

# the Bulletin

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## Second phase of Penn Ave. reconstruction set for spring 2025

By Joe Reuben *Bulletin contributor*

*Penn Avenue* - Speaking with neighbors at a community meeting on Mar. 7, officials from Mayor Ed Gainey's office and the City's Dept. of Mobility & Infrastructure (DOMI) said they anticipate the second phase of Penn Avenue reconstruction will break ground in spring 2025.

Phase Two will extend from Evaline St. to Graham St., and will replace the public infrastructure "from the building line on one side of Penn to the building line on the other," Michael Panzitta, a DOMI engineer, informed the attendees.

He rattled off a list of potential improvements for the avenue - from a concrete roadway to new sidewalks, curbs, catch basins, vaults, street lighting, traffic signals, trees, and public art.

See **Penn Avenue** | page 2



**ABOVE:** State Senator Lindsey Williams (center) joins officials from City of Bridges Community Land Trust, the URA, and Dollar Bank at a Mar. 25 ground-breaking for three new homes in Garfield. Learn more about the land trust below. Photo by Andrew McKeon.



**ABOVE:** Rob Perkins (left) and Muhammad Ali Nasir observe a moment of silence before taking their seats on Mar. 7 as new members of the Allegheny County Jail Oversight Board. Read more on page 7. Photo by Alan Guenther.

## City of Bridges Community Land Trust secures \$8M for affordable housing

By **Cassandra Armour** *CBCLT*

*Pittsburgh* - On Jan. 31, City of Bridges Community Land Trust (CBCLT) closed on a historic \$8 million New Markets Tax Credits (NMTC) transaction to develop at least 22 permanently affordable homes throughout Pittsburgh.

This is the city's first fully-affordable homeownership NMTC transaction, and the state's first fully-affordable NMTC transaction since 2009.

From its Garfield headquarters, CBCLT works to foster first-time homeownership for low-to-moderate-income households who earn less than 80% of AMI (area me-

dian income) for Allegheny County.

While these new homeowners build equity, the community oversees the long-term stewardship of the land to keep it affordable - permanently - as a benefit of the Community Land Trust model.

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) allocated funding across Pennsylvania to support economic challenges due to COVID-19.

These ARPA funds, in turn, leveraged over \$5 million of additional investment,

See **Land Trust** | page 4

- PAGE 3 -

RAISING AWARENESS: WEST PENN  
HOSTS 'DONATE LIFE MONTH'

MAYOR GAINNEY PROPOSES  
CHANGES TO PGH LAND BANK

- PAGE 10 -

## Penn Avenue *continued from page 1*

Panzitta said the City wants to see one block of the project completed before work starts on the next, thus avoiding prolonged closures of multiple blocks, which occurred during Phase One.

“The contractor would be directed to complete one side of Penn, from Evaline to Graham, before starting down the opposite side,” he said. “The section of Penn that carries traffic heading towards East Liberty would go first, and then the section of Penn that heads into town would follow.”

Re-routing Port Authority buses will be more challenging in Phase II, Panzitta admitted, because they cannot be detoured through Garfield due to the neighborhood’s narrow streets. The better option, he noted, is Friendship Avenue. Jennifer Haven, a Friendship resident and member of the Friendship Community Group, suggested the City look at ways to do traffic-calming measures along Coral Street - since she feels that most drivers will try to use Coral, instead of Friendship, to bypass the reconstruction zone.

Panzitta described some new amenities planned for Phase Two, including bus shelters, bike racks, and LED street lamps that will better illuminate sidewalks, along with more public art integrated into the project. Two local artists, Atiya Jones and Marlana Vassar, will be working with ShiftWorks (formerly the Office of Public Art) and community members to design these installations.

Panzitta went into some detail around an elevated pedestrian crossing at Penn and Pacific Avenues, as this will remain the only intersection without traffic signals. While pedestrians crossing the street will not notice the change in elevation, it will be readily felt by vehicles coming through the intersection on Penn. The idea is to slow traffic without creating more congestion in the corridor, he said.

Still, concerns were expressed throughout the meeting that Phase Two needs to avoid the problems that plagued Phase I, which started in the fall of 2013 and did not wrap up until the late spring of 2016. While the first project, stretching from Mathilda to Evaline, admittedly brought a refreshed look to the street, criticisms of Phase I were again voiced by attendees. Their complaints focused on the following issues:

**BELOW:** Penn Avenue’s planter beds and ‘ice cubes,’ public art remnants of the first phase of reconstruction, serve as reminders of yesterday’s good intentions. Photo by Andrew McKeon.



- the length of time that the entire 4-block stretch of Penn was cordoned off, with concrete barricades and 6-foot fencing, creating a “war-zone” look for the street
- PennDOT’s implementation of traffic signals that are twice the size of the old ones
- the failure of the new street lighting system to fully illuminate the sidewalks below
- Phase One tree grates that continuously trap litter and the occasional small animal
- the unwillingness of the Pittsburgh Water & Sewer Authority (PWSA) to replace any of its obsolescent water or sewer mains
- the absence of daily supervision of the Phase One project by the City’s Dept. of Public Works (since folded into DOMI)
- the long-term parking of large construction vehicles on side streets
- the storage of mounds of contaminated earth, old metal trolley lines, and broken piping in the middle of Penn for months at a time

Panzitta and Jan Raether, the Mayor’s liaison to DOMI, reassured attendees that mistakes from Phase I would not be repeated in Phase Two, and that inspections of the project would be much tighter. But business owners like Ryan Spak continued to express their doubts. While his eatery, Spak Brothers, lies outside the 4-block zone for Phase Two, he repeatedly challenged a number of statements that the City’s representatives made about how the two phases would differ from one another.

“Phase I was a virtual nightmare,” Spak said, “and while I want to believe that DOMI will be able to manage Phase Two much better than Public Works [managed] Phase One, I think seeing will be believing.”

Both Lindsay Acquino-Robles, an aide to Mayor Gainey, and City Councilman Khari Mosley were present at the meeting, and pledged their support to help make Phase Two less of a headache for business owners and residents alike.

Mosley said he would try to convince the executive director of the PWSA, Will Pickering, to attend the next meeting - scheduled for 11 a.m. on Thursday, Jun. 6, at the Community Activity Center (113 N. Pacific Ave.). ♦

## BULK UP



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# 'Donate Life Month': West Penn raises awareness, recruits organ donors

By Emma Hohman West Penn Hospital

*Insight/Bloomfield* - April is national "Donate Life Month" and Allegheny Health Network's (AHN) West Penn Hospital is once again involved in the Hospital & Health system (HAP) Donate Life Pennsylvania Hospital Challenge.

The goal of the initiative is to increase organ donation awareness and designations within hospitals and communities.

In 2023, AHN won first place for Top Health System performer and West Penn Hospital (WPH) was recognized with Titanium hospital performance.

According to the Center for Organ Donation (CORE), one individual can help up to eight people, while tissue donors can improve the lives of up to 75 people.

Each day, a million people await tissue and corneal transplants, while every 8 minutes someone new is added to the organ list. The heart, kidney, pancreas, lungs, liver, and intestines can all be transplanted as life-saving organs.

Tissues such as bones, ligaments, and tendons are needed for vital surgical procedures to repair injured or diseased joints and bones. Corneas, heart valves, and skin

may also be donated. Directed, or designated, donation is possible for a friend or loved one.

Living donation is also a possibility. National organ allocation guidelines allow families of donors to elect recipients, typically family members or friends. Organs are matched according to height, weight, and blood type, followed by medical urgency and time on the transplant list.

Those awaiting a transplant in the Organ Procurement Organization's service area are offered the opportunity first.

If there is not a match, the organs are offered regionally and then nationally, based on need. There are only a few medical rule-outs for organ donation.

Every potential donation is evaluated on a case-by-case basis. CORE data shows that every year, between 10,000 and 12,000 people who die are considered medically suitable for organ, tissue, and cornea donation - yet only a fraction of them are donors.

"West Penn Hospital wants to create a culture of donation," Dr. Brian Johnson, MD President of WPH, said. "Locally, we use donations for our nationally recognized American Burn Association burn program to improve the lives of these patients."

Donation only becomes a possibility after all efforts to save the patient's life have been exhausted, tests have been performed to confirm the absence of vital signs, and death has been declared.

If you are interested in becoming an organ donor, you can register as an organ donor through your state's department of motor vehicles registry by indicating this decision on your driver's license or state ID card, which is considered legal authorization for organ and tissue donation.

West Penn Hospital will be conducting several activities during April to receive points for the challenge.

On Apr. 1, a flag-raising ceremony (held near the Emergency Room entrance) will recognize those who have donated their organs, as well as those awaiting transplantation.

On Apr. 29, a rose bush ceremony will be held across the street at the WPH School of Nursing.

Each event will include remarks from representatives of those who have donated or received organs or tissue. West Penn welcomes local community members to attend both of these events. ♦

# the Bulletin

Serving Pittsburgh's East End neighborhoods since 1975

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

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

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[Bloomfield-Garfield.org](http://Bloomfield-Garfield.org)

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# Land Trust continued from page 1

including over \$2.4 million of federal New Markets Tax Credit equity. The first 15 homes funded by the transaction are planned as follows.

**Hazelwood: 4 new builds, 1 rehab**

**Garfield: 3 new builds**

**Fineview: 2 rehabs**

**Polish Hill: 3 new builds**

**Troy Hill: 1 rehab**

**Lawrenceville: 1 rehab**

Four of the homes in Hazelwood are being built as a 4-unit condo building, which will create two ground-floor homes compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. City of Bridges is also proud to have secured roughly 31% MWBE (Minority or Women-owned Business Enterprises) participation across the full project.

“The residents of Pittsburgh will benefit greatly from City of Bridges Community Land Trust securing an eight million dollar New Markets Tax Credits (NMTC) to make affordable housing possible. This historic funding allows homes to be built on formerly publicly-owned, blighted property - bringing back vitality to neighborhoods previously not invested in,” Mayor Ed Gainey said.

With this closing, CBCLT has proof of concept that NMTC can create fully affordable homeownership developments, not just mixed-income.

“The funding structure for this project was complicated,” Ed Nusser, CBCLT’s Executive Director, explained. “It required both financial investment and belief in City of Bridges from our elected leaders and public partners, as well as our lending partners; that support can’t be overlooked. However, what’s most exciting about this project is that it will create at least 22 more homes that will be permanently affordable for generations of Pittsburghers.”

“I’m enthusiastic about our ongoing partnership with [CBCLT], supported by the invaluable collaboration of URA affiliate Pittsburgh Urban Initiatives (PUI). This partnership marks a significant step forward as we embark on the first fully affordable homeownership [NMTC] transaction in Pittsburgh. This venture underscores the collective

mission of homeowners within the [CBCLT] community and ensures accessibility for future generations,” Susheela Nemani-Stanger, URA Executive Director, noted. “Together, we’re paving the way for a more equitable and vibrant Pittsburgh.”

“Dollar Bank is honored to be a part of this project to create affordable housing in the region,” Rebecca A. Yago, Senior Vice President of Real Estate at Dollar Bank, said. “We appreciate the opportunity that City of Bridges is creating to foster growth and development in the communities we call home. As a community bank, we see the need for affordable home ownership in our region. City of Bridges is creating real paths forward within our neighborhoods and it’s an honor for Dollar Bank to be a part of this effort to make those dreams a reality for our community.”

For more information on CBCLT, visit [cityofbridgesclt.org](http://cityofbridgesclt.org). ♦

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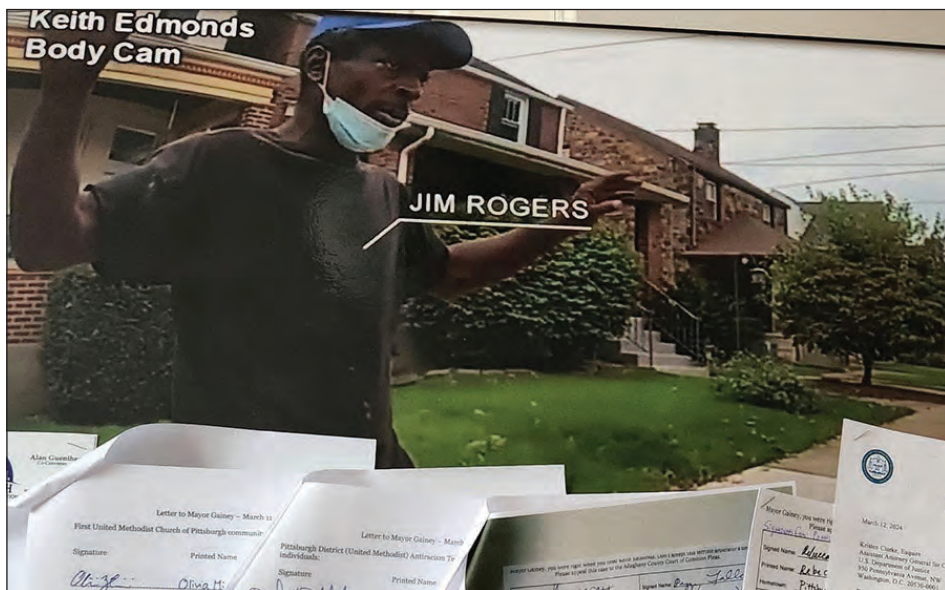
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# National spotlight: NAACP recommends federal probe of Jim Rogers' death

By Alan Guenther *Bulletin contributor, BGC Board Member*



**ABOVE:** Police bodycam footage of a compliant Rogers backgrounds letters from local community members protesting the reinstatement of Keith Edmonds. Photo by Alan Guenther.

*Op-Ed/Bloomfield* - The NAACP recently asked the U.S. Department of Justice to investigate the death of Jim Rogers, a 54-year-old Black homeless man who was tased by police officer Keith Edmonds on Oct. 13, 2021 and died the next day.

Many of us who have been following this case closely believe the federal investigation requested by the national civil rights organization represents the best chance to keep Edmonds from being reinstated to the police force. After Rogers died, Mayor Ed Gainey's administration fired Edmonds. The police union filed a grievance, and a panel of three arbitrators, in a Mar. 8 decision, said that Edmonds should be reinstated with full back pay and no discipline whatsoever.

I personally disagree with that decision. I live in the city's Bloomfield section, about a quarter mile from where Rogers was tased by Edmonds on Harriet Street. Working with local Methodists, Quakers, the Black Political Empowerment Project (B-PEP) and many others, we formed the Pittsburgh Peace Is Possible Coalition. Since the arbitrators' decision was announced, we've collected more than 350 signatures on letters asking Mayor Gainey to continue to fight the reinstatement of Edmonds.

Are we wrong? Well, let's go to the videotape, which can be seen here: [www.tinyurl.com/RogersTasingVideo](http://www.tinyurl.com/RogersTasingVideo). We believe the video, released by federal court order, shows Edmonds using his Taser multiple times as he bullied a confused and frightened Jim Rogers, whose compliance was demonstrated when he raised his hands in the air. Edmonds was on the scene because a neighbor reported that Rogers took a bicycle for a ride. The bike was for sale, and Rogers returned it before Edmonds arrived.

For this minor infraction, the video, in our opinion, shows Edmonds repeatedly escalated the situation. He brutally and repeatedly shocked Rogers with his Taser, employing reckless, unnecessary force against a defenseless person. Our coalition said this in our Mar. 12 letter to the mayor.

We believe that Jim Rogers' death was completely avoidable. Having Edmonds reinstated to the police force would send a message that police officers need not fear consequences - no matter how brutally they mistreat a person. His reinstatement would also tell people of color that they need to continue to fear the police.

In response to *The Bulletin's* request for comment, Mayor Gainey's press secretary, Maria Montano, emailed the following statement on Mar. 26: "As my administration proceeds with our appeal of Officer Edmonds' reinstatement, we would also fully cooperate in any review of the case launched by the U.S. Department of Justice, as has been requested by the NAACP. We are committed to the highest standard of conduct for our police officers, and to holding officers who do not uphold that standard to account."

The NAACP's letter to Kristen Clarke, assistant attorney general for civil rights, says that "without federal intervention, the police officers will not be held accountable for their actions."

[Alan Guenther is the co-convener of the Pittsburgh Peace Is Possible Coalition and can be reached at [guenthera30@gmail.com](mailto:guenthera30@gmail.com)]. ♦



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# Garfield Community Farm: restoring peace of mind with local herbs

A Message from Garfield Community Farm

*Insight/ Garfield* - Looking for a soothing start to your day, one that combines creativity and self-reflection? Then look no further than Garfield Community Farm (GCF, 509 Wicklow St.), where a series of experiential workshops will immerse you in the world of herbs.

Each Saturday morning in May, from 8 to 9 a.m., participants can engage in a variety of activities aimed at deepening their connection with nature. Led by hosts Stephanie and Kevin Bell, with Joanna McElwain as a special guest, these workshops promise a blend of hands-on experiences and moments for personal reflection.

Herbs have long been revered for their spiritual, medicinal, and restorative properties. Activities such as making herbal teas, creating herbal weavings, and enjoying herbal foot baths will help participants learn about not only the physical benefits of herbs but also their spiritual significance. By engaging with these herbs in various ways, they will get an opportunity to experience the restorative power of nature, firsthand.

Scientific research has shown that spending time in nature and engaging with natural elements like herbs can have a profound impact on one's mental and physical well-being. Studies have demonstrated that exposure to nature can reduce stress, anxiety, and depression, while also improving mood, cognitive function, and immune system function ["Urban Green Spaces and Health" (World Health Organization, 2016)].

Stephanie and Kevin Bell, co-founders of [philoxenialife.com](http://philoxenialife.com), are on a mission to create space, providing hospitality and sacred presence for everyone, including our inner selves. Together they lead workshops and retreats in the Pittsburgh area, as well as in Icaria, Greece - a region recognized as one of five "Blue Zones" where humans enjoy the longest life expectancies on the planet.

Licensed Massage Therapist and educator Joanna McElwain, founder of [lotusinspiredllc.com](http://lotusinspiredllc.com), will be at GCF on Saturday, May 18, to provide foot bath soaks using a combination of stone therapy and aromatherapy with essential oils and local herbs. McElwain will also demonstrate practical techniques that can help you become more aware of your own body while engaging your senses and connecting with nature.

The workshops are designed to be both creative and reflective, allowing participants to engage with their inner lives while learning about the healing properties of herbs. Experts will guide each activity, ensuring a balance of hands-on learning and moments for personal contemplation.

The Saturday workshops will be held at GCF on May 4, 11, 18, and 25. These events are free to Garfield residents, but all are welcome (suggested donation is \$10) and no prior experience with herbs is required. Come enjoy a unique opportunity to engage with herbs in a meaningful way, and to walk away feeling restored and rejuvenated. ♦



**ABOVE:** Wildflowers foreground a farmer's view of the Garfield water tower alongside some nifty solar panels. Photo courtesy of GCF.

**BELOW:** Herbs and stones transmit healing properties in Garfield. Photo courtesy of GCF.



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# BOOM takeover ignites April Unblurred

A Message from BOOM Concepts

Penn Avenue - On Friday, Apr. 5, BOOM Concepts will host special on-site programming and curate various exhibitions during the monthly "Unblurred: First Fridays" gallery crawl in Garfield.

This month's featured artists include Charlese Dawson, Ivory Eddins, Jameelah Platt, Evangeline Mensah-Agyekum, DS Kinsel, Adam "FRH" Golden, Princess Jafar, and many more.

The takeover commemorates a decade of BOOM Concepts' (5139 Penn Ave.) work to advance the local arts scene.

"The 10-year anniversary isn't just a milestone," BOOM co-founder DS Kinsel explained. "It's a vision for a future where art thrives, communities flourish, and we all contribute to a lasting impact."

Over the last 25 years of Unblurred, neighbors have forged connections with local artists and business owners [between the 4800 and 5500 blocks of Penn] on the First Friday of each month.

Legacy residents, first-time visitors, and everyone in between are invited to enjoy the creative energy of Penn Avenue's bustling business district.

All are welcome to engage with an eclectic

mix of photography, dance, painting, sculpture, music, spoken word performances, gift shops, fashion shows, boutiques, pubs, and restaurants.

This month's "Unblurred Takeover" is made possible by partnerships with the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation, The Lab @ Silver Eye, Two Frays Brewery, The Opportunity Fund, Pedantic Arts, The Maverick, Artist Image Resource, Public Print House, VisitPITTSBURGH, and other partners. ♦

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# County agrees to improve jail's mental health resources

By Alan Guenther Bulletin contributor, BGC Board Member

Downtown - The quality of mental health care services offered to prisoners in the Allegheny County Jail (ACJ) was highlighted for improvement by a Mar. 19 settlement agreement, which was filed in federal court.

This agreement between Allegheny County, the Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project, and the Abolitionist Law Center must be reviewed by a federal judge before it takes effect. The lawsuit was settled after onsite investigations by national experts revealed the need for comprehensive changes.

According to the lawsuit, a California-based psychiatrist called ACJ's mental health treatment "shockingly substandard."

The suit was filed on Sept. 15, 2020, when Rich Fitzgerald was the County Executive. The settlement was announced by his successor, Sara Innamorato - who campaigned, in part, on improving conditions at ACJ.

Most advocates feel that hiring more staff could be crucial to this agreement's viability. The County must fill 80% of interim

staffing positions within six months of the agreement's effective date.

According to an audit conducted last year by the Allegheny County Controller's office, half of ACJ's budgeted healthcare positions were not filled in 2022.

The money is there, County officials have noted, but they cannot find people who want to work in the jail for the wages currently being offered.

In other news, three new members of the Allegheny County Jail Oversight Board took their seats during a Mar. 7 meeting. The new appointees are Barbara Griffin, Rob Perkins, and Muhammad Ali Nasir.

Griffin, director of the pro bono section of the Allegheny County Bar Foundation, manages programs that provide free legal services to low-income residents.

Perkins is president of the Allegheny Lawyers Initiative, which advocates for criminal justice reform.

Nasir, who is known to many as "MAN E," works with 1Hood Media and the Bukit Bail Fund. He speaks frequently of his time served at ACJ. ♦

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# Neighborhood FOCUS

## New Pennley renovations uncover East Liberty's complex history

By Elizabeth Sensky East Liberty Development, Inc.

*Insight/East Liberty* - Two mixed-income housing developments in the neighborhood are getting a makeover thanks to The Community Builders (TCB), a local nonprofit renowned for its community-centric approach to development and property management. The organization plans to begin renovations on New Pennley Place I & II, as well as Pennley Commons senior housing, this year.

But the story of these properties goes deeper than their physical upgrades. If we rewind the clock a few decades, the Pennley buildings can reveal a lot about East Liberty's transformation and the value of a community-driven approach.

### The story of Pennley Park Apartments

Pennley was a moderately-priced, residential "superblock" created as part of the sweeping "urban renewal" that reshaped East Liberty in the 1960s. Over the years, the dense apartment complex became widely perceived as unsafe and undesirable. Substantial mortgage delinquencies, deferred maintenance, and high vacancy rates led the US Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) to foreclose on the complex in 1997.

That is when East Liberty Development, Inc. (ELDI), and TCB stepped in to work with community members toward reversing the decline and setting a new standard for mixed-income, residential development in the neighborhood. With the support of local civic groups and the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh (URA), TCB acquired the property in partnership with ELDI.

"Since opening our Pittsburgh office in 1994, TCB has sought to build upon the rich legacy of the East Liberty community. We are proud to have been part of the effort to successfully redevelop and revitalize this historic community," said Juan Powell, TCB Regional Vice President of Real Estate Development.

The transfer was accompanied by a \$4 million HUD grant with the condition that

*'We are proud to soon begin construction on an improved environment for the esteemed residents of [Pennley Commons].'*

*Juan Powell, The Community Builders*

the property remains affordable to low-income households. TCB provided professional management of the property and immediately began making improvements while operating the complex through a nearly four-year redevelopment process that included targeted demolition, substantial renovation, and also construction.

The first phase of New Pennley Place, which opened in late 1999, consisted of 102 new and renovated apartments in mid-rise townhomes and duplex-style residences. The next two phases followed in 2001 with 34 new apartments in New Pennley Phase II, and in 2002 with Pennley Commons - a 38-unit, low-rise apartment com-

- continued on next page -



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**BELOW:** New Pennley Place buildings are slated for extensive renovations in East Liberty. The Community Builders, a local non-profit, plans to upgrade the kitchens, HVAC units, and elevators this year. Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Sensky.



- continued from previous page -

plex designed for low-income, senior residents.

The 2006 completion of Penn Manor added 55 family apartments to the site, all of which are affordable homes. In total, New Pennley Place has created 229 new or substantially renovated rental homes, with 201 reserved for low- and moderate-income households.

Situated across from a Whole Foods Market along Penn Avenue in East Liberty, most wouldn't suspect that the majority of these attractive townhomes and apartments are affordable housing, which is exactly the point. TCB shared ELDI's philosophy that people of all income levels deserve quality housing, and that blending market-rate with affordable is critical to fostering a thriving neighborhood.

"The New Pennley Place development was an important first step to show how you could build high-quality, well-designed housing which blended both affordable and market-rate units," Myers said. "It was important to [Pennley] residents, and to the whole neighborhood, that there was no low-income housing stigma attached to these units."

**What's next for New Pennley Place and Pennley Commons**

Now that it's now been over 20 years since the first redevelopment of the Pennley Place Apartments, TCB is embarking on a second round of renovations to help these buildings keep serving mixed-income residents for another 15-20 years.

First up is New Pennley I & II. Together, the two buildings contain a total of 136 apartments; each unit is set for kitchen and HVAC renovations, as well as bathroom upgrades. Common areas, such as the boiler room and elevators, will also be upgraded.

TCB plans to close on the financing in the second quarter of 2024, and anticipates that construction will take approximately a year to complete. This project will be funded through a combination of LIHTC, commercial debt, and loans and grants from the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA) and the URA. The Hous-

ing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh (HACP) is also a major partner.

For the second phase of renovations, TCB will update Pennley Commons. The scope of work will be similar to that of New Pennley I & II, but not as extensive. TCB plans to close on financing in the second quarter of 2024, with construction slated to last approximately one year. This project is being financed with a grant from PHFA and a loan from the URA.

"Building high-quality, affordable housing is crucial and it's equally important to ensure its long-term viability," Powell noted. "This requires a committed partnership with organizations like ELDI, HACP, URA, and PHFA. We are proud to soon begin construction on an improved environment for the esteemed residents of these two buildings." ♦

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## Mayor, City Council members propose changes to Pittsburgh Land Bank

A Message from the City of Pittsburgh

*Pittsburgh* - On Wednesday, Mar. 20, Mayor Ed Gainey joined City Council President Daniel Lavelle, as well as Councilmen Bobby Wilson and Khari Mosley in taking key steps to build upon the recent successes of the Pittsburgh Land Bank (PLB).

By submitting the board nominations of Tammy Thompson, Tamara Dudukovich, and Kirk Burkley - alongside legislation authorizing cooperation agreements with other taxing bodies, and expansion of the PLB Board to provide Allegheny County and Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) with their own seats - the Land Bank will be better positioned to fulfill its promise of serving city neighborhoods.

Thanks to the historic tri-party agreement between the City, the Urban Redevelopment Authority, and PLB that was amended last year, the Land Bank - after years of struggling to move a single property - will be able to move more than 100 properties over the next few years.

The Mayor's Office looks to build on this momentum by bringing renewed energy and important tools to bear in helping the Land Bank reach its full potential.

"I'm proud of the work that we've done to position our Land Bank to move properties more efficiently," Mayor Gainey said. "This new agreement will allow us to bring everyone to the table - everyone who has a stake in the success of our land bank."

The two new pieces of legislation would allow the Land Bank to enter into new agreements with the County and PPS for the shared operation and administration of the land. This legislation would help streamline the process by which all three taxing bodies must clear tax liens from properties acquired by PLB, which is a critical step in preparing the properties for reuse.

The agreements would also expand the board from nine to 11 members; these new board additions would allow for one member to be appointed by Allegheny County, and one member to be appointed by PPS.

"I believe these collaborative efforts not only strengthen our community's ability to revitalize distressed properties, but also pave the way for equitable development and sustainable growth for all resi-

dents," said City Council President Daniel Lavelle.

"As Board Chair of the Pittsburgh Land Bank, I'm dedicated to fostering its ongoing success, knowing well that collaboration with Allegheny County and Pittsburgh Public Schools is not just integral but inherent to our mission," City Councilman Bobby Wilson said.

"We are interlinked - our efforts to combat blight and empower low-income families are shared responsibilities, ensuring the prosperity of our communities," the councilman explained. "As we expand the board, I eagerly anticipate the synergy with new members from Allegheny County and PPS, recognizing that our collective efforts shape the future of our region."

"The Land Bank plays a critical role in our ability to positively impact neighborhoods that have suffered from years of disinvestment while bringing vacant, abandoned, and blighted properties back on the city's tax rolls," added Councilman Kahari Mosley. "I look forward to working with Mayor Gainey, the County, and the School District to build on the important work we have begun this year to maximize our Land Bank's transformative potential."

"When the Land Bank was introduced in 2014, it held the promise of addressing blight in our communities," Mayor Gainey recalled. "These new agreements will allow us to fulfill that promise as we will be able to turn blighted properties across the city into affordable housing, urban agriculture, and protected greenspaces - and increase development opportunities for small, neighborhood-based, and minority- and women-owned businesses in our city."

The legislation may be viewed online at /[bit.ly/LandBankLegislation](https://bit.ly/LandBankLegislation). ♦

## New legislation could pave way for local land recycling

A Message from Pittsburgh Community Reinvestment Group

*Perspective/Pittsburgh* - Pittsburgh Community Reinvestment Group (PCRG) appreciates Mayor Gainey and City Council members' leadership in finally moving forward to complete the taxing body agreements that will allow the Pittsburgh Land Bank to reach its potential [editor's note: read the message at left].

For years, PCRG and member groups have advocated for change with the land bank's board, City Council, and the taxing bodies [Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS), Allegheny County and the Pittsburgh Water & Sewer Authority]. Now, we're thrilled that the Mayor has prioritized the agreement process, the cementing of which will speed up the transfer and recycling of vacant land and properties.

- **Targeted Reinvestment:** Agreements enable strategic property selection, focusing on properties with the highest potential for community impact and economic growth
- **Efficient Property Transfer:** Clearly defined procedures for property acquisition and transfer reduce legal complexities, ensuring a smooth transition from tax foreclosure to redevelopment.
- **Community Engagement:** Agreements can facilitate the active involvement of community members and nonprofit organizations in property decision-making, enhancing community ownership and alignment.
- **Transparency and Accountability:** Clearly outlined reporting and data-sharing protocols enhance transparency, allowing all stakeholders to effectively track progress and outcomes.
- **Economic Benefits:** Through clear and strong agreements, more vacant and abandoned properties can be reintroduced to the tax base, providing direct economic benefits to the taxing bodies.

"While there has been some momentum with the land bank over the last 16 months, specifically with the Pennsylvania legislature's passage of the Municipal Claims and Tax Liability Law amendment, and the inter-cooperative agreement between the City of Pittsburgh and the URA, we will never have a fully functioning land bank without a taxing body agreement," PCRG Policy Director Chris Rosselot said.

In addition, the Mayor submitted his nominees for the Pittsburgh Land Bank Board, as well as new legislation for the body to include representatives from PPS and Allegheny County. ♦

### 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 medical errors by identifying problems and implementing solutions to 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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## Community Supported Agriculture: shares build greener future

By Bre Stanton *Garfield Community Farm*



**ABOVE:** The yield speaks for itself at Garfield Community Farm. Visit [garfieldfarm.com](http://garfieldfarm.com) to sign up for a CSA share. Photo courtesy of Bre Stanton.

*Garfield* - Spring is a great season for many reasons, especially when it comes to fresh produce at Garfield Community Farm (GCF).

While enjoying the bounty that I was able to preserve in the fall, I've recently begun craving crunchy radishes, crisp lettuce heads, bright herbs, and sweet early alliums. I spent the late winter months at GCF starting seedlings and sowing seeds in our greenhouses for spring harvests.

By signing up for a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) share, you're able to responsibly, and conveniently, support your local farmers and gardeners. One of the added benefits: you get to eat the peak produce from GCF every week.

Spring CSA subscribers will receive a weekly box of root vegetables, wild edible salad mixes, and head lettuces, mustards & turnip greens, fresh herbs, and locally foraged ramps & nettles. I hope to have some beautiful cabbages and broccoli ready in time for a special CSA treat. I'm already dreaming of fresh salads and herby pesto sauces.

You can purchase a Spring CSA Share on our website ([garfieldfarm.com](http://garfieldfarm.com)). Please reach out to me ([bre@garfieldfarm.com](mailto:bre@garfieldfarm.com)) with any questions. ♦

## NCJW stages thought-provoking play at Kelly Strayhorn Theater

By Heather Visnesky *NCJW*

*East Liberty* - On Thursday, Apr. 4, the National Council of Jewish Women's (NCJW) Pittsburgh Section will mount a production of Jane Cawthorne's *The Abortion Monologues* at the Kelly Strayhorn Theater (5941 Penn Ave.).

In this play, 17 women reveal the details of their lives, relationships, and families as they tell the stories of their abortions.

Sometimes funny, occasionally heart-breaking, but always thought-provoking, the monologues stand in stark contrast to the real world, where women seldom discuss these choices in public.

The characters navigate everyday hardships, financial crises, relationship breakdowns, illness, death, and radical expectation shifts – as well as the truth about

themselves and their own deepest desires. Their stories challenge each audience member to think again about what they believe, and why they believe it.

ASL interpretation will be provided for the entire show. Natalie Bencivenga will emcee the evening's festivities, and NCJW Pittsburgh CEO Sheila Katz will be interviewed onstage after the performance.

This event will provide an opportunity to bear witness to women's stories, followed by an "action conversation" about the need for safe, reproductive healthcare - including abortion - and how to get involved in further conversations about preserving women's reproductive rights.

Tickets may be purchased at [kelly-strayhorn.org/events/abortion-monologues](http://kelly-strayhorn.org/events/abortion-monologues). ♦

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## Simulation program helps local students explore STEMM careers

By Laura Daniel Allegheny Health Network



**ABOVE:** A middle-schooler interfaces with STEMM simulation models. Photo courtesy of AHN.

*Bloomfield* - The Simulation, Teaching, and Academic Research (STAR) Center at Allegheny Health Network (AHN) is a renowned, internationally-accredited place of learning where hands-on simulations promote learners' self-discovery and professional growth.

The Center has extensive experience training thousands of medical and nursing students and practicing healthcare providers every year. STAR also recently extended services to a much younger target audience of middle school students (grades 6-8).

The fully mobile *Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, and Medicine (STEMM) on the Go* program brings hands-on STEMM adventures into the classrooms of underserved communities.

Over the course of eight months, students gain continual experience in STEMM fields and careers. Exposing students to a wide variety of STEMM careers - which they may not have otherwise considered, or even heard of - the program is designed to ignite their interests, open their minds, and advance their learning aspirations.

Aiming to help diversify the future STEMM workforce, the hands-on simulations and small group activities go beyond textbook learning to help concrete lessons come to life.

Interactive programming, such as the "astronaut drop" and "marshmallow challenge," push kids to think critically while collaborating and innovating with their classmates. These middle school students get a chance to develop skills that are criti-

cal to succeeding in today's ever-changing STEMM fields.

Results from the pilot class provided promising data. Over 90% of students reported that the program was fun, they enjoyed participating, and they would recommend it to others.

Most students responded that the hands-on activities were their favorite elements of the program. When asked what they would change, many suggested speeding up the program's cadence.

"I've had a great time and learned a lot," one participant said of the program. "I think I have a spot...in the medical field."

Interested schools may call the STAR Center (412-578-4418) or apply via email ([simulation@ahn.org](mailto:simulation@ahn.org)). ♦

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## Timeless advice: ‘we must have trees’

By Nancy Cohen *Friendship Community Group*

**BELOW:** *The canopy of a single tree can provide myriad benefits for public greenspaces like Friendship Park. Photo by Andrew McKeon.*



*Insight/Pittsburgh* - As President Theodore Roosevelt once said: “To exist as a nation, to prosper as a state, to live as a people, we must have trees.” Among their many benefits, trees provide shade, support wildlife and aquatic life, raise property values, clean our air and water, and cool our environment.

In 2020, Allegheny County boasted a tree canopy of 51.7%, according to the Pittsburgh Canopy Alliance. However, between 2015 and 2020, the county added only 16,391 acres of tree canopy while a whopping 21, 047 acres were lost; the data projects a loss of 2% of tree canopy every five years. During that time span, Pittsburgh had a net gain of four acres of tree canopy, with coverage standing at about 41%. Part of this gain may be attributed to efforts made by the City and local community groups.

In November of last year, with the assistance of TreeVitalize, members of the Friendship Community Group (FCG) and other volunteers planted 11 trees in the Friendship neighborhood. They selected fruit trees that do not make for slippery sidewalks, and also do not require sidewalk plates to be lifted for planting. Owners of adjacent properties gave the FCG permission to plant.

Over their lifespan, every two trees will remove more than one ton of carbon dioxide. With the tree canopy in Friendship standing at 25.37% (per data published by the City’s Forestry Division), FCG members aim to plant more trees in the near future.

In October of last year, the USDA Forest Service’s Urban & Community Forestry program published a report stating that Pittsburgh will get \$9 million to mitigate carbon heat islands (areas that experience higher temperatures due to reduced vegetation and hard surfaces like parking lots and buildings). Pittsburgh Canopy Alliance will receive \$8 million, and the City will get \$1 million. The City will use these funds to remove trees that are a falling hazard, plant new trees, and create utile natural areas.

Per a BBC report, Ethiopia made global headlines in 2019 when it launched an ambitious campaign to plant 20 billion trees by the end of 2022. Reportedly planting more than 350 million trees in a single day, the African country exceeded its goal and keeps working to further its arboreal mission.

The stats sound impressive, and we can help augment the numbers here in Pittsburgh, one tree at a time. So make plans to plant a tree in your neighborhood. What a wonderful way to save our planet? ♦

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## Assemble, Level Up celebrate ‘International Creatives Day’

By Yuhan Yan *Assemble*

*Garfield* - Assemble, a renowned community space for learning, creativity and innovation, is primed to host this year’s “International Creatives Day” in conjunction with Remake Learning Days.

This free community event, aimed at honoring and inspiring local and international creatives, will take place on May 17, from 6 to 9 p.m., at Assemble’s community hub (4824 Penn Ave.) and Level Up Studios (4836 Penn Ave.).

International Creatives Day is an immersive, and inclusive, event celebrating the rich tapestry of cultures and technologies that make our local communities so vibrant and unique.

It welcomes people of all backgrounds to experience the beauty of creativity, collaboration, and technology.

Featuring hands-on workshops conducted by local and international artists, the event will also showcase innovative artworks, engaging performances, and delicious food from all around the world.

This event is also designed to provides ample networking opportunities by enabling creators, professionals from local organizations, and industry leaders to build impactful connections and inspire collective growth within the Penn Avenue

community.

“Hosting International Creatives Day is a joy, and a reflection of Assemble’s commitment to nurturing creativity and innovation,” said Ja’Sonta Roberts, Assemble’s Offsite Programs Manager. “International Creatives Day is an opportunity for us to highlight the incredible talent within our community, and to foster connections that inspire new ideas and collaborations.”

Join Assemble to celebrate the creative spirit that drives the community forward. For more information about International Creatives Day, and to register for the event, please visit [assemblepgh.org/event/international-creatives-day](https://assemblepgh.org/event/international-creatives-day).

For inquiries, please contact Roberts at [jasonata@assemblepgh.org](mailto:jasonata@assemblepgh.org). ♦

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## Free Help with Preparing & Filing 2023 Tax Returns

**The Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation (BGC), in cooperation with the IRS, will once again be assisting individual taxpayers with filing their federal and state tax returns online. There is no charge for this service, which will be offered every Saturday, beginning February 10 and ending on Saturday, April 13, 2024. Taxpayers will need to make appointments in advance, and then come to:**

**BGC Community Activity Center  
Lower Level  
113 North Pacific Avenue  
Garfield (15224)**

**The earliest appointment we offer is at 12:30, and the last available slot is 4:30 p.m. We do not assist business filers, or individuals who have rental income or numerous capital gains’ transactions to report. City residents will also be able to receive help in filing their city tax returns. All taxpayers will need to have photo ID and proof of their Social Security number when they come for their appointment.**

**Call either Pamela Schon (412-441-6950, ext. 110) or Rick Swartz (412-441-6950, ext. 111) at the BGC to schedule an appointment.**

## 'Grimes Files' lecture: exploring the very first Lawrenceville art scene

By Jude Wudarczyk *Lawrenceville Historical Society*

*Lawrenceville* - Most of us have probably heard of the "X-Files," a fictitious set of FBI files on paranormal phenomena, created for the television series bearing that title.

But not too many people outside the local arts community have heard of the "Grimes Files" - a real-life collection of materials, compiled by Gary Grimes, which document the 19th century art world with a specific focus on Pittsburgh artists.

The Lawrenceville Historical Society (LHS) will host a free presentation by Grimes, giving the public a chance to meet the creator of the Grimes Files and hear stories about the burgeoning arts scene of 1800s Lawrenceville, and its artists' wild exploits.

This event is part of an ongoing series of LHS presentations. It will be held at the Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, (237 37th St.) on Tuesday, Apr. 16.

The lecture begins at 7:30 p.m. Parking will be available at the St. Augustine Church parking lot from 7:15 to 9:15 p.m. Those staying any later may run the risk of having their car towed. ♦



### A Season of Change

We can all remember coloring eggs, eating chocolate candies and wearing our finest clothing. But the true sentiment of Easter is the hope that it brings.

As we reflect on Christ's resurrection and see the coming Spring, we receive a promise of future joy.

Let this season of change be a reminder that even life's deepest sorrows can be followed with new beginnings.



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## Equitable housing landscape sparks new conversations

By Thea Young *Bulletin contributor*

*Oakland* - Everyone is invited to join a diverse coalition of neighbors for a discussion about rising housing costs and growing inequity, and their root causes.

This assembly will propose viable, forward-looking solutions to our housing crisis, and focus on how we can work together to make these solutions a reality.

It will be held on Saturday, Apr. 13, from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., at the Frick Fine Arts Building on the University of Pittsburgh campus (650 Schenley Drive) in Oakland.

This event will be free and open to the public; lunch, childcare, interpretation services, and accessibility accommodations will be provided.

Event co-sponsors include: Pittsburgh Housing Justice Table, Human Rights City Alliance, the City of Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations, Pittsburgh United, the University of Pittsburgh Department of Sociology, Pitt Graduate Workers' Organizing Committee, and The Global Switchboard.

To register, please visit [www.bit.ly/HousingAssembly](http://www.bit.ly/HousingAssembly). ♦

## MONTHLY BLOOD DRIVE IN BLOOMFIELD

Bloomfield Development Corporation invites local residents to participate in its monthly blood drive - held every third Thursday, from 2-7 p.m. - behind the WPH Nursing School (4921 Mend Way). Visit [vitalant.org](http://vitalant.org) or call 412-209-7000 to make an appointment.

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*We promise not to overshare!*



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,

Jarnele Fairclaugh, Board President

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## On the edge: Fringe Festival returns to Penn Avenue

By Xela Batchelder *Pittsburgh Fringe Festival*

*Penn Avenue* - Beginning on Apr. 18 and running through Apr. 27, the Pittsburgh Fringe Festival will celebrate its eleventh year on the avenue. This festival is, figuratively speaking, the theatrical equivalent of seeing a little-known, yet talented band at a basement show. Pittsburgh Fringe provides D.I.Y. experiences at intimate venues along the Penn Avenue corridor.

A few shows are generating particular buzz ahead of this year's opening night. Coming to Pittsburgh from New York City, Evening Crane Theatre will stage a pensive, wistful, and eerie cycle of stories called *The Seasons*. Characters meet and speak to "the Wind," investigate a medieval painting with a violent past, and explore a mysterious hedge maze on the estate of a renowned actress.

Fringe theater festivals are known for producing experimental shows that challenge any preconceived notions of performance. In a first for Pittsburgh Fringe, this year Savage Art Escape will perform an "escape room" show in which the audience collaborates with the performers. The show (*Divine Ride.....or Wait?*) explores the binary nature of humanity while also encouraging each audience member to find their inner artist.

No Pittsburgh Fringe would be complete without a production by award-winning, local favorites. Brawling Bard Theater Company has produced shows in Pittsburgh and also participated in out-of-town Fringe festivals. Brawling Bard players will finally get a chance to perform the show they were rehearsing for the 2020 festival, which was sidelined by the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the April festival, they will tackle Shakespeare's *Macbeth* with their characteristic blend of physical comedy, audience interaction, and swords [... lots of swords]. Following years of production delays for a famously cursed play, what could go wrong?

Another local company, Breaking Burgh Productions, will present *I, Trump* - an orig-

inal show asking how the second Trump term might end - with the President going rogue, or maybe getting distracted by golf outings and gorilla documentaries - along with plans for an epic presidential library.

It is not too late, dear reader, to add your voice to this year's festival, as Pittsburgh Fringe encourages you to participate in the "Yinzer Variety Show" and "Fringe StorySlam."

The late-night Yinzer Variety Show allows anyone to perform a short piece from any genre. The Fringe StorySlam is a show that gives storytelling artists, or those who want to try their hand at the genre, a chance to take the stage and tell a short story on a pre-selected theme; "And It Could Be Dangerous..." is the 2024 theme.

Learn how to get involved, and view the Pittsburgh Fringe performance schedule, at [pittsburghfringe.org](http://pittsburghfringe.org); email [info@pittsburghfringe.org](mailto:info@pittsburghfringe.org) with any questions. ♦



**ABOVE:** A story cycle called 'The Seasons' looks to challenge Fringe Festival audiences on Penn Avenue. Graphic courtesy of Xela Batchelder.



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