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SPRING 2024

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FOR THE PEOPLE WHO LIVE, WORK AND SHOP IN THE SHAKER SQUARE AREA

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North Union Farmers Market



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Your favorite fresh food source is nearly done hibernating at Van Aken Market Hall. The vendors head back outdoors at Shaker Square on April 6. Save us some leafy greens.

Total solar eclipse



Monday, April 8

The last total solar eclipse in Cleveland was in 1806. If you miss it this year, you only need to wait until 2099 for the next one. Margaret Simon shares eclipse tips in her story on Page 6.

Ice Cream Social and Band Concert

Tuesday, April 30, 6:30 p.m.

Pump up the school spirit at this community event on Shaker High School's front lawn. If it rains, head to the North Gym.

Shaker Arts Council

Friday, May 10

The nonprofit celebrates turning 21. Details at shakerartscouncil.org.

Larchmere

Larchmere Plant Sale

Saturday, May 11, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Green-thumb gardeners, get growing. The sale is at Cummins Hall, East 126th Street and Shaker Boulevard. Call 216.269.9060.

Larchmere Spring Sidewalk Sale

Saturday and Sunday, May 25
and 26, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Savvy shoppers can find sweet deals up and down the street.

Larchmere Rock the Blocks

Sunday, June 9

Larchmere Porchfest

Saturday, June 29, 1 to 10 p.m.

With 30 bands on 30 porches, the free event packs in the crowds.

Details at larchmereporchfest.org.



Crime

String of break-ins rattles Shaker Square shops

By Thomas Jewell

One man was in jail – again – for a series of break-ins to Shaker Square businesses this winter, with miles of foot-long sub sandwiches ordered up to get one of the hardest-hit victims back on track.

During Christmas week, the Subway restaurant, now operating in its 17th year on Shaker Square, was burglarized four times, with as many windows broken out in the process.

This left the storefront boarded up for more than a month but still open for business, although it didn't necessarily look that way, as restaurateur Brandon Chrostowski observed, taking to social media to raise public awareness about his neighbor's plight.

Chrostowski, founder of EDWINS Leadership & Restaurant Institute, posted a short video on Instagram rallying support and initially buying 50 sandwiches and 110 Subway gift cards.

He also scarfed up 150,000 "hits" online in getting the word out.

Numerous other businesses were also burglarized in the same time span, including the Shaker Square Nails salon (twice), the Vegan Club, SASA and at least one of the dance studios.

"This is about the tenants on Shaker Square coming together and supporting one another," Chrostowski

said, also calling for more "preventive" safety measures rather than a "reactive" approach to crime.

It also prompted Arnie Berger, who has run a Shaker Square

See String of break-ins rattles Shaker Square, page 9



Daylight pours in the four new front windows in the Subway sandwich shop on Shaker Square. They were replaced Jan. 28 after being boarded up for a month when the shop was broken into four times during Christmas week.

Residents First

City Council cracks down on absentee landlords

By Thomas Jewell

The first overhaul of Cleveland's housing code enforcement in a generation, known as "Residents First," gained early support from Shaker Square advocacy groups.

That backing, most notably from the Morelands Group, continued as Cleveland City Council debated the legislation in January and then modified and passed it Feb. 5.

"We see passage of this comprehensive reform of the code and processes for enforcement as essential in the fight against the predatory practices of widespread speculative investment," said Jay Westbrook, a Morelands Group co-founder, Shaker Square resident and former Cleveland councilman.

Cleveland Building and Housing Director Sally Martin-O'Toole developed the Residents First package during her first two years on the job, coming over after 14 years in South Euclid.

The sweeping set of reforms had

been anchored by a requirement for inspections of vacant one-, two- and three-family homes and commercial properties.

And it became the biggest concession made to get the rest of the Residents First package passed: eliminating interior inspections, making them exterior only.

"We realize that's the core objection" to Residents First, as registered most recently by the Akron Cleveland Association of Realtors (ACAR), Martin-O'Toole told Cleveland City Council's Development, Planning and Sustainability Committee on Jan. 30.

At that time, she agreed to drop an escrow account requirement on residential properties. A six-month window for repairs can also be extended if "demonstrated progress" is shown.

Moving on to council's Finance Committee, Martin-O'Toole unsuccessfully argued that exterior-only inspections were unfair to Cleveland residents who want to buy vacant homes and still have money to fix them up, "rather than being in over their heads

after the house is sold and everyone has made their commissions."

Interior point-of-sale inspections are already required in suburbs like Shaker Heights, Cleveland Heights and South Euclid.

Records from Cleveland's Building and Housing Department showed that "A" and "B-graded" properties fell from 78 percent to 54 percent in 2022, while "C-grade" properties rose from 16 percent to 37 percent.

"Protecting these properties from further decline is vitally important for neighborhood stability," building officials said.

More than half of all vacant structures surveyed in 2022 were graded "D" or "F."

Meanwhile, on Cleveland's East Side, more than half of one- to-three-family home sales went to nonowner occupants in 2021 (24 percent on the West Side).

Another point of contention from ACAR involved a requirement for those nonowner occupants – many of

See City Council cracks down on absentee landlords, page 2

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City Council cracks down on absentee landlords

Continued from page 1

them out-of-state – to appoint a “local-agent-in-charge (LAIC)” to answer to the building department and show up in Cleveland Housing Court.

Citing concerns about “unintended consequences” and potential liability, ACAR officials leaned toward exterior inspections only as well as exempting realtors from the definition of “agent.”

Martin-O’Toole countered that what’s worked in South Euclid has also worked in big cities like Chicago and Minneapolis, where there’s still no “carve-out” for realtors, and “nobody’s lost their license.”

In crafting Residents First, she said, “we didn’t do this in a vacuum. We went out and listened to the stakeholders, including community development corporations and our friends here in the Morelands Group, who have been suffering at the hands of some irresponsible landlords.”

The impact will be more on “corporate purchasers,” who are less interested in a home’s condition and typically will not inspect them before purchasing the house “as-is.”

These include limited liability companies (LLCs), which typically seek bargains and anticipate distressed conditions.

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To provide the Shaker Square area with the leadership needed to re-imagine and foster well-maintained, diverse and vibrant neighborhoods.

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- Apartment Corridor
- CHALK
- Drexmore/Chadbourne
- Historic Shaker Square
- Larchmere
- Ludlow
- Shaker Square
- Larchmere Blvd.
- Van Aken Plaza
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Mailing Address

The SHAD Connection
Shaker Square Area
Development Corporation
11811 Shaker Boulevard
Suite 106
Cleveland, Ohio 44120

Telephone

216.421.2100

Editor

Chris Ball
info@shad.org

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Providence House opens Buckeye-Shaker campus

By Andrea C. Turner

After operating a crisis nursery on Cleveland's West Side for 43 years, Providence House is opening a second location, called Hope's House, in the Buckeye-Shaker neighborhood.

"We're no longer just a West Side agency," said Natalie Leek, Providence House president and CEO. "We discovered in 2017-18 that there was an alarming increase of families on our waiting list. While our Ohio City location serves approximately 350 children per year, approximately 486 children had been placed on Providence House's waiting list, the majority of whom are children from Cleveland's East Side."

Hope's House, at 11801 Buckeye Road, will feature a 24-bed crisis nursery, family resiliency center, community hub, and administrative offices. Staff has moved in, and the first dozen beds probably will become available in late spring or early summer.

Providence House provides a safe haven for children whose families are experiencing instability. Since 1981, its crisis nursery in Ohio City has offered free, voluntary (noncustodial) 24/7 emergency shelter to children from newborns to age 12. It has served more than 15,000 families covering 32 ZIP codes.

The nonprofit agency is committed to child abuse prevention and family preservation by providing for children's physical, emotional, developmental, and educational needs. It supports families by connecting them to resources, cultivating nurturing practices, and offering individualized parent education, counseling, case management, and trauma services to support long-term family stability.



Hope's House includes a spacious children's playroom.

Hope's House is opening in phases. A fundraising campaign, initially \$13 million and now \$21 million, is being co-chaired by Cleveland Guardians owner Paul Dolan and his wife, Karen Dolan.

Cleveland Neighborhood Progress and Burten, Bell, Carr Development Inc. helped the agency secure the vacant, historical Weizer building, which was in foreclosure. It's been completely renovated, and a residential building for the crisis nursery has been constructed behind it. An RTA bus stop is in front, and the RTA Buckeye Woodhill Rapid station is nearby.

Hope's House is named after the founder of Providence House, Sister Hope Greener. Karen Dolan said Sister Greener was one of her favorite teachers at St. Joseph Academy.

The 1926 building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Hungarian immigrant John Weizer built it to house his real estate offices, shops, apartments, and a bank serving Cleveland's growing Hungarian Jewish population. Weizer helped

immigrants settle in the neighborhood, once the fourth largest Hungarian community in the world.

A new playground is expected this spring. The Cavaliers will provide a basketball court, the Guardians will sponsor a Wiffleball court, and the Browns in conjunction with PNC Bank will fund a climbing structure for child-safe play. "Once the playground is completed, the location is expected to

earn its operating license by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services prior to opening," Leek said.

Providence House partners collaboratively with more than 130 public and private service providers to link families to community support, treatment, and therapies. The agency began phase two of its campaign by raising \$5 million for an endowment to fund its three-story community services hub at East 119th and Buckeye. Slated to open late this year or in early 2025, it will provide leasing space for agency partners to work onsite. The Cleveland Hearing and Speech Center has contracted to be its first tenant.

Turner is a marketing communications consultant at ACT One Communications. Her work has appeared in *Currents*, *The Heights Observer*, and *The Columbus Dispatch*.

"We're no longer just a West Side agency."
- Natalie Leek, Providence House president and CEO



Providence House renovated the vacant Weizer building on Buckeye Road for its new East Side campus, called Hope's House. Photo by Chris Ball

Providence House helps couple raising 4 grandchildren

By Andrea C. Turner

When Detria Giddings gained custody of her four grandchildren three years ago, she was unaware of the resources Providence House could offer to help raise her "kids."

The East Cleveland resident, an Akron native, had no family or peer support in the area to help with the children, leaving her and her fiancé, Damon Taylor Sr., with no real break for more than a year.

Giddings signed up for services offered by Help Me Grow, a parent support program of the Ohio Department of Health. It assists pregnant women, caregivers with new babies, and families with young children with developmental delays and disabilities. Her case worker suggested she contact Providence House to get on its waiting list for help with the children: three girls and one boy, 3 to 5 years old.

In November, a boiler system failure left the family of six with no heat in the house. The need for assistance became immediate.

"We had been using the stove, oven and portable heaters to heat the house," Giddings said. Then Nora Conway, family services manager at Providence House, contacted her.

"After being placed on a waiting list for nearly eight months, Nora called and said that Providence House could house all four of our kids so that we could work on getting our boiler replaced in the house. The timing couldn't have been any better," Giddings said.

Providence House cared for the kids for a total stay of 13 days, transporting

them to and from school, supervising daily hygiene, providing meals, offering child-appropriate activities, as well as giving them new shoes and coats. Taylor, who does home remodeling, was able to replace the boiler, and they had time to get their home in order before Thanksgiving.

"The kids had a ball there. They didn't want to come home," Giddings said. She and Taylor visited them regularly. She said Taylor, known as "Papa" to the children, missed his "golden children," as he refers to them. He joked that he'd "spring them out" if they wanted. But instead, they enjoyed field trips, playing in the indoor gym, and engaging in daily activities. One of them made a new best friend.

Staff invited the family back for its Christmas holiday event, including pictures with Santa. They went home with age-appropriate gifts like dolls, trucks, puzzles, coloring books and learning tools, as well as new hats and gloves.

Providence House "is a phenomenal resource. I had to leave my jobs three years ago to take care of my grandkids, all of whom were premature babies," Giddings said. "They provided me with housing information to work with my landlord, gave us extra clothes and household supplies, and went over paperwork with us very thoroughly, explaining everything clearly." The new location will be more convenient going forward, she said.

"My babies are so blessed because of Providence House," Giddings said. "They are now healthy, independent and confident children who know they are well-loved."

HOW TO HELP

Providence House has a wish list of critical need items, children's items, household items, groceries and gift cards, all listed on its website. Go to provhouse.org.

To make a financial gift to support Hope's House services for children and families in crisis, go to provhouse.org/urgent.

Providence House's 43rd annual meeting and luncheon are Thursday, April 25, at noon at the InterContinental Hotel and Conference Center Cleveland. Purchase tickets at provhouse.org/events.



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Heard Around the Square

By Margaret Simon

Love was in the air Feb. 14 when **Judge Lauren Moore** (Ludlow resident and wife of SHAD VP **Brian Siggers**) donned her red robe to marry Cuyahoga County couples in the Cleveland City Hall rotunda. She initiated this tradition in 2009 in response to couples' desire to marry on Valentine's Day.

Another beautiful recipe for romance and social impact! Scene Magazine included **EDWINS Leadership & Restaurant Institute** among its Most Romantic Restaurants in Cleveland. EDWINS offers a romantic ambiance, delicious French cuisine, and a meaningful mission of giving back to the community. **Brandon Chrostowski's** dedication to training and employing formerly incarcerated individuals while offering them a second chance in the hospitality industry adds an extra layer of warmth to the dining experience. (Chef Chrostowski recommends first-timers try the paupiettes de mérou: grouper wrapped in crispy thinly sliced potatoes served with haricot verts in a beurre rouge sauce.)

Shaker Square has been a *growing* concern for the award-winning North Union Farmers Market for years. The outdoor Shaker Square Market is held on East and West Bound Shaker Boulevard, where you'll find fresh produce, meats, dairy, baked goods and more from 8 a.m. to noon every Saturday. The market opens April 6 with an annual blessing and sheep shearing.

Time to get fiscal. AARP volunteers will be at the Shaker Library from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Mondays and Fridays through April 12 to help you crunch the numbers on simple tax returns. Call 216-991-2030 to make an appointment.

Learning that **Akin Affrica** has stepped in to save Zanzibar Soul Fusion from closure is heartening. His personal connection to the restaurant, as its original owner and founder, played a significant role in his decision

to intervene. Despite his facing a past traumatic event, his dedication to the brand and the community it serves is evident. Zanzibar Soul Fusion's presence in Shaker Square and downtown Cleveland preserves a beloved dining establishment and maintains a cultural and culinary landmark for food enthusiasts.

Congratulations to Shaker Heights High School students **Patrick Khayat**, **Samuel Srivastava**, Adam Holbrook, and their adviser, Nathanael Hsu, on their impressive victory in WEWS Channel 5's "Academic Challenge." Their final score of 635 showcased their academic prowess and teamwork. Placing second so far this season has positioned them well for the upcoming Academic Challenge championship. Well done, Raiders!

This year, the Shaker Schools benefit, **A Night for the Red & White**, will be at Shaker Heights High School at 7 p.m. Saturday, March 2. Join supporters, alums, faculty, and friends for an unforgettable evening. Bid on exclusive items and experiences, with proceeds benefiting the Shaker Schools Foundation and its initiatives. Event



emcees are Shaker alums, **David Pogue**, class of 1981, technology and science writer and correspondent for CBS News Sunday Morning; and **Mariama Whyte**, class of 1993, singer, songwriter, actor, speaker, educator and coach.



Inspired by the total solar eclipse April 8, the **Shaker Historical Society** presents the *Manifestation of Light: Exploring the Shakers' Celestial Inspiration*. The exhibit delves into Shaker artwork and writing inspired by the sun, moon and stars. The gallery opening is 6 to 8 p.m. Friday, March 8. Enjoy light food and drink while celebrating a stellar exhibition made possible through underwriting from

Ohio Humanities and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Onaway resident **Emily Cole-Kelly** has been appointed to the Shaker Library Board of Trustees to fill the



unexpired term of **Dr. Timeka Rashid**. Cole-Kelly is grant manager for Birthing Beautiful Communities, a nonprofit organization that provides holistic prenatal, birthing and postpartum services to pregnant Black women.

Congratulations to good sport **Virginia "GiGi" Benjamin**, a former partner at law firm Calfee, Halter & Griswold, who is the new chairwoman of the Gateway Economic Development Corp., which oversees taxpayer spending at the homes of the Cavaliers and Guardians.

Shaker Arts Council announces its Painting the Town project, a juried art competition for the design of utility boxes in Shaker Heights. Applicants age 21 or older who reside in the Shaker Heights School District or are members of the Shaker Arts Council are eligible. All designs must be submitted electronically by 5 p.m. March 22. For details, go to info@shakerartscouncil.org. Congratulations to **André Taylor**, incoming president of the Shaker Heights Arts Council, who succeeds **Sally Levine**, who will continue to serve as a board member.

Shaker Hockey has a strong tradition and a dedicated group of coaches and staff supporting the program. With coaches who are alumni of the school (**Matt Bartley**, class of 2001; **Carson Strang**, class of 2001; **Rashaun Ewing**, class of 2000; and longtime ex-coach **Mike Bartley**) along with long-serving volunteers like **Ira Krumholz** and **Keith Arian**, there's a sense of continuity and commitment that contributes to the success and affection for the team. Seeing such passion and dedication in a high school sports program is wonderful.

Looking to expand your personal library without breaking the bank? **Julie Mizener**, Friends of the Shaker Library's president, invites you to discover a treasure trove of literary delights at the Friends Spring Book Sale from April 3 to 7 on the second floor of the Main Library. Whether you're an avid reader, a collector, or simply searching for your next great read, the sale offers thousands of gently used books for all ages and interests. Find fiction, nonfiction, children's books, classics, and more at bargain prices. Rare and collectible editions are waiting to be discovered, and Friendly volunteers under the leadership of **Pat Neville** are ready to assist you. On Sunday, fill a bag for \$8. Help support the Friends and indulge your love for reading at the same time. Cash and credit or debit cards are accepted.

Get ready for a harmonious blend of music, cool treats, community spirit, and good vibes at Shaker High School's Ice Cream Social and Band Concert from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. Tuesday, April 30, on the school's front lawn. (The North Gym is the rain location.)

The Little Free Pantry on Winslow Road is back. It suffered damage over the winter but has been repaired and is ready for your donations for individuals facing food insecurity to access essential items without having to navigate the bureaucracy or stigma sometimes associated with food assistance programs.

A bright light has gone out with the death of **Alyssa Raybuck**, who used her gifts working for local nonprofits (The Cleveland Zoological Society, The City Club of Cleveland, and the Greater Cleveland Food Bank) to make the world a better place.

Area librarians will remember her for her work on *5 Days for Democracy*, a week dedicated to reminding us why democracy matters and engaging all of us in keeping it strong.

Email news items to heardaroundthesquare@gmail.com

Shaker Square

New office space puts Burten, Bell, Carr closer to the action

By Jason Novak



Photo by Jason Novak

Business Development Coordinator DePaul Davis works at his standing desk in Burten, Bell, Carr Development Inc.'s new Shaker Square office.

Since the acquisition of Shaker Square properties by Burten, Bell, Carr Development Inc. (BBC) and Cleveland Neighborhood Progress (CNP), their presence is being felt. Since the start of the year, that has become more literal with BBC's new Shaker Square office.

The new office, at 13212 Shaker Square, places the organization in

the neighborhood it represents. "It allows us to be closer to the merchants and business partners we serve," said Larkesha Burns, director of business development for BBC. "It helps us understand the needs of our clients and maintain good tenant and merchant relationships."

The office, which sits above Edwins Too, houses Burns, Business Development Coordinators DePaul Davis and Arielle Blackshire, and receptionist Gwen Degraffenreed. "The Square is very walkable, and there is a lot of parking nearby," Burns said. "Plus, we're right along the Rapid line, so people can get here easily."

Burns and staff help local businesses in various ways. BBC works with the U.S. Small Business Administration's Community Navigator Pilot Program to create what it calls an "eco-system of entrepreneurship" where lenders, marketers and other partners team up to provide services to clients. This help is available both to existing and new businesses.

"We work with entrepreneurs at all

levels — aspiring, seasoned, some with over 50 years of experience," Burns said. "We provide technical assistance, and we meet one-on-one with clients. ... If you have a business idea, you'd share it with us, and we can connect you with our resources inwardly. And if we can't handle it in-house, we can direct you to someone who could assist you, but then we'd follow up."

BBC assists small businesses at the earliest stages through services such as Business Needs Assessments and Ideation Sessions, as well as through networking and vending opportunities to help existing businesses grow. "I meet with a lot of [business] owners who say 'I don't know what I need,'" Burns said. "We listen to them and create a solution based on their concerns."

While BBC began moving into the Shaker Square office at the end of last year, Burns and staff are still working

to make the space more accessible. Being on the second floor of a historic building presents its own challenges. "Unfortunately, it isn't ADA accessible — as it is with many 100-year-old buildings — but we're working on it," Burns said.

They want to turn the first floor lobby area into a sort of visitors center where people can learn about the merchants and businesses on Shaker

"We work with entrepreneurs at all levels."

– Larkesha Burns, director of business development for Burten, Bell, Carr Development Inc.

Square, as well as where potential businesses can find out about the services BBC provides.

Meanwhile, fellow tenant Shark + Minnow is allowing BBC to use its conference rooms, and Burns has offered her organization's services at local merchants' meetings. Being close to the clients BBC serves is important to BBC's mission. "Building

trust is a big thing," Burns said. "We've been able to accomplish a lot of that."

Find more details on BBC's services at bbcdevelopment.org.

Buckeye Road branch closes but could reopen in six months

By Chris Ball

Huntington Bank closed its Buckeye Road branch Feb. 9. But it left the door open to reopening in six months if it can resolve its crime and employee safety concerns, and the ATM remains in service.

A grassroots group trying to preserve the branch said it met Feb. 15 with bank officials. "Huntington Buckeye is not closing permanently, but is being closed temporarily for 6 months," wrote Greg Groves of the Committee to Keep Huntington on Buckeye in a Feb. 16 email to supporters.

The group collected more than 775 signatures on a petition asking Huntington to delay closing the branch, at 11623 Buckeye Road. "We ask that you recommit to this convenient location and be part of the initiative to revitalize our neighborhood," the petition reads.

Huntington withdrew its application Jan. 24 to the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency (OCC) that it filed last fall to permanently close the branch, bank spokesman Kris Dahl told Signal Cleveland. If it could have filed a

temporary closing application, the bank would have done so, he said.

"While there's no formal process to communicate a temporary closure to the OCC, we have shared our updated plans with them," Dahl wrote in an email to Signal Cleveland. "While we have withdrawn the initial filing, nothing has changed in our plans since the last time we updated you."

Robert L. Render III, a branch customer, told Signal Cleveland the citizens group plans to make sure the bank and the city are sincere about developing a safety plan.

"Crime has always been on Buckeye going back to the 1970s," Render

said. "We now have an opportunity to finally address this problem. We need institutions that are going to invest in making this a better community, not those that are going to run away."

Other bank customers agree. "I don't have a car. I need something close by," Leslie Colombani told WKYC Channel 3. "They shouldn't close this bank. We need it."

City officials are taking notice. "Their concerns are around safety for their employees. We cannot dismiss that," City Council President Blaine Griffin told WKYC. "We want our partners and our neighbors to be resilient and

"They shouldn't close this bank. We need it."

- Leslie Colombani, customer, Buckeye branch of Huntington Bank



A notice on the back door announces the Feb. 9 closing of Huntington Bank's Buckeye branch.

help us find solutions to this safety issue as opposed to abandoning the neighborhood."

Mary Boyle, a former county commissioner and state representative, told Signal Cleveland other bank branches have closed in the area over the years, including one where she had banked. She said she chose not to move her account to a suburban branch.

"That's when I took my little account to the Huntington bank on Buckeye," Boyle said. "Now Huntington is doing exactly the same thing as the other banks."

The bank said it isn't giving up on the area. "We will work with the city of Cleveland in the event actions can be taken to address the safety concerns for our customers and employees," Dahl wrote in a statement. "After six months, we will assess if there have been sufficient improvements to safety in this area. We will maintain the ATM at its current location and will continue to work with our community partners to advance programs that serve the Buckeye neighborhood, such as digital empowerment, home repair programs, and local small business entrepreneurship."

Charitable giving

Toy giveaway draws surprisingly large crowd to Shaker Square

By Chris Ball

The line was long, but few complained. Many stood for 90 minutes in the cold at Shaker Square. Their patience was rewarded. More than 600 kids got to choose a free toy. And 200 received a new winter coat.

The large turnout surprised the organizers of the fifth annual "\$10,000 Toy Giveaway" on Sunday, Dec. 17. "This year was huge. It stretched us," said LaRick Calhoun. "We didn't know that many people were coming. ... With parents, that was 1,000 people."

The event is the brainchild of businessmen Calhoun, Greg Parker and Akin Affrica. "We were all in real estate," Calhoun said. "One holiday season, we had the idea to come together and pool our money to buy toys, and bikes that first year, for the underserved and give them away at one of our locations."

The event has moved around. It started in 2019 at Angie's Soul Café on Carnegie Avenue, owned by Affrica. It shifted to Shaker Square for the first time in December when FASS Management donated the use of the former Biggby Coffee shop.

In previous years, kids got two gifts. But this time, as the line stretched from the empty corner coffeeshop to CVS Pharmacy, the organizers changed plans.

"We made a decision to do one gift," Calhoun said. "And we went down the line to explain to everyone. And they understood. And they still waited."

Food was new this time. More than 300 people enjoyed free chili and hot cocoa while waiting. So were

"This year was huge. It stretched us."

- LaRick Calhoun, organizer, "\$10,000 Toy Giveaway"

coats. Fashions by Fowler donated them. "We're going to have more coats next year," Calhoun said.

A green Santa Grinch and other costumed characters from community change groups New Era Cleveland and the Moore Love Project posed for pictures and interacted with kids.

"We had personal shoppers this year to take each person through and help pick things out so they would have more of a customer service experience," Calhoun said.

The festive atmosphere is a major part of it, he said. "I really believe for some people, that's their opportunity to show what they're willing to do for their children. Even more than just

a gift, it's that mommy or daddy is willing to take you somewhere to do something other than just at home. ... For some people, that's a whole event for them. I'm realizing that now. So they're willing to patiently wait there."

Calhoun, whose company 2 Excel Group recently opened Be Suites, a business resource center at 11802 Buckeye Ave., grew up nearby in Cleveland's Mount Pleasant neighborhood. This event is his way to give back.

"We share a few words of encouragement with them, let them know we've all come through the community of hard knocks," he said. "We still are committed to the community. We just wanted to let them know that people who were in the same shoes are just a step away, and we still are thinking of them and any bridge we can create to help them come into a different reality. That's what we're here for."



Organizers estimate that 1,000 people showed up for the fifth annual "\$10,000 Toy Giveaway" Dec. 17 on Shaker Square.

Celestial spectacle

These eclipse tips will keep you from being left totally in the dark

By Margaret Simon

On Monday, April 8, we will witness a celestial marvel, as a total solar eclipse graces our sky. Solar eclipses have captivated humanity for centuries, inspiring awe and wonder as the moon temporarily obscures the sun, casting a shadow on Earth. The event promises to be a breathtaking display of nature's splendor, offering a unique opportunity for sky gazers and astronomers alike to witness the harmonious dance of celestial bodies.

One exciting aspect of the April 8 solar eclipse is the "path of totality," where observers can witness the Sun entirely obscured by the moon, creating a twilight-like experience. On April 8, the path of totality will pass over Northeast Ohio, allowing millions to witness the solar eclipse in all its glory. The total phase will cover Northeast Ohio in darkness from 3:13 to 3:17 p.m.

While an eclipse is captivating, observing it safely to protect your eyes is crucial. Staring directly at the Sun, even in an eclipse, can cause severe eye damage. Specialized solar viewing glasses or solar filters for telescopes and cameras are essential. Be safe and buy Total Eclipse glasses from Loganberry Books, Shaker

Lakes Duck Pond or online. (Eclipse glasses differ from regular sunglasses, which are unsafe for viewing the Sun. You must wear eclipse glasses or use other solar filters to view the Sun directly during

the partial eclipse phase. Photographers should purchase white light filters.)

The next total solar eclipse visible from the contiguous United States won't be until 2044, so many are getting in the spirit. Heinen's and Market Garden Brewery have developed a "Totality" beer to mark the occasion, and Great Lakes Brewing is creating a Vanilla Blackout Stout that hypes the eclipse on the label.

The April 8 solar eclipse promises to be a remarkable and

unforgettable event for those lucky enough to witness it. Whether you're a seasoned astronomer or a casual observer, witnessing the enchanting dance of shadows during a solar eclipse is a humbling and awe-inspiring experience that connects us to cosmic rhythms. As we continue to explore the mysteries of the universe, the solar eclipse remains a timeless spectacle that transcends cultural boundaries and sparks curiosity about the wonders of the cosmos.

Want to learn more? Log on to the NASA website at science.nasa.gov.

The April 8 solar eclipse promises to be a remarkable and unforgettable event for those lucky enough to witness it.



Where to watch

Local organizations are hosting viewing events with proper safety measures, allowing people to share in the wonder of the celestial show. They include:

- **ECLIPSED! AT THE NATURE CENTER**
Bring the family to the Nature Center at Shaker Lakes between 11:30 a.m. and 4 p.m. April 8 to make a craft, play games, play solar system trivia, enjoy food from The Dawg Bowl, and view the eclipse. Activities include an all-ages, hands-on eclipse workshop. Tickets include a pair of eclipse glasses. For details and to buy tickets, visit shakerlakes.org.
- **TOTAL ECLIPSE FESTIVAL AT GREAT LAKES SCIENCE CENTER**
Join Great Lakes Science Center and its partner NASA Glenn Research from April 6 to 8 for the Total Eclipse Fest 2024, a three-day celestial celebration at North Coast Harbor in downtown Cleveland.
- **TOTAL ON WADE OVAL**
The Cleveland Museum of Natural History and University Circle are hosting a free community eclipse watch party April 8 at Wade Oval. It starts at 10 a.m. with special programs inside the history museum, including live music and family-friendly activities. The party moves outside at 2 p.m.
- **TOTAL ECLIPSE OF THE ARBORETUM**
Holden Arboretum is hosting a ticketed eclipse event from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. April 8 with food trucks, activities, a DJ, and plenty of space to take in the eclipse. Tickets include eclipse glasses and admission to the Kirtland garden. They expect tickets to sell out quickly.

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Tina Haldiman and Cassidy Anderson, owners of Larchmere Fire Works, greet customers at their table inside the Nature Center at Shaker Lakes during its annual holiday event Dec. 15.

Retail

Gentleman's Quarters prepares to close after 55 years on Larchmere

By Grant Segall

You couldn't buy any of Walter Thompson's suits off the rack.

"If you don't try it on, you can't buy it," Thompson, owner of Gentleman's Quarters at 12807 Larchmere Blvd., said recently. He has tailored every suit before it left his shop. That way, "Nobody can say to you, 'Where the hell did you buy that?'"

Before long, you won't be able to buy anything at Gentleman's Quarters. After running the small, pine-paneled shop for 55 of his 80 years, Thompson said at press time that he'd close it sometime this year and retire. Meanwhile, he'd sell out his remaining jackets, ties, jeans, display racks, sewing machine, and other items, while Susan Geller, his associate for 45 of her 75 years, liquidated her women's accessories business, Frog's Legs, which shares his premises.

The time seemed to have come. "Our customer base has eroded," Thompson said. The pandemic closed some of his suppliers, led more consumers to stay home in casual clothes, and led more of them to shop online. Gentleman's Quarters and Frog's Legs had no websites or social media outlets.

Before 1969, Thompson had no experience in haberdashery. He'd served in Vietnam with the U.S. Army and owned an insurance investigation business. But his younger brother, Charles, and two associates liked to invest in small businesses. They found a tailor's shop for sale in a 1966 brick building and persuaded Walter to join it. The associates dropped out early on, and Charles died in 1979.

The shop started with men's clothes and soon added women's. In the early years, Thompson could not find American suppliers of European clothes. Later, he carried nothing but. He never shopped in Europe, relying instead on importers. And he bought nothing from China. "I don't like the way they treat their people."

Like him, Geller had little experience

in clothing before the shop. "I gave up a lucrative career as a teacher at Patrick Henry [School]," she said. During a strike, she started working at another clothing shop. In 1979, she bought jeans for herself at Gentleman's Quarters. Thompson

tailored them and delivered them to her store. He liked her way of helping customers there, so he hired her.

In 1985, Geller opened Frog's Legs. At their height, the two stores had eight employees, all part-time.

Like fashions, Larchmere has changed over the years. Back in 1969, Thompson recalled, many residents worked nearby,

especially at St. Luke's Hospital. John Sedlak was selling furniture at what would grow to 14 buildings on the street. He and the Thompsons founded the Larchmere Merchants Association.

Now Sedlak Furniture is in Solon, and St. Luke's is closed. But Larchmere has many new and old apartments, restaurants, and shops. Besides, Thompson and Geller said they haven't depended on the neighborhood. Their customers, mostly regulars, have come from around the region.

Customers said they'd miss the shops. "I like the quality of the clothing and a few things you don't find anywhere else," said Dr. Karen Kea. "I like the personal touch."

Ruth Anna Carlson had shopped there for 30 years. "On a buying trip to New York," she said, "they found the dress I wore for my son's wedding. It was perfect for me. It was perfect for the event."

At press time, the shops were still liquidating their merchandise and staying open every Tuesday through Friday, noon to 6 p.m.

Geller lives in the Van Aken District, and Thompson in Cleveland Heights. A few years ago, he weathered throat cancer, which he blames on Agent Orange in Vietnam.

Now both shopkeepers look forward to slowing down. Said Geller, "I'm just going to relax and have nowhere to go and all day to get there."

"Our customer base has eroded."

- Walter Thompson, owner, Gentleman's Quarters



Walter Thompson has witnessed many changes on Larchmere since opening his shop in 1969.



Susan Geller will soon sell her last women's accessories after more than four decades on Larchmere.

Photos by Grant Segall

Retail

8 questions with Oma owner Michal Schorsch

By Chris Ball

Meet Michal Schorsch, who opened Oma Vintage in September at 13006 Larchmere Blvd. The newcomer chose to answer our questions by email for this introductory interview.

Q Where did you grow up and go to school?

A I grew up in the Bronx, but before that I lived in Israel, Atlanta and California.

Q What is your professional background?

A I studied dance and religion in college and have worked as a waitress, nanny, antique dealer and dance teacher.

Q Why did you choose Larchmere?

A I got a good feeling on Larchmere. I have always loved Loganberry Books, and I used Eclectic Eccentric's bathroom once and felt transported to New York in the 1980s despite not having been there.

Q How do you like Larchmere so far?

A Everyone has been welcoming and inquisitive. I'm glad I landed on this block and in this neighborhood.

Q How do you describe your shop?

A I would say my shop occupies a unique niche in the Cleveland vintage ecosystem. I carry a range of aesthetics and eras, but I tend to lean more contemporary than other "true vintage" shops (workwear, y2k, basics). I also love natural fibers (wool, silk, linen) and have a well-curated unisex selection of quality fabrics and colors.

My Oma (German for grandma) passed away a little over a year ago, so the shop is dedicated to her and our time spent shopping together, among other things. I love the backstories of clothes. Some I can only imagine and guess or research about. Others I have direct associations with or memories of finding or buying from someone. It interests me to track who is attracted to what, especially when I know who wore it before or have visions of another life the garment had.

Q How do you find new inventory?

A I thrift a lot! I won't give away my secrets, but success is hit or miss anyways. The trick is being consistent. The more you thrift, the more you find.



Q Have you always wanted to own your own store?

A I have always wanted to hold down my own shop. One of my best friends runs an amazing store in Victoria, British Columbia, in Canada. Shout out to Vintage After Death! I was also inspired by a store in Portland, Oregon, called Zig Zag Vintage. The owner has since become my business mentor.

I have experience organizing dance festivals and producing various events, which bleeds into this line of work. I'd say one of my strengths is creating environments for people to have repeated, sensual, personal experiences in. I care about the vibe in the store – the music, the seating options, the smell, it's all part of it.

Q What's your favorite color?

A I love color. My house is every color of the rainbow (cantaloupe, mustard, lime, eggplant). Material and texture can affect color a lot, so I appreciate when the two complement each other well, for example chartreuse and velvet, or hot pink and silk.



Photo by Chris Ball

Izzy Kuzma (left), Oma Vintage shop owner Michal Schorsch, and Robyn Holman enjoy wine and cheese Nov. 24 during the Larchmere Holiday Stroll.



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"Since 1972"

Real estate

Take a rare peek inside this Belgian Village retreat

By Grant Segall

Wedged between busy Fairhill Road and the Doan Brook's lush gorge are five acres of history and modernity.

The Depression-era complex is officially the Fairmount Road Group Development, reflecting the road's name back then. But the place is widely known as Belgian Village. Its architecture of stucco, stone, gables, and slate, though inspired by England's Cotswold region, was mistaken by locals as Belgian.

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Belgian Village is a leading example of efforts then and now to blend urban and suburban life, privacy and community, yesterday and today.

"Everybody does their own thing, but they watch out for you," said longtime resident Pat Brownell. "There's always someone around you can talk to."

Over the years, the village's three detached homes and five two-family homes have drawn notable residents such as baseball great Hank Greenberg, movie star May Allison, two Cleveland Orchestra music directors, Karamu House's founders, Jones Day's managing partner, and the Cleveland Public Library's director. A dedicated line from Severance Hall used to deliver concerts to one of the homes.

The typical attached home has roughly 2,800 square feet, two or three stories,

five or six bedrooms, arched passageways, and intricate woodwork, plasterwork and ironwork. "All you have to do is walk in the front door and see how incredibly beautiful it is, and you can't not want to live here," said resident Rob Hartshorn.

The homes rarely come up for sale. But a detached, renovated one of 4,036 square feet transferred Jan. 12 for \$800,000.

Belgian Village straddles Cleveland and Cleveland Heights along a sharp curve of Fairhill. Before homes arose, the site was strewn with rubble from construction of the nearby Fairmount Reservoir.

The village was started by several neighbors on University Circle's Hessler Street, including A. Donald Gray, who designed Forest Hill Park, some of the Cleveland Cultural Gardens, and a downtown lakefront garden now named for him. The neighbors wanted a closed but greener site.

The Depression sidelined some of them, so the remainder sought buyers beyond Hessler. Karamu's founders, Rowena and Russell Jelliffe, later wrote, "We thought we should be careful about the people who came into the group, recognizing that not everyone was equipped for the degree of give and take that this kind of group would demand."

Several banks and insurers rejected the unusual project, but others cooperated, and the Depression slashed costs. Various architects designed the homes, built from 1929 to 1933, with one more in 1971.

Each home is privately owned. A shared association maintains a front lawn and a semicircular cobblestone driveway. Pedestrians often cut through the driveway, since there's no sidewalk in front. The residents don't mind, said Dr. Terry Gutsell, the association's president.

The backyard was shared at first, then divided by short walls. The ravine below was once a leading sandstone quarry. Now it is lush, quiet, and rugged, with steep, unmarked trails. It plunges beneath Martin Luther King Boulevard to the heart of University Circle.

Gutsell's friend, Robert Vroman, wrote a paper about the village for Cleveland State University. Vroman called it part of the international Garden City Movement, which sought to create ideal communities blending urbanity and greenery. Another local example is the for-profit, Depression-era Forest Hill in East Cleveland and Cleveland Heights, with its historic Norman houses and private back yards that flow together.

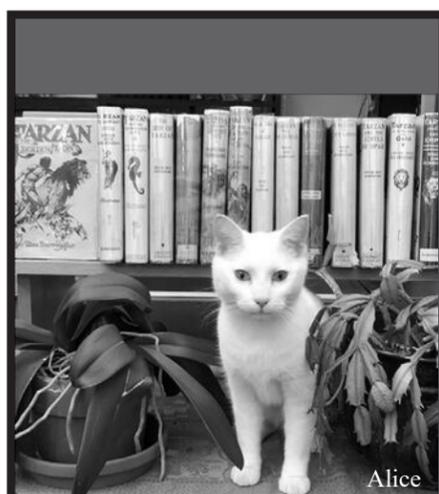
**"You can't not want to live here."
 - Rob Hartshorn, resident.**



Belgian Village is a 1930s retreat hidden between Fairhill Road and the Doan Brook Gorge.



Rob Hartshorn painted the spindles on his staircase at Belgian Village, which isn't Belgian at all.



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Dining

New coffee shop serves up hope and hot drinks on Buckeye

By Najee Hall

A new Buckeye Road coffee shop hopes to build community one cup at a time.

The Tavern Coffee House is a nonprofit shop at 12302 Buckeye Road. The Meeting Place Church transformed the former bar into a space for Buckeye residents to enjoy coffee and community. According to its mission statement, the coffeehouse exists to “bring back hope to Buckeye through strong coffee, stronger jobs, and to build the strongest community.”

Kenneth McQuiller, CEO of the Tavern Coffee House and an associate pastor at the Meeting Place Church, found inspiration in the city of Cleveland and has set his sights on bringing people together.

McQuiller was attending college in his home state of New York when a summer internship at the Meeting Place brought him to Cleveland. He lived three months in the Buckeye neighborhood.

“I came here in 2016, and I fell in love with the city right away. When my internship ended and I graduated, I moved back here,” he said. “I’m from New York, and I think Clevelanders are probably some of the most determined people I have ever met.”

The Meeting Place Church was looking for ways to connect with the community in a more direct, hands-on way. Pastor Bob Willard and his wife, Judy, kept coming back to a piece of property they acquired through the Cuyahoga County Land Bank.

“We were looking at the space and were trying to decide what we wanted to do with it,” Willard said. “We wanted to utilize the bar space without having to do too much renovation work.”

A full-service restaurant seemed like more than they could handle. So many people go to a Starbucks or McDonalds and just hang out, he said, that they hoped to create an inviting space where people could start their day. The Tavern idea was born.

They were just beginning to work on the space when COVID-19 shut everything down.

“COVID set us back. We had missionaries and volunteers coming in from all over to help. That stopped when COVID hit, so things stalled for a while,” Willard said. “Once things opened back up, inflation made our initial costs skyrocket, so we basically had to go back and rally for more money.”

They pushed through, got the funds for the renovation, started work again in fall 2022 and celebrated their grand opening on Sept. 8, 2023.

The Tavern is open Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. to noon. The shop serves coffee, lattes, cappuccinos, teas and pastries. All items are \$5 or less. They have a steady stream of customers but would love to see more new faces, McQuiller said.

“Right now, we are probably serving 10 people a day. Our next goal would be to service 20 people a day, and so on,” he said. “Our current customers say how they prefer us to a Starbucks or a McDonalds because you get that personal interaction with us and other customers that you don’t get everywhere.”

The Tavern is also open for community gatherings and events.

“There is no cost to use the space. We accept donations and whatever people are able to give,” McQuiller said. “Our hope is that this will be a safe place for the community to meet and get together. A place where people can have fun and we can build community.”

The Tavern also prides itself on supporting a Buckeye resident, Angelina Bell, Humble Mornings CEO, by offering her coffee beans daily.

The core values of the Tavern are community, renewal, determination and generosity. McQuiller centers those values as he shows up in the community, ready to serve. You can find him behind the “bar,” whipping up your favorite drinks.

This story ran in Signal Cleveland at tinyurl.com/lyucsatwm. Used with permission.



Start your day with coffee and pastry at The Tavern Coffee House, which opened in September at 12302 Buckeye Road.

Photo by Najee Hall / Signal Cleveland



Lights cast a mysterious glow on a foggy Lower Shaker Lake in this view looking eastward in January.

Photo by Joyce Popper

String of break-ins rattles Shaker Square shops

Continued from page 1



Photo by Chris Ball

Despite wood boards replacing broken windows for a month, the Subway sandwich shop on Shaker Square remained open after being burglarized four times during Christmas week.

website for 20 years, to reach out to nonprofit ownership.

“My understanding is that Shaker Square is now better-lit and well-covered by security cameras,” Berger wrote, asking if the crimes had been captured – as well as the perpetrator.

“We need to know, and the fact that there is such a system in place is important to share as a deterrent to vandals and a reassurance for potential lessees,” Berger said. He posted additional safety and security facts on his website, shakersquare.net.

At least one suspect was identified by the more than 60 cameras installed after they acquired the historic hub in August 2022, said Tania Menesse, president and CEO of Cleveland Neighborhood Progress (CNP), one of the Square’s nonprofit co-owners along with Burten, Bell, Carr Development Inc. (BBC).

Those cameras came in handy again when the Cleveland City Dance studio and Goldenrod Montessori school had windows on their doors smashed in late January.

It was reportedly done by the same suspect, who was out after posting a \$5,000 bond – or possibly just 10 percent – in connection with the previous break-ins.

Officials with CNP and BBC appealed to the judge on the case “to consider another alternative to releasing him again,” given he was now “associated with more than 20 burglaries.”

They may include a Jan. 24 break-in at Loganberry Books and Jan. 25 at Convenient Vegan nearby on Larchmere Boulevard.

Meanwhile, longtime Shaker

Square Subway owner Bobby Patel was happy with the local support through the ordeal – as well as his new shatter-proof windows, similar to the ones in his door, broken in two previous break-ins during 2023.

“We had a lot of community help when people came in and bought our sandwiches, even when the windows were boarded up,” Patel said in early February.

He also had to replace a cash register the burglar damaged but had no plans on closing or moving elsewhere.

“I will be staying as long as I can afford it,” Patel said.

In her earlier response to Berger, Menesse said “the cameras are working, and there is now a feed again at Moreland Courts so that all eyes are on the Square.”

“It’s encouraging to see the merchants, residents, police and our team sending a clear message that those who perpetrate crimes at Shaker Square

will be caught,” Menesse said. The ownership and FASS Real Estate Management Services continue working with the Cleveland Police Department, the assistant safety director, and Safe Choice to improve safety.

The management team is also working with the assistant safety director to get all merchants enrolled into the FUSUS security software system, “a widely used and trusted public safety platform.”

“We are also establishing a Visitor Center on the Square that will have a few BBC staff, FASS maintenance, and a place for both Safe Choice and the Fourth District [police] to stop in,” Menesse said.

“I will be staying as long as I can afford it.”

– Shaker Square Subway owner Bobby Patel

Up and Down the Boulevard

Spring blossoms on Larchmere



Scorpacciata



Fiddlehead art pieces



Eclectic Eccentric



Liz Tekus of Fine Points

By Barbara Mooney

Spring annuals

We can look forward to Larchmere's annual events to usher in the warm months again this year. The 25th annual **Larchmere Plant Sale**, which benefits the Larchmere Community Association, will open the season on Mother's Day weekend, Saturday, May 11, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., at Cummins Hall, East 126th Street and Shaker Boulevard. Order by May 5 and get a 10% discount. Call 216.269.9060.

The Larchmere **Spring Sidewalk Sale** will highlight Memorial Day weekend, Saturday and Sunday, May 25 and 26, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Stores will have special sales indoors and bring their wares outside. Visiting vendors will also set up booths between North Moreland Boulevard and East 120th Street.

PorchFest calling

Larchmere's largest annual attraction, PorchFest, is scheduled for 1 to 10 p.m. Saturday, June 29. The family-friendly music festival, which brings "30 bands to 30 porches," is calling for potential performers, porch hosts and volunteers to register on its website, larchmereporchfest.org.

Fiddlehead features

Fiddlehead Gallery (12736 Larchmere Blvd., 216.231.9400) is featuring "mosaic goddesses" wall art pieces by local artist Jacquez Payne in its window, an acknowledgment of the March 8 International Women's Day. The store also features other original artworks, like the bottle-cap cat portraits from John Taylor Lehman.

Fiddlehead owner **Susan Rozman**, who is behind the handcrafted trees that appeared in spots along Larchmere for the holidays, has added spring flowers and buds to them.

Also, the gallery resumes its First Friday Craft Nights on April 5. For \$15, you can craft your own artworks with upcycled materials the gallery provides. The workshops are from 5 to 8 p.m.

Eclectic art offerings

Eclectic Eccentric (13005 Larchmere Blvd., 216.798.3002) is selling spring-themed oil paintings and reverse glass paintings by Lori Pastor.

Our Favorite Things spring

Women's History Month during March is being honored at **Our Favorite Things Boutique** (12730 Larchmere Blvd., 216.400.6081). The shop is having a 15 percent-off sale every Saturday through the month. Also, on behalf of younger women, owner Lisa McGuthry is holding her annual prom dress drive in March and April. The shop collects new and gently used dresses, then gives them away to deserving high school teens in April and May.

Scorpacciata opening soon

Scorpacciata Pasta Co., the restaurant that a year ago announced it will move from the Van Aken District to the space that was Larchmere Tavern, 13051 Larchmere Blvd., has indicated it will open soon. In a recent Facebook post, it put out a call for job applicants. Owner Peter Reuter told *Scene Magazine* that the restaurant will feature a pasta-making

room on display, a wood-fired pizza oven and a 12-seat bar. The eatery is also expected to have a front patio.

Word on the street is that two other spaces under renovation will be filled soon. **Batuqui Cleveland**, the Brazilian cuisine restaurant at 12706 Larchmere, may be moving into the remodeled church at the southwest corner of East 127 and Larchmere known as the Cultural Exchange. Batuqui's owners didn't respond to a request for comment. (But a server unofficially confirmed they expect to move in early summer.) And word is that a boutique is coming to a space being renovated at the corner of Larchmere and East 128th Street that had housed Elegant Extras antiques.

Poppy accolades

Poppy, A Salt Restaurant (12502 Larchmere Blvd., 216.415.5069) has won places on two lists recently put out by *Scene Magazine*. The restaurant appeared on the publication's list of "25 best new restaurants of 2023," and its ricotta dumplings were cited as one of the "best things we ate in Cleveland in 2023."

Better together at Academy Tavern

The Academy Tavern on Larchmere (12800 Larchmere, 216.229.1171), which has hosted regular live music events for years, has started a regular program, "Better Together Wednesdays." A variety of acts will start around 7:30 p.m. Check the restaurant's Facebook page for updates on performances.

As seen on TV

A few Larchmere merchants had star turns on TV recently. In a Thanksgiving rerun of "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert" from a year earlier, Liz Tekus and her **Fine Points Inc.** yarn, knitting supplies and clothing boutique (12602 Larchmere Blvd., 216.229.6644) appeared in the show's hilarious "Small Biz Bump" segment. The spoof, which also starred the cast of "NCIS: Los Angeles" and Drew Carey, gave a nice shoutout to Cleveland and Larchmere Boulevard. The segment is on the shop's website, finepoints.com.

Rorry Garrett and Tara Mitchell from **UnBar Cafe** (12635 Larchmere Blvd., 216.293.4480) graced the set of WJW Channel 8's "New Day Cleveland" on Dec. 22. The pair came on the morning show to make some of UnBar's signature coffee smoothies as well as cocktails, which UnBar features after 6 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday during its "UnWind" hours.

Loganberry's new book clubs

Loganberry Books (13015 Larchmere Blvd., 216.795.9800), is hosting two new monthly book club meetings. The Magical Realism Book Club meets on the third Thursdays, and Rebel Readers, a book club focusing on "authors writing about race, religion, culture, sexuality and intersectionality," meets on the third Sundays.

For updates on all of Loganberry's many events, go to loganberrybooks.com.

Email news tips to act_one@sbcglobal.net.

Dining

UnBar Café joins movement to pay higher wages

By Mandy Kraynak

An initiative to increase Ohio's minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2028 is collecting signatures and could be on the ballot in November 2024. Melissa Garrett-Hirsch views \$15 an hour as a steppingstone to even higher wages rather than an end goal.

Garrett-Hirsch owns UnBar Café, one of 10 restaurants named Cleveland's first "High Road Kitchen Restaurants."

These restaurants have committed to scaling wages up to at least \$15 an

hour for all employees, excluding tips. In exchange, they received \$5,000 grants and training to help them recruit and retain staff and increase wages.

The One Fair Wage campaign is pushing to increase wages and eliminate subminimum wages in multiple states. Meanwhile, its affiliate network of restaurant owners, High Road Restaurants, is helping small independent food businesses in Cleveland navigate ways to remain profitable and grow while paying their employees higher wages.

Ohio's 2023 minimum wage for tipped employees was \$5.05, half the minimum wage for nontipped employees. The ballot

initiative would gradually increase the tipped employee minimum wage each year between 2025 and 2028, eventually eliminating it Jan. 1, 2029, when employers would have to pay them full minimum wage, with tips on top.

To help the restaurants scale their wages and retain and recruit staff, High Road Restaurants is offering wage model consultations and race and gender equity training. The George Gund Foundation provided the funding for the first round of grants, and the city of Cleveland committed an additional \$50,000 to award 10 more restaurants in 2024.



Tara Mitchell is training to be UnBar Café's store manager and more.

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UnBar Café joins movement to pay higher wages

Continued from page 10

Forty-eight restaurants applied for the grant program. The selection process factors in geographic diversity, diversity of the restaurant's workforce and ownership, time in business, and whether the restaurant was full service.

The \$5,000 grants on their own won't be enough to help the restaurants increase their wages long-term, said Mikey Knab, national director for High Road Restaurants. The funds will compensate restaurant owners for their time participating in the training sessions and making changes to their systems.

"It's nice to be somewhere where I can be appreciated and seen, not just be like a number."

**- Tara Mitchell,
UnBar Café**

The goal of the race and equity training is to help restaurants recruit staff and prevent turnover, which is expensive, he said.

Garrett-Hirsch signed up for the grant program because of the wage consultation, which she hopes will help her business find a

way to remain profitable while paying employees \$15 an hour or more, plus tips. "Everybody's focusing on the \$5,000. That's nothing in the scheme of things.

What it really is that helps me is we're gonna have some mentors come in, look at our balance sheet and our P&L [profit and loss] with us and help us find ways to cut costs so that it won't be such a burden to carry that payroll expense," Garrett-Hirsch said.

Paying competitive wages is crucial for individual employees' well-being and for recruiting and retaining employees, she said.

Tara Mitchell, who manages operations at UnBar Café, used to work at a large corporate company. Now, she's training

to be store manager at the Larchmere neighborhood café and sees Garrett-Hirsch as a mentor.

"It's nice to be somewhere where I can be appreciated and seen, not just be like a number," Mitchell said. "Her whole mindset is not having me locked in to just helping her business, driving her business. Her mindset is more so teaching me how she keeps a business afloat so that hopefully one day I can own something for me and my children."

This story ran on The Land, at tinyurl.com/3pcnhf7z. Used with permission.

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