

the
Bulletin

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**Developer of large
apartment complex
to seek approval from
Planning Commission**

By Joe Reuben *Bulletin contributor*

Garfield - A 264-unit apartment complex, proposed for construction in the 300 block of N. Negley Avenue, will likely be returning to the City for approval in early 2024, according to one of the principals in the company that now controls the site, Mellon's Orchard Acquisition LLC.

In a Nov. 29 online meeting with representatives from several neighborhoods along the Negley Avenue corridor, Eric Jester confirmed that he and city officials have been discussing a way for the 6-story project to be predicated on a new zoning classification for the site.

The project, which would be located next to the neighborhood known as Mellon's Orchard North, did not receive approval

See **Mellon's Orchard** | page 2



ABOVE: Assemble's Nina Barbuto (far left) leads makers of all ages through arts & crafts activities at the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation's annual holiday party. To learn more about the Dec. 16 event and community coat drive, turn to page 5. Photo by Shannon Kenyon.



ABOVE: On Dec. 13, church leaders and political activists conducted a candlelight vigil to remember the 87 people who died from gun violence last year in Allegheny County. Read more about the ceremony on page 8. Photo by Alan Guenther.

Echo Realty appeals rejection of six-story 'Bloomfield Square' project

By Alan Guenther *Bulletin contributor, BGC Board Member*

Bloomfield - On Dec. 4, the developer of a proposed 248-apartment "Bloomfield Square" complex filed an appeal to overturn a Zoning Board decision that rejected the project based on its scale.

The current zoning code for the site (4401 Liberty Ave.) permits developments that are no more than three stories high.

Echo Realty [filing under the name "Bloomfield Bridge Associates"] sought to be relieved from that restriction by obtaining a "variance" to permit construction of a six-story, 75-foot-tall complex

on the two-acre site where the Community Market currently operates.

In its eight-page appeal, the developer called the zoning board's decision "arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion, not supported by substantial evidence, and contrary to law."

Echo wants a judge to reverse the decision and require the Board to issue an order "directing that the project be approved as depicted in the plans and exhibits."

The Board, in its Nov. 6 ruling, said it

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- **PAGE 6** - *'NEW BURGH' TO BUILD AFFORDABLE HOUSING UNITS IN LAWRENCEVILLE*

EXPLORING PERMACULTURE AT GARFIELD COMMUNITY FARM - **PAGE 11** -

Mellon's Orchard

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for several variances it sought from the City's Zoning Board of Adjustment at a Sept. 2022 hearing.

Several low-rise apartment buildings still occupy the site, having sat vacant and boarded-up for over five years. Jester said his private investment group [New Burgh Real Estate] would like to offer as many as 60 affordably-priced apartments if the project is approved as designed.

The economics of the project are such that 204 market-rate apartments would need to be part of the project if the affordable units were to be built feasibly, according to Jester.

The site extends from Rural Street on the south to Rippey Street on the north.

Jester said he thought New Burgh had the support of nearby neighbors for the project following a public meeting in June of 2022. However, several objectors appeared at the September zoning hearing three months later, and asked the Board to deny the variances that would have allowed for a denser development than what its current zoning classification permits.

According to Jester, only 50 units could be built on the site if the current zoning clas-

sification were to remain in place. He said there were 70 apartments scattered among the various buildings when his investment group purchased the properties in 2019.

Jester's intentions are to apply to the City Planning Commission for a zoning overlay known as "R-VH", which would permit the construction of a structure taller than any that previously occupied the site.

"We have stepped back the 5th and 6th stories of the new development so that neighbors would essentially be looking at a four-story complex," he related during the recent online meeting. "And we have added front-door entries along two sides of the building so that it would more closely relate to the homes on Rippey Street."

The building would also feature an indoor space, at the corner of Rural & N. Negley, benefiting riders waiting for Port Authority buses heading either way on N. Negley.

Jester said he believes he has the support of the city planning department and Mayor Ed Gainey's office in pursuing the new zoning overlay.

Even with this change, the project would still have to return to the zoning board at some point to seek relief from the setbacks



ABOVE: A rendering of the proposed 264-unit development in the 300 block of N. Negley Avenue. Artwork by AE7 Architects.

requirements for the building as designed.

The development would feature as many as 190 surface and underground parking spaces, which Jester feels would keep tenants of the complex from gobbling up on-street parking.

The Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation (BGC) hosted the online meeting, and Rick Swartz, its executive director, advised Jester that if the nearby neighbors were to

give their support to the development, it's likely that BGC would do the same.

"We certainly would like to see more affordably-priced rental housing along the Negley Avenue corridor," Swartz said.

"We thought the development was well-designed for projects of this size when it was presented to the Zoning Board back in 2022. But it seemed to hit an unexpected bump in the zoning approval process." ♦

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2023 data crunch: BGC posts impressive stats

By Pamela Schön Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation

Garfield - How is it already January of 2024? What happened to 2023 - and what impact did we at the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation (BGC) have in the local community?

While the beginning of a new year can be a time for planning, filling your calendars, or even creating your vision board, it's important to take a moment to reflect on our work last year. So we compiled all of the end-of-year data to bring you the following report: "BGC by the Numbers."

Youth Programs

The Youth Programs department graduated 51 high-school juniors and seniors from the 2022-2023 College & Career Readiness Program (CCRP). Of those 51 youths, the youth staff assisted 42 seniors through graduation and post-graduation planning. The nine juniors have re-enrolled in the current program year, along with 32 new high-school youths. We had four valedictorians: six received full rides to college; 20 participated in paid internships; and 16 earned their driver's licenses.

The BGC's Summer Learn & Earn Youth Employment Program employed 93 youths - 16 of whom were from Garfield - at worksites across the city, including 11 businesses in Garfield. The Teen Neighborhood Think Space (TNT) supported 57 youths who attended the Passport Academy [in Downtown Pittsburgh], where mentors taught them all about post-graduation planning, resume-building, FASFA, and more.

The Eastside Neighborhood Center (ENEC)

The ENEC hit an all-time high with 1,600 individuals receiving assistance with resumes; 128 of those individuals found employment and 631 were residents of the 15224 zip code.

Garfield Greenzone

The neighborhood's Greenzone welcomed the planting of 23 more native and fruit trees at Healcrest Farm, as well as the sowing of seeds for new collaborations and initiatives in 2024.

Housing & Land Use

The BGC was able to support three homeowners in receiving matching repair grants through the URA's Homeowners Assistance Program. The BGC identified 24 vacant properties with Rising Tide Partners, Inc. as the potential candidate for conservatorship actions at Common Pleas Court. The BGC also completed construction of 25 single-family, affordable rental homes along Kincaid, Rosetta, and Hillcrest Streets, and on N. Aiken Avenue.

Community Support

The BGC supported 27 families with emergency needs grants, supplied more than 100 winter coats to youths during our annual holiday party, and provided 30 Giant Eagle gift cards to Garfield residents for the holidays. Lastly, we were able to assist 116 community members in filing their tax returns.

Penn Ave Arts Initiative & Business District

We marked the 25th year of "Unblurred: First Fridays," and 10 years of the Garfield Night Market. While the COVID-19 pandemic took its toll, 2023 was a bounce back year for Penn Avenue. BOOM Concepts hosted nine artists-in-residence on the avenue, while also leading two public art/mural projects and nine exhibitions.

The rotunda project on Negley Ave. made advances last year, with the BGC leading the charge in fundraising \$300,000 to reimagine the former synagogue sanctuary as a future community arts, events, and education center. We also continued serving as the fiscal sponsor for the Pedantics Arts Residency's fundraising and programming.

In 2023, the BGC welcomed a variety of businesses to Penn Avenue - including a childcare space (Each One Teach One), two tattoo shops (Dream Machine, Kindred Spirit), and a pair of beauty salons (Diva on Fleek Boutique, and LaLa's Nail Academy). We're excited to welcome more entrepreneurs to the avenue in 2024! ♦

the
Bulletin

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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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Bloomfield Square continued from page 1

wasn't convinced that the variances requested by the developer were needed to make the project's construction feasible.

In addition, the Board said it didn't have the power to ignore existing zoning laws, maintaining that changes to the city's zoning code would require action by the City Planning Commission as well as the approval of City Council.

The Bloomfield Development Corporation joined many area residents in supporting the project, noting that it would keep a grocery store in the area while also setting aside 25 affordable apartments for low-income residents.

Some residents who live near the development said a six-story project would overwhelm local houses and clog narrow streets with traffic. They preferred a smaller, 191-apartment project that Echo Realty originally proposed - one that had also included a grocery store.

If approved, the six-story project would

take at least 18 months to complete. The grocery store would remain closed during that span, but Giant Eagle [owner of Community Market, and project partner of Echo Realty] is reportedly committed to delivering food to area residents.

As things stand, Echo's plans call for a new, 28,000 square-foot Giant Eagle to be constructed on the site, which would be smaller than Community Market's present footprint (36,000 sq. ft.).

The eight-page appeal was filed with the Allegheny County Common Pleas Court. On Dec. 15, the City served notice that it has received a copy of the challenge, and that it would defend the Zoning Board's decision in court.

As *The Bulletin* went to press, no further court action had been scheduled on the project.

[Alan Guenther lives two blocks from the project site. He may be reached by at guenthera30@gmail.com.] ♦



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for the latest neighborhood information and community updates.

Good tidings: BGC & MWCC provide cheer, warm coats for East End families

Story by Carlee Benhart Kukula Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation / Photos by Shannon Kenyon

BELOW: Jason Sauer (left), of the Most Wanted Car Club, leads a rousing karaoke rendition of Bruce Springsteen's "Santa Claus is Comin' to Town" with Rick Swartz, executive director of the BGC. DJ Paris not France (at right) smiles in approval.



Garfield - The Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation (BGC) and the Most Wanted Car Club (MWCC) recently joined forces to bring holiday joy to children in Pittsburgh's East End.

The collaborative effort, known as the "Saving Christmas" project, proved to be a tremendous success thanks to the combined effort of staff, donors, community members, and nonprofit partners.

The BGC took the lead in organizing the

initiative, providing the space for the party and raising funds to purchase and distribute coats to families in need.

The annual coat drive was able to serve 40 families, matching more than 100 coats with children living in East End neighborhoods.

MWCC, organized by Garfield resident Jason Sauer, purchased a Target gift card and two toys for each child, bringing the Christmas spirit to 50 families and 110

BELOW: Kids partake in a seasonal 'Kodak moment' with Santa and his elfen assistant. Santa (a.k.a. FRZY) recently won an Emmy Award for his exceptional rapping skills.



ABOVE: Local residents look through an assortment of winter coats made available at the Community Activity Center in Garfield.

children.

Assemble, located in the 4800 block of Penn Avenue, provided engaging arts & crafts activities for the kids, bringing an extra layer of fun to the festivities.

Paris Wright, the BGC's Employment Center Specialist, donned another hat to serve as the party's emcee and karaoke co-ordinator ["DJ Paris not France"].

Attendees were treated to a duet by Sauer and BGC Executive Director Rick Swartz as they performed the holiday classic, "Santa Claus is Comin' to Town."

The community spirit didn't stop there as Bloomfield's Caliente Pizza & Draft House generously donated 50 pizzas for the families, while Amy E. Drevenak showcased her baking talent with the contribution of 350 cupcakes.

The event featured Harvey "FRZY" Daniels as Santa, accompanied by Clutch Marles as Elf, spreading smiles and holiday cheer to all the children.

Thanks to Kelly O'Connor, of Kelly O's Diner in the Strip, free breakfast was generously provided for all the volunteers.

The BGC extends its sincere gratitude to all supporters, donors, and volunteers who played a critical role in making this event a success.

Working together in the spirit of the holiday season, their efforts helped create lasting memories for East End families. ♦



ABOVE: Jarmele Fairclough (left), the BGC's Board President, helps distribute cupcakes to partygoers on Saturday, Dec. 16.

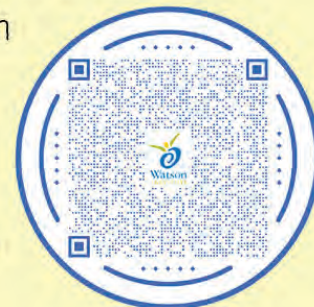
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'New Burgh' presents plans to build 50 housing units on Penn Avenue

A Message from Lawrenceville United



ABOVE: Representatives from New Burgh Real Estate and architects from AE7 explain their plans for a new residential development in Lawrenceville. Photo courtesy of Emma Gamble.

Lawrenceville - New Burgh Real Estate presented its proposal for a new residential project in Lower Lawrenceville during a public Community Development Activities Meeting co-facilitated by Lawrenceville United (LU) and Lawrenceville Corporation on Thursday, Dec. 14.

The project would consist of 50 new units of housing on a site (at 3634 Penn Ave.) that is mostly vacant land. A building at 37th & Penn is currently unoccupied and in bad shape, and would need to be demolished, according to the development team.

During the Dec. 14 meeting at New Alliance Federal Credit Union, Eric Jester (of New Burgh) introduced architects from AE7, who walked attendees through early designs of the 3-story project, which they characterized as “garden apartments in an urban typology.”

The project meets minimum parking requirements by offering 36 parking spots (with additional bike parking), including a few spots that are made possible via shared parking agreement with an adjacent parcel. One key focus of the meeting was how those parking spaces would be accessed. Some community members expressed strong concerns about a proposed driveway coming off of Penn Avenue - and how this might affect the neighborhood’s strong walkability and exacerbate concerns about pedestrian safety.

The project is the latest in a number of Lawrenceville developments to trigger the neighborhood’s inclusionary zoning overlay requirements, which mandates that new residential projects featuring more than 20 units must price 10% of the units as affordable for low-income residents. As part of these requirements, New Burgh will be providing

five below-market-rate units, which are restricted to households earning less than 50% Area Median Income. In the case of a family of three, that translates to collective earnings of less than \$45,000 per year in 2023.

At the community meeting, Jester pledged that New Burgh would go one step further by accepting Housing Choice Vouchers for the inclusionary units, in order to better support lower-income households in qualifying to rent the affordable units.

The project team explained they would likely need to request a variance for height due to residential compatibility standards, but that this was largely a technicality imposed by the development’s proximity to the nearest single-family-zoned property, which is part of their own project.

Following suit with nearby properties along Penn Avenue, the project appears to meet the height/story limits set by the neighborhood commercial district. The shared parking agreement is also expected to require a special exception from the City’s Zoning Board of Adjustment.

The development team stressed that the Dec. 14 meeting was preliminary, and that a hearing date has yet to be scheduled with the Zoning Board. Anyone interested in learning more about the project is encouraged to visit LUnited.org for full meeting notes and presentation documents, or contact LU at 412-802-7220 or info@LUnited.org. ♦

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'Catapult Culinary' grads give back, prepare holiday meals for Northgate School District

By Elizabeth Sensky *East Liberty Development, Inc.*

Bellevue - Nicole Porterfield-Miller, a graduate of the Catapult Culinary program, was going through a tough time when a catering request for Thanksgiving meals came through her inbox.

"I saw the email, and I passed on it, because I recently experienced a death in my family," she explained.

But after a week went by and Miller saw the email again, she decided to reach out and investigate further.

The request was from Bellevue's Northgate School District. Roughly 20 families whose children attend Northgate elementary schools were struggling to provide Thanksgiving dinner, and the school decided to do something about it.

"I am naturally made aware of families that have experienced hardships and may need extra assistance," said Austen Tarabay, school counselor at Northgate's Avalon Elementary School. "I know that the holidays can be difficult for many people, and we wanted to do something for our families to be able to enjoy their Thanksgiving."

Tarabay said she was then connected to Dr. Jeff Cohen, who leads community health and innovation at the Allegheny Health Network (AHN).

Dr. Cohen, in turn, reached out to Catapult Greater Pittsburgh's "Catapult Culinary" incubator program, which operates out of AHN's former General Hospital

Suburban Campus in Bellevue. He knew that someone from the program would likely be able to help.

Miller ultimately answered the call.

"Northgate sent me over the list of families that needed assistance with Thanksgiving meals, and I decided that we would do it," she said.

Miller is the owner & chef behind Café NikkiP, a small catering business that offers breakfast, lunch, and party trays. Getting her start making fruit and veggie trays out of her kitchen in 2015, Miller jumped at the opportunity to take her business to the next level when she saw an ad for Catapult's food incubator program for minority businesses in 2021.

Joining the first cohort, she learned essential skills for running a food business, from understanding the economics of inventory to how to set up an LLC. But perhaps the biggest benefit of the program was gaining access to Catapult's 6,000-sq.-ft. commercial kitchen space in Bellevue, as well as access to the Catapult network.

"I have tripled my income from last year to this year based off being in the kitchen space and being connected to different organizations throughout the city," Miller shared.

After receiving so much from the incubator program, Miller felt it was only natural to give back. With only five days to prepare a Thanksgiving meal for 80 individ-



ABOVE: Catapult graduate Terina J. Hicks baked pumpkin pies for Northgate families in need. Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Sensky.

uals, she and her husband (David Miller, who is a partner in the business) put their heads together and got to work.

"We wanted [the meals] to be easy for the families to be able to reheat, and we knew it would be raining that week so, rather than sending them home in boxes, we decided to put them in plastic bags," Miller explained.

As far as the menu, they went with a slight twist on the standard Thanksgiving meal - opting for Cornish hens and baked chicken over turkey - along with the classic sides of mashed potatoes, gravy, corn, green beans, stuffing, and rolls.

But what would a Thanksgiving dinner be without dessert? Fellow Catapult Culinary alum Terina J. Hicks was also contacted to supply the obligatory pumpkin pie for each family. Hicks also works in the Catapult kitchen, where she operates

CobblerWorld, a bakery specializing in homemade, nostalgic desserts - with a Downtown retail shop at 1059 Penn Avenue.

"Growing up, we didn't have much. There were days where our cupboards were bare," said Hicks. "So I just love to see the smiles on people's faces when they see pineapple upside down cake, banana bread, pumpkin pie, or whatever it may be."

According to Tarabay, the smiles were contagious, with each family thrilled to receive such delicious and complete meals.

"Thank you so much for this," one family shared. "We were almost going to cancel Thanksgiving altogether."

For Catapult Executive Director Tammy Thompson, it's opportunities like these that showcase the beauty of the program.

Catapult Culinary members can be compensated for their hard work while accessing a commercial kitchen at a fair rate - typically the biggest barrier to entry for food-based entrepreneurs - and a local institution [like Northgate] can provide homemade food to community members in need at a discounted price.

"I'm so proud of our Catapult Culinary team answering the call to be part of such a generous endeavor," Thompson said. "This kind of generosity is in direct alignment with the values we embody at Catapult Greater Pittsburgh."

For Miller, the initiative was in direct alignment with her personal values as well: "My family is blessed to be able to cook and provide for our children, and sometimes it hurts, because we see the need and hunger around us. So, it really warmed our hearts to be able to provide these meals."

Visit catapultpittsburgh.org to learn more about the culinary program. ♦



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ABOVE: Cobbler World's storefront in Downtown Pittsburgh is a testament to the empowering effects of the Catapult Culinary program. Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Sensky.

Neighborhood FOCUS

Ceremony mourns lives lost to gun violence in Allegheny County

Story & photos by Alan Guenther Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation

Bloomfield - On Dec. 13, during a candlelight “remembrance” ceremony at the First United Methodist Church of Pittsburgh, church groups and activists mourned the loss of 87 lives – all in Allegheny County – due to gun violence last year.

“I am sick of this violence, and I know you are, too,” said Shayla Holmes, a member of the Coalition Against Violence and the Black Political Empowerment Project (B-PEP).

“We started the vigils right after George Floyd was murdered in Minneapolis,” said Tracy Merrick, a member of the church and the Pittsburgh Peace Is Possible Co-

alition - which helped organize the ceremony with CeaseFirePA and a half-dozen other groups.

“We want to see what we can do to be agents of change in this world,” said Merrick.

When his son was shot to death, Rev. Thomas H. Mitchell said that it was hard to overcome the feelings of shock and grief he felt upon seeing his son lying in a coffin with a bullet hole in his head.

As a father, he cried. But at the same time, he knew that he was also a pastor who had an important message to deliver. In his sermon, Mitchell told his son’s friends not to go out in the streets to avenge his son’s death with more violence. His son (Thomas III) died 21 years ago, at the age of 32.

The evening ceremony began with a 45-minute vigil outside the church building. After that, the ceremony resumed inside where, according to Tracy Cox (pastor at the First United Methodist Church), about 100 mourners lit candles for their loved ones who died from gun violence.

Niesha Hunter, 45, said her son, Daevon Eggleston, 24, was murdered in the city’s Manchester neighborhood on June 12, 2022. Video cameras recorded the shooting, she said, but police told her the footage “just showed everyone running scared. ... My son’s murderer is still out there.”

Beth Foringer, the southwest coordinator for CeaseFirePA, said that by bringing

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ABOVE: Following the ceremony, attendees hung stars in remembrance of local lives lost to gun violence.

BELOW: More than 100 people attend a Dec. 13 evening service, held at the First United Methodist Church of Pittsburgh, to commemorate last year's 87 victims of gun violence in Allegheny County.



- continued from previous page -

people together, the event helped give voice to those who have lost loved ones to gun violence.

"Don't wait for it to happen to you," she warned. "Take action now."

'We want to see what we can do to be agents of change in this world.'

- Tracy Merrick, First United Methodist Church
& the Pittsburgh Peace Is Possible Coalition

According to CeaseFirePA, Republican lawmakers in the state Legislature have blocked passage of "common sense" legislation that could save lives, including:

- **Extreme Risk Protection Orders**, which could empower family members and law enforcement officials to petition a judge to temporarily remove guns from a loved one in crisis, without subjecting them to an involuntary mental-health commitment.
- **Lost or Stolen Gun Reporting** that would require gun owners to report the loss or theft of a firearm within three days of discovering the firearm is gone.
- **Universal Background Checks** that would require thorough vetting for the private sales of long guns, closing a loophole that currently allows violent felons and other dangerous individuals to purchase military-style rifles (the weapon of choice for mass shootings) from a private/non-licensed seller without any oversight.
- **Safe Storage Legislation** that would require firearm owners to securely store their weapons in their home when not in use. According to CeaseFirePA, this has been shown to prevent school shootings, unintentional shootings, and suicides, especially by preventing children from accessing weapons.

At 6 p.m. on the second Wednesday of each month, the First United Methodist Church (5401 Centre Ave.) and the Pittsburgh Peace Is Possible Coalition hold outdoor vigils to mourn those who have been shot to death the previous month. All are welcome to attend these ceremonies.

[Alan Guenther is a co-convenor of the Pittsburgh Peace Is Possible Coalition.] ♦

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Rotunda Collaborative hosts benefit concert at Rodef Shalom

A Message from the Rotunda Collaborative

Pittsburgh - The Rotunda Collaborative, a new project helmed by the BGC, is delighted to present our first public concert at Rodef Shalom synagogue at 3 p.m. on Sunday, Feb. 4.

For more information about the rotunda renovation project's overall vision, please visit our website (rotundapgh.com). The Feb. 4 event is a fundraiser for the project, which a small group of us have been working on with the BGC for the past four years.

Given the historic roots of the rotunda

building - located in the sanctuary of the former B'nai Israel synagogue on N. Negley Ave. - we decided to focus this event on music written by Jewish composers as a way to celebrate the Jewish continuity embedded in our renovation project.

This concert will highlight the contributions of Jewish composers to American music - from the Golden Cantorial age through Yiddish Theatre, and finally to Broadway.

Since the building will be used for a myriad of community arts events, we are work-

ing to pay homage to the congregation that once worshipped there.

The concert will highlight several local performers, led by Sara Stock Mayo, who is serving as Community Outreach Director for the Rotunda Collaborative project.

With a background in both musical theatre and cantorial music, Mayo will collaborate with another local talent, Doug Levine, who will arrange the music and accompany a team of singers at the event. Both performers, who grew up attending services at B'nai Israel, bring their passion for the building's future to this project.

Desiree Sorteres (from Aria 412) will join a team of local singers and community members during the afternoon of music.

After the program, attendees will be invit-

ed to an informal gathering with leaders and members of the BGC, the Rotunda Collaborative, Beacon Communities (the development company who worked to get this project off the ground and maintains a high level of support and involvement), and the performers.

We will provide updates and share architectural drawings with you, and answer any of your questions about the project's next steps.

We could not be more excited to share this opportunity with you as we work to enrich the Rotunda's event programming.

More information about the fundraiser will be forthcoming on our website.

Please email Mayo (stockmayos@gmail.com) with any questions. ♦



ABOVE: The rotunda building on N. Negley Avenue. Photo courtesy of rotundapgh.com.

"State of the Neighborhood" Meeting

When: Tuesday, Jan. 16th, 6 PM

Where: BGC Activity Center
113 N. Pacific Avenue, Garfield

Special Guests: Realtors Association of Metropolitan Pittsburgh

Representatives from the Association will be present to talk with residents about how to avoid problems with a tangled title to the family property after the owner has passed on, and how to go about resolving them if you do.

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For further info, contact Carlee Kukula of the Bloomfield-Garfield Corp. (Carlee@bloomfield-garfield.org).

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Exploring permaculture with Garfield Community Farm

By **Stephanie Bell** *Garfield Community Farm*

'Introduction to Permaculture' class on Feb. 24

In this one-day class, we explore the foundations of permaculture, its modern history, and its roots in indigenous wisdom. We will learn the principles of permaculture and how they guide various practices and design methodologies.

This class includes eight hours of education toward your "Permaculture Design Certification" (PDC) and is the perfect class for those beginning the certification process. It also provides a great introduction for those exploring gardening, farming, and ecological design for the first time.

Permaculture design course: 2024 cohort

The permaculture design course has been the foundational hallmark of permaculture education for the past four decades. Permaculture brings together food production and ecological restoration, helping gardeners, farmers and land stewards see how we can create solutions to food inequality, climate change, and the ecological crisis.

Through permaculture we can all learn to care for the earth, care for other people, and do it with justice and equity. With a deep understanding of nature and ecology, "permaculturists" develop human-managed systems to grow more food, support more biodiversity, and make positive impacts in their communities.

Beginning in 2024, our permaculture design course will be spread throughout the year with a monthly weekend intensive. This year's cohort will include eight to fifteen students committed to finishing their PDC in 2024.

Instead of doing 80 hours of classwork in an intense two-week course, we're spreading the classes throughout the year - giving students time to read, experiment, learn, and ask questions between classes.

We believe this model for the PDC will create better learning and teaching environments, and allow students to go deeper into the practices and theory of permaculture throughout the course.

For more info, and to reserve your spot in the introductory class or design course, please visit wild-indigo-guild.com/classes. ♦



ABOVE: Dusk settles over the landscape of Garfield Community Farm (GCF), casting the neighborhood's iconic water tower in relief. Photo courtesy of GCF.

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Pittsburgh Public Schools’ lack of students may force closings

By Ann Belser *NEXTpittsburgh*

[The following excerpt was originally published by NEXTpittsburgh (nextpittsburgh.com), which features the people, projects and places advancing the region and the innovative and cool things happening here. Sign up to get their free newsletter at nextpittsburgh.com/sign.]

Pittsburgh - The Pittsburgh Public School District has more empty desks than it has children enrolled in its 54 schools.

That stark fact has implications that make school closings a real possibility and funnels a disproportionate amount of the district’s money to charter schools.

The amount the district spends on average for each student determines how much it must pay charter schools for every city student it educates.

For the 2022-2023 school year, while other school districts across the commonwealth paid an average of \$13,639 per student who was not in special education, the Pittsburgh schools paid \$19,398 each in tuition for those students.

For children who have an individualized education plan, or are in special education, PPS paid \$46,518 per student compared to the average tuition in the state of \$31,544, according to figures from the state Department of Education.

A+ Schools, in its “2023 Report to the Community on Public School Progress in Pitts-

burgh,” noted that the city schools were educating 20,072 students last year, while the buildings had 20,665 empty seats. The district also paid to send 5,250 students to charter schools.

Using the state data and calculating the difference between what the district pays for regular education in charters and the average cost for other districts, PPS is paying about \$30.2 million more for charter school tuition than the average district in the state.

Former school Director Kevin Carter, who was chair of the board’s finance committee before the board reorganization, pointed out that the cost of charter school tuition doubled in the eight years he served on the school board.

It was actually faster than that. In 2018, charter schools cost the district \$74.2 million in tuition. In the budget for 2024, charter payments are up to \$144.7 million. Tuition for charter schools now makes up 20 percent of the school district budget.

On Dec. 18, the district will hold an online public hearing at 6 p.m. on the proposed \$714 million budget, and on Dec. 20 the board, which includes three new members who were sworn in on Dec. 4, will be voting in a live stream session at 6:30 p.m.

That budget is 4.23% higher than the 2023 budget. Despite a proposed operating deficit of \$29.62 million, the budget does not include a tax increase; instead the deficit would be paid from the district’s fund balance, which the budget office estimated will be \$75.16 million at the end of this year and \$45.54 million at the end of 2024.

Ronald Joseph, the district’s finance director, said the fund balance, which has been money set aside by the district, will be gone in 2025.

“Using your fund balance to fund your deficits is not where we want to be,” Joseph told the board members during a budget workshop.

Joseph projected that by the end of this year, the district will have dipped into the fund balance and spent \$8.4 million of it. Next year’s proposed budget is balanced by using \$29.6 million from that account. [Read the full story at nextpittsburgh.com]

[Ann Belser is the owner of *Print*, a newspaper covering Pittsburgh’s East End communities. After receiving a master’s degree from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, she moved to Squirrel Hill and was a staff writer for the *Post-Gazette* for 20 years where she covered local communities, county government, courts, and business.] ♦

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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).

Pittsburgh Racial Justice Summit aiming to build local coalitions

By Margo Hinton *Pittsburgh Racial Justice Summit*

East Liberty - The "Black & White Reunion" will present the 26th annual Pittsburgh Racial Justice Summit on the evening of Friday, Jan. 19 and the morning of Saturday, Jan. 20. The theme for this year's gathering is "From Othering to Bridging: Reconnecting for Social Change."

The Summit will be held in person at the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary (616 N. Highland Ave.) in East Liberty. The annual event's mission is to help strengthen local coalitions in order to promote sustained collective action toward racial justice in Pittsburgh and beyond.

The keynote speaker for Friday evening will be Dr. Audrey J. Murrell, a Professor of Business Administration, Psychology, Public & International Affairs at the University of Pittsburgh's School of Business.

Dr. Murrell conducts extensive research on mentoring, careers in local organizations, workplace/supplier diversity, and social issues in management. The Saturday morning panel will include a diverse group of local leaders in social justice and community-building.

The Pittsburgh Racial Justice Summit, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, and YWCA Greater Pittsburgh are partnering to bring this event to the local community. We encourage all community members to attend or become an event volunteer, and also to share information about the summit with friends & family.

For more information, and to register, please visit prjs-summit-2024.eventbrite.com.

Information may also be found on our social media [on Facebook (Pittsburgh Racial Justice Summit); on Instagram (@summitpgh); and X (@justicepgh)]. ♦

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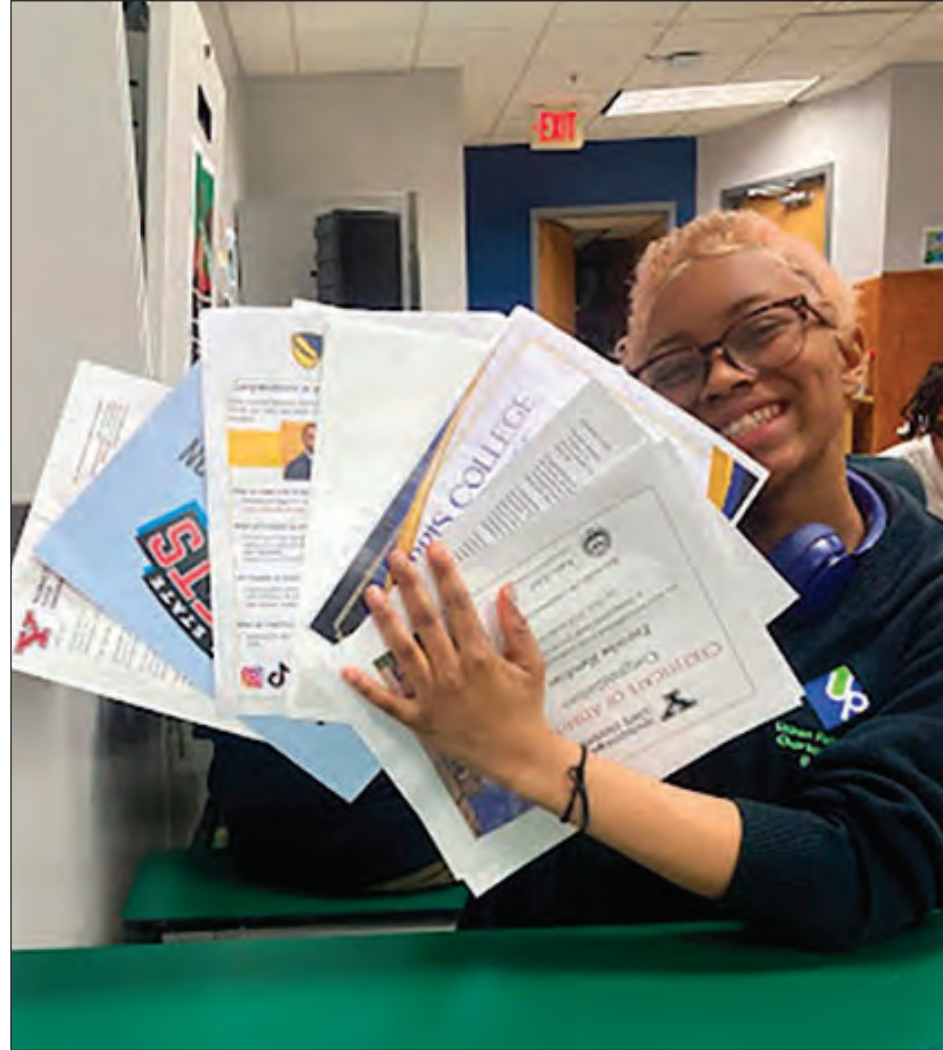
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CCRP student profile: Taeosha Hawkins

By Julia Beadnell *Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation*



ABOVE: CCRP student Taeosha Hawkins can barely get her hands around all the college acceptance letters she received in 2023. As of press time, Taeosha's impressive tally is eleven and counting. Photo courtesy of Julia Beadnell.

Garfield - Taeosha Hawkins has been participating in the Bloomfield Garfield Corporation's (BGC) College & Career Readiness Program (CCRP) since last August.

During our first meeting with this bright young mind, it was clear that Taeosha was tenacious and hard-working.

After initially pursuing her goal of becoming an attorney, she has since changed course and decided to pursue a degree in forensic psychology & criminal justice.

A Pittsburgh native, Taeosha is the oldest of five siblings and, with a weighted GPA of 3.7, she is ranked first in her senior class at Urban Pathways Charter School.

As of December 2023, Taeosha has received a whopping 11 college/university acceptance letters, including several from historically Black colleges or universities (HBCUs), and is still waiting for several more decisions from other institutions of higher learning.

To celebrate all her hard work, we posted about Taeosha and her acceptance letters on the BGC's Facebook page. Thanks to

the support of her friends and family, this post received one of the highest levels of engagement across all the BGC's social media channels. Stay tuned to see where the rest of the year takes Taeosha.

So far this year, 21 of our CCRP participants have received a collective 139 college or university acceptance letters. At least 45% of them are from HBCUs, and four of them are international acceptances.

What an accomplishment for the Class of 2024! We couldn't be more proud of our CCRP students! ♦

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ECS welcomes first Director of STEM, Elvin Peprah

By Deana Callipare *Environmental Charter School*

Insight/Pittsburgh - The Environmental Charter School (ECS) is proud to announce the appointment of Elvin Peprah as the district’s first Director of STEM.

As a pioneer of this position, Peprah joins the school’s Innovation Department to ensure modernized curricular content, instructional approaches, materials, and infrastructure that can provide students with a competitive edge in the global community.

Peprah will lead the integration of sciences, humanities, civic engagement & technology, arts, and design for the school’s newly-formed Environmental Citizenship Department - through a social justice, environmental sustainability, and STEM lens. He will support the ECS district’s strategic direction in areas of design, making, and innovation.



ABOVE: Elvin Peprah, ECS’s first Director of STEM. Photo courtesy of Deana Callipare.

With a proven track record of educational leadership in maker spaces, Peprah will design new curriculum to help support students and staff in growing the seed of an idea into a prototype, and eventually into a product.

Having previously served as the Department Chair for Innovation & Computer Science at Georgetown Day School, Peprah brings his knowledge of project-based learning and human-centered design to the position - with a focus on social justice and reaching underserved students.

“At the core of my educational philosophy is the conviction that ‘our future will be built,’” Peprah said. “I believe we need to empower students to solve the problems of tomorrow, and that starts with cultivating the mindsets of kids, teachers, and families that center on creative problem-solving and creating experiences that allow us to practice it.”

He is dedicated to equipping students with the knowledge and skills required to actively participate in shaping a better future for their communities. By exhibiting a commitment to lifelong learning, acquiring new skills, and gaining insights from his students, Peprah leads by example. ♦



Bloomfield Garfield Corporation’s Annual Winter Coat Drive

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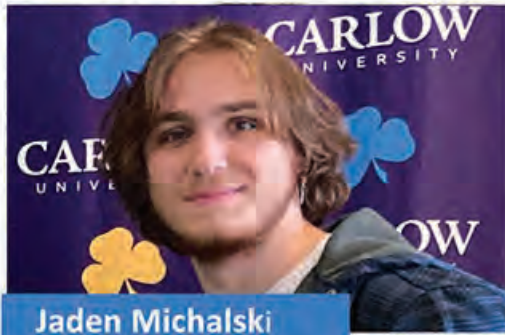
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Dear Neighbor,

It has been a year to remember in our community. There are many successes to reflect back on and, as always, some things that still need a good deal of time or attention, or both. We are proud to share the stories of Jaden Michalski, Arianna Ethridge, and Chequila Estes – just three examples of the remarkable people who long for a better quality of life for themselves and their neighbors in spite of great challenges. With your support, we will head into 2024 with strengthened capacity to provide invaluable support systems for adults and children, create safe & affordable housing, and nurture new businesses and inclusive arts programming on Penn Avenue.



Jaden Michalski

Jaden Michalski, a Garfield resident who participated in both the College & Career Readiness Program and the Summer Learn & Earn Program, is now enrolled at Carlow University.



Arianna Ethridge

Arianna Ethridge, a Garfield resident who studied photography & ecology while participating in the Summer Learn & Earn Program.



Chequila Estes

Chequila Estes, a more recent arrival to Garfield who has received various means of support for her family through BGC programs.

These stories, and so many others, are the fruits of your generous support of our work. **Please help us reach our year-end fundraising goal of \$10,000 by donating to the BGC today.** By supporting this work, you are joining a growing coalition of neighbors and small businesses who believe in the future of Garfield and surrounding communities.

Gratefully,

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County Exec. Innamorato: new role might test strong principles

By Alan Guenther *Bulletin contributor, BGC Board Member*

Allegheny County - With her inauguration scheduled for Jan. 2, Lawrenceville resident Sara Innamorato, 37, will get a chance to transform her ideals into action as the newly elected Allegheny County Executive.

An early chance for her to show how she will implement promised changes will come at 4 p.m. on Jan. 4, when the Allegheny County Jail (ACJ) Oversight Board is scheduled to meet in the county courthouse. A new, interim warden is already on the job, but Innamorato is expected to hire her own person in the months to come.

Since March 2020, more than 20 people have died while in the jail, or shortly after being released. With prisoners complaining about roaches and dead snails in their food, Innamorato is expected to appoint as many as half a dozen new Board members to help improve conditions at ACJ.

Innamorato narrowly defeated Republican candidate Joe Rockey, a retired PNC bank executive, with 51.2% of the vote on Nov. 7.

A self-described progressive Democrat, Innamorato will be the youngest person, and the first woman, to hold the influential and powerful job. The County Executive has the power to sign contracts worth millions without the approval of the County Council.

As the executive, Innamorato will run a government with a \$3 billion operating & capital budget and more than 6,300 employees. She'll appoint board members to lead critical agencies such as the health department, the county jail, and Pittsburgh Regional Transit. She will also preside over the Allegheny County Board of Elections to make sure all votes are counted in earnest.

When *The Bulletin* interviewed her last April, Innamorato said that, when she was 16, she left her family home - with her mother and sister - on Christmas Eve, determined to get away from her drug-addicted father. Innamorato said she would use the pain of her personal experience to inform the ways in which she helps people.

Prior to winning the election, Innamorato served five years in the PA Legislature as the 21st District state representative [for the Bloomfield, Garfield, and Lawrenceville

BELOW: Sara Innamorato joins other lawmakers in Harrisburg last summer to advocate for the elimination of race-based hair discrimination. 'Let's #passthecrown!' she wrote on Instagram. Photo courtesy of @repinnamorato.



neighborhoods]. Before that, she ran Innamo Co., a small communications & marketing business.

During her *Bulletin* interview, Innamorato - who grew up in Ross Township and has lived in Lawrenceville for the past 10 years - said she knows why people are angry with government. They don't want bureaucratic solutions from the same stale leaders. They want something new, and someone new.

When asked how she would manage a sprawling, multi-billion-dollar county government, Innamorato said she would rely on her progressive ideals. When looking at the county budget, for example, she did not talk about bloat or cutting costs. She talked about fair wages for employees.

"Who are the people there? And are they making a wage where they can sustain themselves and their family?" she asked. Innamorato said she plans to create a culture where county employees are "compensated fairly and treated with dignity and respect." She plans to eliminate "wage gaps" based on gender and race. When it comes to closing those gaps and providing living wages without raising taxes, she said it is a matter of approaching the job with different priorities.

Innamorato said she will apply the same progressive attitude to many aspects of her new job. For example, she will pursue partnerships with companies that don't pollute the environment, and will seek to punish those that do. She doesn't want to hire more police officers, preferring instead to get at the "root causes of crime" by providing mental health services and safe shelter to those who need it.

In short, Innamorato said she will be a different leader whose ideals will make Allegheny County a better, and fairer, place for all. At least that's the plan. Here's hoping, for all of our sakes, that she's right.

[Alan Guenther may be reached at guenthera30@gmail.com. He is a co-convenor of the Pittsburgh Peace Is Possible Coalition, which has advocated for reforms at ACJ.] ♦

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