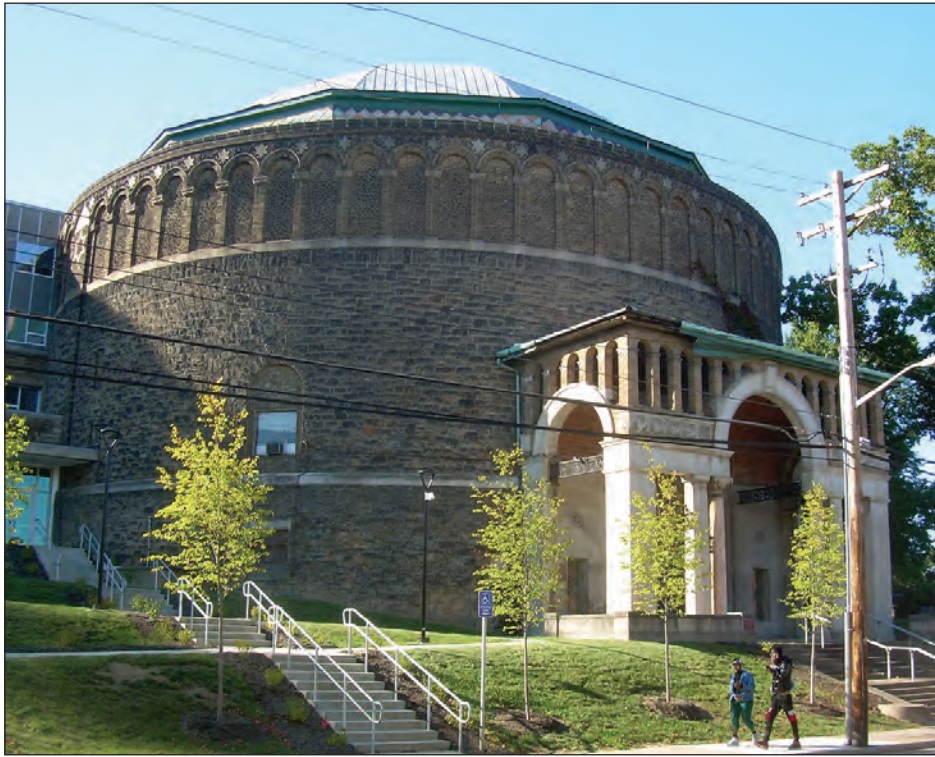
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ABOVE: The Negley Avenue Rotunda on a late summer afternoon. Photo by Rick Swartz.

BGC supports East End community with grant funding from URA

By Carlee Benhart Kukula Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation

Insight/Garfield - In August of 2022, the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation (BGC) was contracted to administer Homeowner Assistance Program (HAP) funding in the neighborhood.

To date, one project has been completed, and a larger project is preparing to begin construction.

If you're interested in learning more about what the URA has to offer you as a homeowner, read on for some tips and tricks we've learned in our first year of HAP project management.

If you're already on the waitlist for HAP or a similar program, keep an eye out for contractors who have experience working with the URA.

The invoicing/inspection process can be very exacting, so finding a contractor ahead of time will ensure your project moves through the process as quickly as possible. Anyone struggling to find a contractor may reach out to us here at the BGC for references of trusted contractors.

While this year's HAP application period has already closed, there are still many

ways for aspiring, first-time homeowners - from all walks of life - to utilize city, state, and federal funding.

If you're interested in learning more about what kind of funding is available to you, please contact Carlee at carlee@bloomfield-garfield.org or 412-441-6950 (ext. 117).

URA Outdoor Dining Grant

If you own a business that sells food and/or drink, and it has been open since before March 2020, you are eligible to receive funds from the URA Outdoor Dining Grant (administered locally by the BGC).

Don't miss your chance to help pay for chairs, tables, heaters, necessary permits, or design services to help your business maximize its earning potential while upgrading your space.

Penn Ave. Nail Academy dazzles New York Fashion Week audience

Stop by LaLa's Salon & Spa (5341 Penn Ave.) to congratulate Lauren Long and her team. They recently traveled to New York Fashion Week, where they created custom press-on nails, and performed manicures & pedicures for 14 shows. Kudos to the team at LaLa's!

Third Space Bakery coming to Garfield

If you're plugged in to what's happening at the former Spork Pit (5349 Penn Ave.), you may already know that Third Space Bakery will soon operate a worker-owned, community-focused bakery and teaching space on the site. In the meantime, keep an eye out for the Third Space food truck at Trace Brewing (4312 Main St.) in Bloomfield. ♦

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Land trust aims to build two homes on Broad Street

By Rick Swartz Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation

Garfield - If the nonprofit City of Bridges Community Land Trust (CBLCT) is able to push through all the bureaucracy associated with buying two lots [owned by the City] in the 4900 block of Broad Street, a pair of new, affordably-priced homes could be in the cards for Garfield.

Ed Nusser, CBLCT's executive director, shared his organization's plans for the site - which sits mid-block between N. Millvale Ave. and N. Winebiddle St. - during a public meeting hosted by the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation on Aug. 30.

Nusser's land trust group has been one of the more active developers in the city lately, bringing to market new, single-family homes that are affordable to families earning less than \$75,000 per year.

"We are close to completing the transfer of the two lots from the City to the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA), who will then sell them to us," Nusser announced. "But that second transaction will not happen until sometime next spring." If all goes as planned, he anticipates a ground-breaking on the project by early fall of next year.

The homes will be three-story structures,

BELOW: A rendering of two 3-story townhomes planned for construction in Garfield (4900 block of Broad Street). Graphic courtesy of City of Bridges Community Land Trust.



connected to one another, and offer 3 bedrooms and 1.5 bathrooms each.

CBLCT intends to make the homes, which will be produced in a factory outside Allegheny County, match the existing fabric of the street.

Nusser trumpeted some of their features, including Fiberglas windows, Hardie board siding, Energy Star appliances, and

low-VOC paint that he believes will make the units durable and attractive to first-time buyers. Module Design, based in East Liberty, will oversee their construction at the site.

Whoever the future buyers are for the units will be purchasing them under the land trust model.

CBLCT sells the house itself, but retains ownership of the land under a 99-year lease with the buyer.

According to Nusser, CBLCT has completed 22 such sales since 2019.

When the buyer decides to sell the house down the road, the price will be negotiat-

ed between the buyer and the land trust.

Nusser said the goal is to allow the subsidy that goes into building any of their new homes to be passed along to a second family - one whose income would otherwise bar them from owning a home that will cost CBLCT over \$400,000 to build.

Anticipating a sale price of \$185,000 for each home, Nusser said the amount of subsidy in the project turns out to be "quite substantial."

"Our goal as an organization is to build homes that become permanently affordable, and not just for the length of time that the initial owner happens to reside in the house," he explained.

Buyers will also be eligible for URA grant funds that will reduce the monthly payment on their first mortgage loan. In order to qualify, buyers will need to show annual incomes that place them at, or below, 80 percent of median household income for the Pittsburgh region. For a family of four, that is \$75,850 or less, according to the U. S. Dept. of Housing & Urban Development.

Since the homes require dimensional and use variances, a hearing with the city's Zoning Board will be forthcoming.

CBLCT will need some relief from the zoning code on the interior and exterior setbacks for the homes - and due to the fact that the structures will be semi-detached, as opposed to fully detached. ♦

Two Decades of Community-Driven Transformation

Discover the amazing journey of East Liberty—from blight and disinvestment to a thriving, mixed-income community—as East Liberty Development, Inc. looks back on the successes and lessons learned of redeveloping the neighborhood.



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Youth programs navigate new landscape

By Pamela Schön Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation

Insight/Garfield - In late 2022, Partner4Work (P4W), a nonprofit workforce development agency, released its Request for Proposals (RFP) for Youth & Young Adult Career Services programming for the 2023-2024 school year. To expand the overall impact in underserved communities across Allegheny County, as detailed in its 2023-2026 Strategic Plan, P4W effected numerous changes to the program that impact the teenagers served by the BGC.

As part of its efforts to expand services, P4W increased the number of contracts with organizations to 18 (double the number from the previous funding year) in order to make services available to youths across the County, including college & career preparation, workforce training and development, and housing support. What does this mean for the BGC's Partner4Work-funded College & Career Readiness Program (CCRP)?

This means that CCRP's enrollment numbers were cut from 50 to 45, and our budget decreased by \$6,000. One may think "Oh that's not a big deal", but for us, that's five fewer 11th- and 12th-grade students who we can support throughout their graduation, post-graduation, and employment plans. While we were initially disheartened, the BGC Youth Programming staffers are resilient, and will continue assisting high school juniors and seniors in other ways, including our Teen Neighborhood Think Space (TNT). The TNT program operates from Passport Academy, a charter school in downtown Pittsburgh; we're available there, during office hours, three days a week.

P4W's Strategic Plan also includes more focused efforts to ensure that youth participants have access to training, internships, and job-shadowing opportunities in the healthcare, technology, financial services, construction, and manufacturing fields.

This falls under one of two new focuses of P4W: Career Exploration & Experience (model 1); and Pathways to Employment & Retention (model 2). As part of the requisites under model 1, which includes the BGC's youth program contract, CCRP is required to connect youth participants with PA CareerLink and its "One Stop Center" partners to help make workforce training resources more accessible.

CCRP works closely with industries across Allegheny County to ensure that youths have the opportunity to explore every available career path - including hospitality, childcare & education, nonprofit management, staffing, entertainment, entrepreneurship, and public safety.

Despite these changes to our youth programming landscape, the BGC model will adapt, grow, and flourish. We have to. We will continue to support Allegheny County youths - and help each kid make informed decisions about their future. ♦

Sunday, October 22

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Neighborhood FOCUS

Lawrenceville dog-walkers appear united in support of Innamorato

Story & Photos by Alan Guenther *Bulletin contributor*

Lawrenceville - Colleen Krajewski is happy to tell you about her tiny dog, Pierre, who was declared “the second gayest dog in Pittsburgh” during a local Pride contest. He’s a Gemini, she says, who’s four years old - and his middle name is Presley because he was born in Memphis, where Elvis lived.

The contest, which raised funds for Heart of Glass Animal Rescue, featured Democratic Allegheny County Executive candidate Sara Innamorato as a judge. Her Republican opponent was not present for the event.

A few months ago, that candidate, Joe Rockey, told *The Bulletin* that his political mentors advised him to “lose the tie” during public appearances. “I don’t know,” Rockey (59, a retired executive with PNC Bank) said. “When I put on a tie, it just feels like I’m going to work.”

Innamorato, 37, appears much more comfortable connecting with a younger, seemingly more progressive audience.

“I love Sara. She just really cares about this community, right? I’ve gone thrifting with her. In a thrift store, she would just pass by a neighbor and say, ‘I know about your sewer! We’re going to fix that,’” said Krajewski, a 41-year-old gynecologist. “She just knows everybody. She’s amazing!”

Other dog owners interviewed on Butler Street agreed.

Rona Chang, 45, sitting with her German shepherd, Poker, said she knew Innamorato as “kind and helpful” and “very present in the community.”

Kelly Harvey, 24, said one key issue for her was abortion rights. As she wrestled with her relentlessly affectionate dog Kendall Louise, Harvey said women should

have a right to decide what is best for their bodies and themselves. “It shouldn’t be a political thing at all,” she noted.

While Innamorato favors abortion rights, Rockey declined to discuss the issue in a recent interview, saying it's not relevant to a local campaign. Yet he is a member of the board of directors for the Pittsburgh chapter of Little Sisters of the Poor, one of the most fervently pro-life groups in the nation. The Little Sisters won a U.S. Supreme Court case over whether they could be forced to pay for contraception services for their employees. The high court, in a 2020 ruling, said they did not.

The race between Innamorato and Rockey is only one of the important local contests that will be on the Nov. 7 ballot. The contest for Allegheny County District Attorney will have far-ranging implications, too; progressive Democratic candidate Matt Dugan seeks to oust longtime District Attorney Stephen Zappala. Although Zappala lost the Democratic primary election to Dugan, he is now running as a Republican in the general election.

The campaigns for County Executive and District Attorney both reflect a well-documented national trend, showing that local residents now increasingly base their votes on national issues [Editor's note: sigh; the Mayor of Dallas, TX (my old stomping grounds) recently made the same change for political gain]. Here in Pittsburgh, politicians are catching on to the trend.

Zappala, for example, has used fighting in the streets of Portland, OR, and other cities run by progressive Democrats, to say he does not want to see that sort of “experiment” drive up crime in Pittsburgh. On Sept. 22, Mayor Ed Gainey, a progressive Democrat, objected to how Zappala portrays crime in his city. According to the Mayor, statistics show that crime is actually trending down in Pittsburgh.

Gainey added: "Our city also deserves to have an answer as to the outcome of the

- continued on next page -

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ABOVE: Colleen Krajewski, 41, takes her dog, Pierre, for a walk in Lawrenceville.



BELOW: Corey Duncan, 47, lets his shirt do the talking. He is one of the few Rockey supporters to be found on Butler Street.

BELOW: Rona Chang (right), 45, enjoys relaxing with her dog, Poker, on Butler Street. She hopes that fellow Lawrenceville resident Sara Innamorato wins the County election on Nov. 7.



- continued from previous page -

Jim Rogers investigation” - where Rogers, a 54-year-old homeless Black man, was tased repeatedly by police, and died the next day. Almost two years after the incident, Zappala has neither charged, nor exonerated, police officers involved in the incident. Meanwhile, Gainey’s administration fired five cops and paid \$8 million to Rogers’ family to settle a wrongful-death, civil lawsuit against the City.

Dugan, the county’s chief public defender, has campaigned as a reformer who has said he would try to resolve racial inequities - and not clog the courts and jails with nonviolent, less serious charges. Dugan’s campaign has reportedly been financed, in part, by billionaire liberal activist George Soros.

In the race for County Executive, there are plenty of crucial local issues to consider, but amid all the happy dog-walking along Butler Street, most people interviewed focused on national topics instead of local politics.

BELOW: Amaya Bishop, 20, hopes the next County Executive advocates for “people who are often put to the side.”



*‘I just want to see more equality.
More acceptance. More community.’*

- Amaya Bishop, Butler Street stakeholder

For example, Corey Duncan, 47, a Republican, said gender issues were important to him. “Children,” he said, “should not be ingrained to be a certain way. They should be allowed to be kids. They shouldn’t be given a choice of whether they’re a boy or a girl when they’re five years old. That’s not something five- or six-year-olds should have on their minds.”

About the local race, he said he liked the fact that Rockey was a retired bank vice president. Government needs to be “run like a business,” Duncan said.

Across Butler Street, a young Black woman, Amaya Bishop, 20, had a different point of view.

Her main issues, she said, were “the youth, and equality overall, especially for people who look like me, and people who come from different backgrounds - the people who are often put to the side.”

Bishop said that her brother, who has special needs, has been denied job opportunities because of his disability. “I just want to see more equality,” she said. “More acceptance. More community.”

Madison Reitter, 24, who makes balloon animals for a living, reflected the views of many of the younger people interviewed on Butler Street in late September.

“Definitely, Sara’s looking good to me. That’s probably who I’ll vote for,” Reitter said. “I love her fighting for equal rights, and I’m an environmentalist, too, so I like her stand on environmental issues.”

Reitter rejected the idea of supporting Rockey, who had risen through the ranks at PNC Bank before retiring as a senior vice-president.

“It’s hard for me,” Reitter said, “as a blue-collar person, to see someone who’s made a [seven-figure salary] at PNC and think that’s someone I can relate to.”

Reach out to Alan Guenther at guenthera30@gmail.com. ♦



ABOVE: Kelly Harvey, 24, embraces her canine companion on Butler Street.



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Small characters, big stories: comic book artist Shawn Atkins

By Chris Mueller BOOM Concepts


Pittsburgh - As a lifelong comic, Shawn Atkins aims to tell the stories of “average people doing extraordinary things.” His work blends elements of entertainment and escapism into a cohesive narrative designed to resonate with the experiences and passions of his audience.

In this interview, Atkins expands on the deeper meaning behind his illustrative work, including his Pittsburgh-centric projects. [The following conversation has been edited for space. Read the full transcript at boomuniverse.co].

BOOM: What compelled you to pursue a career in the arts? Who are some of the primary influences that helped shape the fundamental components of your work?

Atkins: “Most of what really inspires me about art is telling stories. That’s why I’ve gravitated to comics. When I first got to Pittsburgh 20 years ago, I started at the Art Institute of Pittsburgh but didn’t really delve into comics at first. I wanted to be an animator, storyboard artist, and character designer because I figured you need to be versatile.

“But after hanging out around the Pittsburgh art scene for a while, I fell into the comic scene a bit more. I’d say Jack Kirby, Alex Toth, and Bruce Timm are my top three influences. And if you take anything from my work, it’s about average people doing extraordinary things.”



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BOOM: You’re currently exploring the “corruption of American society’s political class” through comics. How do your illustrations bring the story to life?

Atkins: “The project was kind of like a very angry comic that I had coming to fruition during the early stages of the pandemic. Like a lot of other people, my whole life got turned upside down for reasons that were outside of my control. In the comic, the two main villains are a rich guy who never worked a day in his life because he was born into the right family, and then another rich guy who is a political powerhouse - and knows the harm he is causing, but still chooses to do it anyway.

“Both characters were a lot like Donald Trump at the time. His presidency gave me a lot of frustration, so I had to do stuff like this to channel that energy in a healthy way. I see these systems of corruption and weave them into my stories. But, at the end of the day, I still always try to entertain people with my comics as opposed to force-feeding political messages.”



ABOVE: Artist Shawn Atkins’ comics help readers escape. Photo by Vania Evangelique.

BOOM: Could you walk us through the creative process behind *Yinzer Magic*, a series of your illustrations of Pittsburgh neighborhoods “spliced together with magical creatures walking around”?

Atkins: “I’ve been doing comics for most of my life, but they take a long time to finish so you don’t always get that artistic satisfaction. I went to an open studio at Radiant Hall, and they proposed the idea of doing projects with a quicker turnaround time. I was in the process of doing illustrations, and one of the things I wanted to try was a series around Pittsburgh.

“I knew Pittsburgh stuff sells well around here, but didn’t want to be one of those placating people, exploiting ‘Black and Gold’ as a way to monetize their work. I wanted it to at least come from the heart, so I started thinking about places I’ve been to over the past 20 years.”

BOOM: Is that how your “Beehive in the Fall” illustration [depicting the former South Side coffee shop] came to life?

Atkins: “Exactly. I used to go to the Beehive a lot. My wife hung out there a lot. We’d go there with friends a lot. My Coffeehouse Comics series stemmed from the places where I would draw comics. I’m not going to beat around the bush: some of my Pittsburgh-centric work is financially driven. You need to figure out how to monetize your work and make your career sustainable. However, I’ve always made sure that there’s still heart behind it.”

BOOM: As a Black artist, have you faced instances of adversity that prevented you from being able to express your full creative self?

Atkins: “I can’t think of a single incident. If there were, it was never overt. I’ve been called names before, which is never pleasant, but it never hindered my creative process or became an obstacle from pursuing what I wanted to pursue as an artist. Nothing is ever going to stop me from being creative regardless of what kind of societal barriers are put in front of me.

“No one is going to tell me that I can’t create what I want to create and, as a father, no one is going to tell my daughter that she can’t create what she wants to create. Escapism has always been one of my drivers. When I draw stuff that relates to systemic barriers in our society, I hope that people of color will read it and enjoy some escapism. I want them to read it and relate, but not feel like it’s a heavy-handed message.”

Atkins participated in the 2022 BOOM Universe summer residency program. ♦

Maelene Myers reflects on life's work transforming East Liberty

By Elizabeth Sensky *East Liberty Development, Inc.*

East Liberty - Maelene Myers never set out to work in community development, much less lead the revitalization of a Pittsburgh neighborhood. But once she commits to something, Myers does not waver.

When she became the executive director of East Liberty Development, Inc. (ELDI) nearly 27 years ago, the organization was struggling. It was a nonprofit that had seen two directors resign in one year, and was roundly criticized for not being representative of the community. Meanwhile, East Liberty - once considered Pittsburgh's "second downtown," and home to a tight-knit residential community - was dealing with higher rates of unemployment & crime, deteriorating housing options, and a lack of opportunity for its residents.

Coming from Cleveland, where she worked for six years as the executive director of Hough Area Partners in Progress (an inner-city, community development corporation), Myers was no stranger to creating positive change amidst difficult circumstances. Upon beginning her work in East Liberty, she drew on the lessons learned in Ohio to set a new course for the neighborhood. It all started with a planning process that, over the course of three years, captured the local community's vision for the neighborhood - and the work required to attain it.

"She was willing to do what so many others were not," ELDI Board President Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy said. "She made sure that those who lived in the community defined their future."

As ELDI prepares to launch its 20+ year retrospective - an impact report reflecting on the neighborhood's remarkable journey from hard times and blight to a thriving, mixed-income community - we sat down with Myers to learn more about her perspective on a changing neighborhood. Myers recounts her incredible journey, from a single mother on welfare to leading a successful community development corporation, and shared what she thinks is needed to ensure a bright future for East End residents.

[The following conversation has been edited for space. Read the full transcript at east-liberty.org].

BELOW: Maelene Myers has helped East Liberty Development, Inc. (ELDI) navigate 27 years of change. Photo courtesy of ELDI.



ELDI: Who spearheaded the search for a new executive director of ELDI?

Myers: "East Liberty was in such a state of disarray in the late 90s that the stronger neighboring communities - Highland Park, Bloomfield, and Shadyside - were starting to get impacted by all the crimes and drugs, so they demanded the City of Pittsburgh find someone, and they were not going to tolerate any of the people in Pittsburgh, because ELDI had already gone through several executive directors."

"When I came to tour the area, I didn't see what the problem was at first. It was not nearly at the level of crime and blight that I was accustomed to [seeing in Cleveland]. But I recognized right away how important East Liberty was from a 'downtown' perspective. It must have been a very significant piece of Pittsburgh if they would wait so long for someone like me to come along."

"What I could see from the beginning was that the neighboring communities and City were not asking the right questions. They were looking for this new person to come in and clean up the past, but the community had shut ELDI down and turned its back. So, I spent my first visit to East Liberty meeting people and talking..."

ELDI: How did you begin to formulate a plan for the neighborhood?

Myers: "First, we had to reconfigure the board of directors, and bring in some new staff to begin doing the work. I had to start with a clean slate. It had to be a community-driven organization, and we had to bring in some diversity."

"I remember the first community meeting we held at the Regent Theater (now the Kelly Strayhorn Theater). There were around 250 seats; it was packed, down to only standing room. We started by having each individual stand up, say their name, and say what's important to them - then our staff went around the room to write down every comment. We started at 6 p.m. and were still there at around 9:30 p.m."

"...That was the easy part. Being able to deliver on what they were asking us to do was the hard part. I asked the board and the City for their commitment to achieving those things. That's how this started. We continued to have those committee meetings, and I spent my first three years doing that to make the 1999 East Liberty Community Plan. I keep the original version in my office, as a reference to remind me that there is no timeline. As I said to the City, there is no rush because I have to do this based on community input and what's important to them - so I don't know how long it's going to take me to turn it around, but I do know we will start with this plan."

ELDI: After the first planning process, how did you help ensure that community members had a say in future developments?

Myers: "When the work was done, and the community was happy with where the plan was headed, I decided to create an independent committee - one that's still around to this day, 25 years in the making - called the "Community Planning Committee." The committee is made up of a mix of ELDI Board members and local residents, and it helps ensure that we are transparent. Any project that's going through East Liberty goes through that committee. I also created the real estate investment committee to ensure

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SCAN ME

Assemble welcomes first full-time instructor, artist Zim Syed

By Alex Bastianini *Assemble*

Insight/Garfield - The new school year is full STEAM ahead as Assemble’s afterschool programming returns to its brick-and-mortar location (4824 Penn Ave.). Assemble staffers are also excited to resume offsite programs, which take place around the city in public, private, and charter schools as well as other youth-centered organizations.

We think this is quite newsworthy, but we’d also like to recognize how Assemble reached a monumental achievement with a new hire.

Pittsburgh-based artist and teacher Zim Syed is Assemble’s first full-time instructor. The offsite teacher is friendly, talented, and very active in local arts culture.

Syed served as a resident artist in the 2022 BOOM Universe residency program, and

as the lead artist for the John Lewis mural on Locust Street in Uptown. He has worked on numerous other community projects across the city, including a Black Lives Matter mural in Oakland.

Syed is an offsite teacher at Assemble, meaning he teaches programs at satellite locations like Environmental Charter School (ECS) and Woolslair Elementary School. In addition to his work with students, Syed is crafting an offsite teaching plan to help support other Assemble teachers.

Prior to teaching here, Syed said he’d only known about Assemble “as a fairytale.” Several of his friends had worked with, or at, Assemble and he’d heard great things - but he couldn’t actually teach there, could he?

Then one day, Syed came across a job opening at Assemble and the rest is history. In May, Syed began working with Assemble as a part-time teacher. In a matter of months, he became Assemble’s first full-time teacher.

“There are so many great things about Assemble, and I love the staff and culture,” Syed said, praising the work of Nina, Devon, and Ja’Sonta - some of Assemble’s great leaders. “My favorite part of working at Assemble, though, is that it doesn’t really feel like a job,” he continued. “It’s more like a vessel for good that can be different things for different people.”

Syed has a powerful worldview that comes through in his teaching. “I think it is important to realize that we don’t have all the answers and that it’s okay to try something different than how it is usually done,” he explained. “I want to encourage experimentation, curiosity, and the courage to try something your own way.”

Syed is a wonderful fit here at Assemble, where our mission is to build confidence through making. When asked what STEAM education meant to him, Syed said “it is a way to sustain ourselves through the ability to create, and use creativity to solve problems and add to culture.”

To learn more about Assemble, visit assemblepgh.org. ♦



ABOVE: Local artist Zim Syed, Assemble’s first full-time instructor, is an expert muralist. He teaches students about STEAM principles offsite. Photo courtesy of BOOM.

JOIN THE WEST PENN HOSPITAL PATIENT SAFETY COMMITTEE

West Penn Hospital [WPH, 4800 Liberty Ave.] is looking for community members to be a part of the Patient Safety Committee meeting; you cannot currently be employed by Allegheny Health Network.

The purpose of the committee is to provide oversight and management of the patient safety plan and ensure the hospital meets the patient safety requirements outlined in the Joint Commission standards and the Pennsylvania Medical Care Availability and Reduction of Error Act (MCARE).

The Patient Safety Committee's objectives are to promote change; show leadership, and maintain staff awareness of patient safety, by identifying safety issues; implement best practices that are user-friendly and data-driven; support actionable plans; reduce and eliminate medical errors by identifying problems and implementing solutions that promote patient safety.

We ask community members to commit to attending a monthly meeting, either in person or via Microsoft Teams, and help WPH ensure alignment with the Patient Safety Committee's purpose.

Information shared at the committee meeting is confidential [and protected from disclosure, except as otherwise permitted under Pennsylvania's Peer Review Protection Act, Patient Safety Work Product, and the MCARE Act]. Committee members will be obligated to not disclose any information. If you are interested in joining this committee, please contact Jacqueline Drahos (Jacqueline.Drahos@AHN.org).

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LOCAL REAL ESTATE BLOTTER

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

Real Estate Sales for the month of July 2023

Compiled by Lillian Denhardt, Residential Realtor

Bloomfield

Christopher P & Margaret A Frank to Hue V Nguyen at 468 Pearl St. for \$86,000.

David Caliguiri to Maria Battaglia at 459 Pearl St. for \$367,500.

Deborah S Young to Chak Chak LLC at 424 S. Evaline St. for \$424,000.

Guido A & Joan A Deangelis to Ian Candy at 369 S. Winebiddle St. for \$370,000.

Healthcare Associates Of Pennsylvania LLC to Ohm Property Holdings LLC at 4312 Penn Ave. for \$1,550,000.

Jason Polder to Collin Wright at 4771 Cypress St. for \$340,000.

Mahmud Michael & Christina D Barmada to Jacob & Michalik at 225 S. Evaline St. for \$635,225.

Samantha A Melvin to Katherine Wettick at 4607 Corday Way for \$306,000.

Seiden Family Trust to Timothy & Heather M Clancy at 4224 Milgate St. for \$1.

Stefhani & Cooper WD Danes to Mary Beth Levrio at 5130 Friendship Ave. for \$485,000.

Vinessa G Turpin to Colter J Harper at 4816 Cypress St. for \$299,900.

Friendship

No sales to report.

Garfield

A&S Home Ventures LLC to American Lotus LLC at 5338 Kincaid St. for \$80,000.

Calvin J Michael to Nadine Oury at 5491 Penn Ave. Unit A302 for \$275,000.

David L Brown to Shannon L Spear at 307 N. Graham St. for \$230,000.

Elsie LR Howard to Community Reinvestment Partners LLC at 214 N. Aiken Ave. for \$62,337.

Heasi H Sliams to Community Reinvestment Partners LLC at 4807 Dearborn St. for \$23,977.

Ziyad Hirbawi to Garfield Property LLC at 340 N. Aiken Ave. for \$9,900.

East Liberty

405 Betty LLC to Chrisom A Ikej at 405 N. Beatty St. for \$610,000.

Diversified Family Investments LP to Hydro Sc LLC at 6111 Penn Ave. for \$325,000.

Golden Oil Company to 15 Katz Crew LP at N. Negley Ave. for \$701,250.

Highland Park Properties LLC to East End RE Group LLC at 745 N. Highland Ave. for \$10.

Lanita Clanton to Oluwaropo Omodunbi at 609 Collins Ave. for \$315,000.

Lawrenceville

3600 Penn Associates LLC to Rachel Adelman at 5109 Dresden Way for \$390,000.

3821 Cabinet Way LLC to Robert Earl Branson Testamentary Trust at 3821 Cabinet Way for \$263,000.

Albert J & Jane M Porco to 220 39th Street LLC at 220 39th St. for \$265,000.

Andrew T Slobozien to Molly Wilson at 130 46th St. for \$511,000.

Bridge City LLC to 4012 Foster LLC at 4012 Foster St. for \$150,000.

CFI Holdings LLC to Taylor Avenue LLC at 5140 Butler St. for \$300,000.

Charles J Pupich to Street 3.5 LLC at 5238 -5240 Wickliff St. for \$285,000.

David Muto to Ronald L Antosz at 4116 Geneva St. for \$120,000.

Elizabeth Jane Emerick to Xinlei Ji at 384 1/2 Bowery Way for \$130,000.

Gerbe Holdings LLC to Windley Peak Investments-Pennsylvania LLC at 187 Banner Way for \$225,000.

Jeb Jungwirth to Caroline Ann Austria at 34 48th St. for \$610,000.

Joseph F & Deborah E Talarico to Kartik Dwarki at 309 38th St. for \$775,000.

Joshua V Loccisano to Niveditha & Mohan at 345 Manion Way for \$85,000.

Katelyn Braun Schneider Irrevocable Trust to 3817 Butler Street LLC at 3817 Butler St. for \$1.

Lauren E Andrews to William Armbruster at 326 37th St. for \$525,500.

Magnolia Growth LLC to Kai Le Lie at 3825 Mintwood St. for \$469,000.

Matthew J Hogle to Ryan James Auld at 4518 Davison St. for \$375,000.

Matthew T Liegey to John Sala at 5406 Duncan St. for \$115,000.

Raymond & Mary Ann Scott to Andrew V Dicerbo at 3506 Leech St. for \$120,000.

Robert Baumgartner to Robin Neumayer at

4221 Sherrod St. for \$537,500.

Ronald W McGuinness to Morgan Marzo at 409 40th St. for \$195,000.

Russell W & Joyce A Sharp to Evan J Janoski at 3922 Mintwood St. for \$262,000.

Simon King to Benjamin Thomas Harper at 240 Main St. for \$690,000.

Sunny Day Renos LLC to Mackenzie Creehan at 243 Fisk St. for \$700,000.

Sunny Day Renos LLC to Margaret P Stuart at 349 Fisk St. for \$800,000.

VP Management LLC to Bailey J Sanden at 240 1/2 46th St. for \$300,000.

Wylie Holdings LP to Marissa & Gogniat at 319 37th St. for \$455,000.

Zachary Little to Orchard 137 LLC at 3725 Butler St. Unit 506 for \$741,000.

Stanton Heights

Bernard L & Gwendolyn E Henderson-Young to Chanell D Jones at 1510 Hawthorne St. for \$215,000.

Cynthia L Bowers to Jasp Holdings LLC at 1117 Stanton Ter. for \$230,000.

Donald G & Trisha D Kavalir to Omari Payne at 4602 Coleridge St. for \$105,000.

Harold Toomer to TH Property Owner I LLC at 4259 Coleridge St. for \$165,000.

Lsf8 Master Participation Trust to Andrew & Kaitlin Grover at 1152 Stanton Ter. for \$205,000.

Mary R Amantea to Lindsay Pierce at 1117 Normahill Dr. for \$122,000.

Robert & Eleanor Kumer to Gregory J Pontash at 5526 Camelia St. for \$257,000.

Ryan Timothy & Shannon Leigh Smith to Richard Charles & Stephanie Ash Howells at 1116 Oglethorpe Ave. for \$304,900.

Victor Johnson to William Joseph Rianda at 1523 Hawthorne St. for \$350,000.

This column, which uses County data, contains occasional errors. If something looks off, let us know.

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ECS elevates new & returning faces to leadership positions

By Deana Callipare Environmental Charter School

Garfield - The Environmental Charter School (ECS, 5525 Columbo St.) is proud to announce that two leadership positions have been filled: Intermediate School Assistant Principal by Keiterez Bynum, and Executive Director of 6-12 Academics by Cynthia Gilmer.

These two appointments play a pivotal role in maintaining the district's commitment to academic excellence and fostering a positive learning environment.

Having previously served as the assistant principal at Pittsburgh Public Schools' Brashear High School and Pittsburgh CAPA, Bynum brings his passion for data analysis and positive student and staff outcomes to ECS Intermediate School. He consistently demonstrates his ability to collaborate effectively with all local stakeholders including students, staff, parents, and community members.

"I look forward to assisting and supporting all members of the ECS Intermediate community and acting as their spirited supporter while maintaining the school's reputation for being a place for all students, and educating the whole child - and for ensuring a holistic, authentic, educational experience," Bynum said.



ABOVE: Keiterez Bynum joins ECS Intermediate as the new Assistant Principal, bringing more than 10 years of experience working with youths to the school's leadership team. Photo courtesy of ECS.

"I'm dedicated to continuing to refine and elevate ECS Intermediate's Out-the-Door programming and overall school culture."

Bynum's background of advocating for diversity and amplifying the voices of marginalized communities aligns with ECS's mission to grow active, engaged citizens.

His expertise in building meaningful relationships will contribute to the school's efforts to provide a high-quality education, and to inspire curiosity and wonder.

While Bynum is new to ECS, Gilmer had previously served as the district's Director of Curriculum of 6-12 Academics; she returns after working briefly in the Office of the Provost at the University of Pittsburgh.

Drawing on her background in science - 11 years of practical experience in medical research - Gilmer previously served as a science teacher for several local school districts including City Charter High School, Woodland Hills School District, and Pittsburgh Public Schools. She also served as an instructional coach.

Gilmer was named to *The New Pittsburgh Courier's* 2022 Women of Excellence list, and she holds a degree in secondary education from Carlow University, as well as a B.A. in biological sciences from Washington and Jefferson College.

"Not only does Cynthia have organizational knowledge from her previous tenure at ECS, but her commitment to standards-based and project-based learning aligns well with ECS's 6-12 academic programming," Superintendent Dr. Amanda Cribbs said. "We are delighted to have her rejoin the team as she shares her extensive knowledge of pedagogical content."



ABOVE: Cynthia Gilmer returns to ECS as the district's Executive Director of 6-12 Academics, bringing more than 20 years of teaching, curriculum development, and mentor experience to the district's leadership team. Photo courtesy of ECS.

Gilmer is excited about the district's mission to grow citizens: "With positive student outcomes at the forefront of this work, I'm excited to work alongside former colleagues and equip our teachers & staff members with the resources and supports needed to grow empathetic and thoughtful citizens," she said. "Student success is my top priority, and I look forward to contributing innovative practices as the urban classroom evolves." ♦

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