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Snelling and University traffic study foreshadows looming crisis

By JAN WILLMS

If Snelling and University were two trucks, some might say they are approaching a head-on collision.

The intersection at Snelling and University in St. Paul is one of the busiest in the Metro, and studies have concluded that the area will not be able to maintain its level of service, regardless of major transit improvements.

The Ramsey County Regional Rail Authority has committed \$100,000 to support a joint study with the city of St. Paul, the Ramsey County Department of Public Works and the Minnesota Department of Transportation.

According to Janice Rettman, Ramsey County commissioner, the purpose of the study is to determine the cost and impacts of five possible options. Those options are widening University, Snelling or both; completion of the "ring road" around the intersection; grade separation of Uni-

versity Avenue traffic and/or Light Rail Transit (LRT) or busway; possible alignment alternatives or various combinations of these choices.

The grade separation could involve using a tunnel or bridge. Alignment alternatives refer to LRT routes that could be placed in a different alignment, such as south of University rather than on University Avenue itself.

Rettman, who said the city of St. Paul will lead the work on the study that is scheduled to start in November, has specifically requested that all District Councils be made aware of the study.

"I believe in District Councils a lot," Rettman said, "and I think it's important that any study consider them." She added that she thinks conducting the study is similar to throwing a pebble in the water, as it reaches out to the councils that in turn reach out to the neighborhoods.

John Maczko, director of

transportation for St. Paul, agreed that the study is something that needs to be done. "Snelling and University is one of the most highly traveled roads in the Metro," he said. "It is highly congested, and something needs to be done, regardless of whether LRT

Dan Soler, traffic engineer for Ramsey County Public Works, said that the study could indicate that any of the five solutions could work, or not work. "All of the solutions will have impacts," he said.

"We know certain things,"

"Snelling and University is one of the most highly traveled roads in the Metro. It is highly congested, and something needs to be done."

happens." He said that additional studies are being done on the east, from Snelling Avenue west from 94 up to the north side. "We're looking at Pierce Butler and north-south alternatives, as well as east-west options," he said. He said these studies will be getting underway the first part of the year.

Soler said. "We know Snelling and University is a very important vehicular intersection. We know it is a very important pedestrian intersection. We know there is a potential for a number of land changes around the area, and we know

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Four Points closing leaves Midway without mid-priced hotel

By TOM CONLON

On Monday, October 31, the long-time Midway Four Points Sheraton Hotel closed its doors for good, leaving 108 employees and many loyal customers without a longtime home.

The hotel, built and opened as the Sheraton Midway in late 1982 on the Northeast corner of Hamline and Interstate-94, was originally financed with \$9 million of industrial revenue bonds by the St. Paul Port Authority, said Tom Collins, communications director for the St. Paul Port Authority. In 1988, San Francisco-based Grosvenor Properties Ltd. purchased it on a contract-for-deed basis but defaulted on its debt service payments and contracted improvements with the Sheraton hotel chain in 2003.

After the Port Authority repossessed it in February 2004, spending \$600,000 to repair a leaking roof, it was required to sell the property to the highest qualifying offer to repay the bonds. Collins said there were



On Monday, October 31, the long-time Midway Four Points Sheraton Hotel closed its doors for good, leaving 108 employees and many loyal customers without a longtime home. (Photo by Tom Conlon)

three offers, two of whom intended to keep it as a hotel but did not provide financial statements or the best offer. In June 2005, the Port Authority Board of Commissioners voted to sell the property to Target Corpora-

tion on a non-contingent (and highest) sale price of \$8.6 million and announced its intention to close the hotel by October 31.

But Brian McMahon, executive director of University UNIT-ED, an organization representing

12 community organizations and some local business owners, said the closing was unnecessary and that the Port Authority could have waited to find more consensus with all the stakeholders.

"We had a very serious second bid that was only \$100,000 less than Target's, and had they taken into account the annual sales tax revenue portion that goes to the city, that the hotel generated, they could have justified it financially and saved the hotel," he said. "We believe that a win-win solution could have been found to give Target its desired expansion space and save the hotel, but the decision appeared to be a foregone conclusion."

Will the Midway ever see such a hotel again?

"There is definitely a market for banquet and hotel facilities in the Midway," said Lori Fritts, executive director of the Midway Chamber of Commerce, which represents member businesses in

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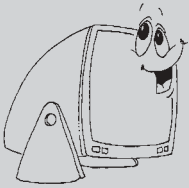
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Midway Como in a Minute

Homeless shelter receives Council OK

A proposal to build a 120-bed shelter for homeless and chronic inebriate men in the South St. Anthony Park neighborhood has won approval from the St. Paul City Council. The facility will be built at 906 Hersey St., between Wycliff Street and Capp Road.

The St. Paul Planning Commission approved a conditional use permit for Catholic Charities November 4. The Planning Commission decision is final unless it is appealed to the St. Paul City Council.

Plans for the new facility have been in the works for more than a year. Catholic Charities has looked for a St. Paul site for more housing for several years.

The conditional use permit designates 60 of the rooms to be for a community residential facility and 60 units to operate as a rooming house. That split designation means that a whole host of zoning regulations, as well as state regulations for the care of chronic inebriates, come into play.

Two variances were approved for the project, one of which is tied to the city's community residential facilities rules. St. Paul uses a population cap to regulate the number of beds for the homeless in each of its planning districts, working with a formula meant to prevent putting too many facilities in one neighborhood. The population of a planning district is weighed against the number of beds in existing community residential facilities, emergency housing facilities, shelters for battered persons with more than four adult residents, overnight shelters and/or transitional housing facilities. If the number of facility bed residents in a neighborhood exceeds 1 percent, putting any more housing there requires a variance. St. Anthony Park (District 12) will be

11 beds over the limit when the new catholic Charities facility opens.

The Planning Commission also approved a 14-space parking variance for the property. There are 36 parking spaces and 50 are required.

No one appeared at an October 27 public hearing on the Catholic Charities request. St. Anthony Park Community Council is in support of the request, provided that Catholic Charities current 56-bed facility for chronic inebriates on Wycliff closes after the new facility opens. The city plans to buy that property for redevelopment and not allow any rooming houses or community residential facilities to be put there.

Landlords may be forced to return fees

Landlords who charge tenants application fees with no intention of renting to those tenants face sanctions from the City of St. Paul. The St. Paul City Council voted unanimously to adopt a city ordinance that requires landlords to return rental fees.

The intent of the ordinance is to protect rental applicants from unnecessary and predatory collection of rental application fees. Some landlords have been accused of using application fees as a way to generate revenue, with no intention of renting to a tenant.

The fees are paid so that a landlord may screen and check the background of a prospective tenant, before a lease is signed. Under the new ordinance, a landlord must disclose to the tenant the criteria by which an application will be judged. The application form for a dwelling unit will give the prospective tenant a choice as to how the application fee will be returned. It can be mailed back to a tenant, held for retrieval or, in the case of a check, destroyed.

Application fees for rental properties shall not exceed \$35 per adult applicant.

Also, the landlord must notify prospective tenants in writing and tell them why they did not meet criteria for renting a dwelling unit. Tenants will also be provided the name, address and phone number of any tenant screening agency and other credit reporting agencies.

No one testified at a public hearing on the ordinance. However, a group of landlords picketed City hall on the day the ordinance was heard. Landlords contend that they are being unfairly treated by Mayor Randy Kelly's administration and that enforcement of the property codes is done in an arbitrary manner.

Ward Two Council member Dave Thune, who headed the city's Housing Information Office under former Mayor Norm Coleman, said there have been a number of complaints about landlords who collect fees as a way of generating income for themselves.

R & R Books sues city over redevelopment

The owner of an adult bookstore, whose building is threatened by a redevelopment project, has sued the City of St. Paul. R & R Books owner Jill Rasmuson filed the lawsuit in U.S. District Court October 17.

The bookstore, the city's last adult bookstore, is at 674 University Av. It is on a commercial block eyed for retail-office redevelopment. Summit-University Planning Council, Aurora-St. Anthony Neighborhood Development Corporation, Model Cities Development Corporation and Welsh Companies are working to redevelop the corner. Plans call for a two-story commercial building with underground parking. Building cost is estimated at \$6.9 million.

In September the St. Paul

City Council, acting as the Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA), voted unanimously to acquire the bookstore and three neighboring storefronts through condemnation or eminent domain. In the lawsuit Rasmuson claims the purpose of condemning the property is to force out the bookstore. The bookstore, a liquor store, a hat store and a vacuum cleaner repair shop are being displaced by the project. The repair shop has already moved.

The bookstore is on a block where major redevelopment is occurring at both ends, the St. Albans-University corner and the University-Dale corner. A new St. Paul Public Library with housing above it is under construction at University and Dale.

The lawsuit not only targets the redevelopment project and property condemnation, Rasmuson is also challenging new city zoning regulations on adult-oriented businesses. The regulations were adopted by the City Council last spring as a means of better controlling where the businesses go and preventing a concentration of adult businesses in residential neighborhoods. Rasmuson contends the ordinance as it is written doesn't allow her bookstore to relocate in St. Paul.

The city has not filed a response to the lawsuit yet. Nor have any court dates been announced.

Wellington builds condos at Lexington Park

Responding to community demands for more housing, Wellington Management will build 77 condominium units at its Lexington Park development. Plans shown to the Lexington Park Design Advisory Group October 27 show two L-shaped building at the southeast corner of the site near Lexington and

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Can Snelling Avenue be remade as a more interesting destination location?

By JANE MCCLURE

Instead of serving as a thoroughfare people drive to get through area neighborhoods, why can't Snelling Avenue be a more interesting place to come to? Could the street, which carries about 46,000 vehicles per day, be a place with more street-level activity, public art and interesting features that compels motorists to slow down?

David Engwicht, an internationally known traffic calming and pedestrian safety expert from Brisbane, Australia, thinks so. He challenged participants in a recent series of community workshops to imagine a community that is walkable and safer for motorists as well as pedestrians, a community where schoolchildren can safely walk across Snelling Avenue without being bused across.

Approximately 200 people attended Engwicht's traffic calming workshops in St. Paul October 13-15, including residents from Hamline-Midway, Merriam Park, Snelling-Hamline, Lexington-Hamline and other St. Paul neighborhoods. They discussed solutions Engwicht has implemented successfully in other communities. But they also looked at what they like about their own neighborhoods here and how that translates into ideas to slow down and reduce motor vehicle traffic.

Engwicht has visited St. Paul in the past few years and is seeing a change in how citizens and city officials think about traffic and safety. "I think people are

getting much better organized around these issues," he said. He sees a shift toward thinking about what is possible, rather than giving up and seeing the traffic issues as a lost cause.

Engwicht encourages "outside the box" thinking to get people focused on ways to calm and slow traffic. "This is really a social problem," said Engwicht. "You're not even trained to think about it as a social problem."

The workshop participants took part in role-playing exercises and tried to approach traffic calming issues from the viewpoint of the person represented, be the persona of a traffic engineer, child, local politician or corporate chief executive officer. They walked Snelling in the Hancock-Hamline and Hague areas and discussed problems and solutions. The push to make Snelling and Hague safer became more urgent just hours after the workshop participants left October 15. A 63-year-old man was struck and injured by a vehicle as he crossed the street there.

The October 15 session ended with participants each picking a traffic calming idea to work on in the weeks ahead and filling out postcard reminders to themselves stating that idea. The postcards will be mailed out by mid-November, to give folks a nudge. Street fairs and sidewalk sales, public art and colorful banners, colorful plantings in curbside flower boxes and organized efforts to reduce motor vehicles trips are just some of

the ideas area residents are pursuing to tame Snelling traffic.

Wendy O'Leary said the community around Snelling and Minnehaha avenues needs to look at developing a stronger neighborhood identity, possibly as Hamline Village. Getting people to the area and involved in activities and public art there would bring the added benefit of slowing down traffic.

Another idea is to reuse the old metal and wood kiosks put up more than a decade ago along Snelling and Minnehaha, as part of a Neighborhood Partnership Program streetscape project. Yet another idea she and others raised is the need to get kids walking to school again, in a "walking school bus" group led by a parent or parents.

Hamline-Midway resident Randy Schubring is a proponent of the idea of a community block party along Snelling, which could be a springboard for a community visioning and planning process to bring more of a human element to Snelling all of the time. Engwicht said he liked the idea of a party or a festival as a springboard for ongoing activity along a street.

"It's really important that roads not be closed for these types of events," he said.

To move the traffic calming efforts along, the Midway Transportation Management Organization (TMO) is setting up a web site, www.reclaimourstreets.org Midway TMO Director Russ Stark is encouraging area residents to post

their ideas for traffic calming, including pictures of changes made in their neighborhoods. The Midway TMO site will also include links to Engwicht's work and his web site, www.mental-speedbumps.com

Midway TMO will start a campaign to get area residents to think about combining their motor vehicle trips and taking fewer trips. "We want people to take a note pad and jot down their trips, and then think of ways trips could be combined," Stark said. Midway TMO will also encourage people to shop locally, rather than driving to other neighborhoods.

Some of Engwicht's ideas, such as putting a colorful chair on a boulevard for passersby to sit in, may sound unconventional. But his work has drawn attention worldwide. Engwicht also has the attention of St. Paul Public Works, which sent several staff members to the workshops, and the City Council.

Engwicht said he tries to focus on the "politics of the possible," to give people ideas that they can easily implement in their own neighborhoods. He talks about reclaiming streets and bringing more human activity back to front yards and sidewalks. One of his oft-stated goals is to reduce motor vehicle traffic by 50 percent, to make streets safer for everyone.

Of the constituent complaints he deals with, traffic safety issues are among the most vexing, said Ward Four Council Member Jay Benanav. Speeding

motor vehicles, cut-through traffic on neighborhood streets and dangerous crosswalks constantly generate calls to his office.

"It's frustrating because we are often told there is nothing we can do," Benanav said. Community groups are sometimes in conflict with city Public Works staff. But he noted that in recent years, Public Works has been much more responsive to requests for traffic calming and more willing to try new ideas, ranging from flags for pedestrians to carry while crossing streets to countdown clocks to indicate how much time a pedestrian has left to get across a crosswalk.

City Council members say they are pleased at Public Works' focus on traffic calming. Public Works Director Bob Sandquist said traffic calming will continue to be a goal for the department in 2006. Sandquist said Public Works is always willing to look at new ideas.

Engwicht's workshops generated a traffic taming idea for the City Council to act on in the weeks ahead. A proposal is in the works for a city ordinance that would allow district councils and other community groups to make small but noticeable changes to intersections. Making the intersections more visually interesting is seen as one way to slow vehicles down. No date has been set for introduction of the ordinance, but Benanav indicated it would be brought to the council soon.

Tour Churches of Minnesota on Nov. 14 at Hamline Midway Library

Don't miss a presentation of Doug Ohman's stunning photographs from Churches of Minnesota, the new book in the Minnesota Historical Society Press series that previously brought readers Barns of Minnesota. Join The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library for a visual tour of some of Minnesota's most scenic churches on Monday, November 14 at 7 p.m., at the Hamline Midway Branch Library, 1558 West Minnehaha Avenue.

Churches of Minnesota highlights the beauty and significance of these places of worship, from the one-room chapel of a prairie town to a grand city cathedral. One of

the churches featured in the book is the nearby St. Columba—be sure to look for other familiar sites. Doug Ohman is a photographer who specializes in historic structures and community landmarks. His pictures were featured in the Smithsonian Institution's exhibit Barn Again!: Celebrating an American Icon and in the Minnesota Historical Society Press book, Barns of Minnesota.

This program is sponsored by The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library and is free and open to the public. For more information, contact The Friends at friends@the-friends.org or 651-222-3242.

LETTERS

When did University Avenue become an alley?

As I write this letter, I am looking out my office window at the south-facing facade of the CVS/Pharmacy. I am wondering if anyone has any idea when University Avenue officially became an alley, since what I am looking at certainly could not have been approved by anyone with authority for enhancing the appearance of

the primary east-west arterial avenue in the Twin Cities.

As a resident, taxpayer, and one who has had a life-long connection with the Midway, I am insulted by what I see. The light over the service door reminds me of the back door of a Broadway playhouse. If what I am seeing is a product of our leaders' vision for the future of University Avenue, I might as well move my office to Lake Street and pay lower rent.


Steven R. Kufus

Cindy, it appears you have

PHARYNGITIS

(Sore Throat)


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Autumn is a time of turning ...the leaves turn color, the clocks turn back ... we even turn up our collars to the chilly winds. For many it is also a time of turning indoors, both physically and mentally. As the outside becomes cool, we spend more time inside. Our thoughts may turn inward. Watching the dying back of the plant world reminds us that we humans also experience cycles of birth, growth, and death.

I usually like to write about ways to maintain or improve your vitality. But this month I am going to focus on acknowledging your mortality, and preparing for it. Specifically, I want to give you some information to help you if you want to prepare a living will.

First—a clarification of terms. A living will, or a health care directive, is your opportunity to define, in writing, for yourself and your loved ones, how you want your life to be managed if you become too ill to make decisions for yourself. It also allows you to name the person or people you want to make decisions about your health care, if you are unable to do so. This can be especially important if you want someone other than your biological or legal family to make decisions for you.

For example, if you are unmarried and want your life partner to be the person who will make decisions for you, you need to have that person defined as your “agent”. Otherwise your parents or siblings will be the ones chosen.

A health care directive does not need to be fancy or long. That being said, there are some basic areas to address. Questions to ask yourself, and then define in your health care directive include the following -

- What are your goals and values about your health care?
- If you are in pain, do you want pain control?
- Under what conditions do you want your heart restarted with electricity or chest compressions? (This is called resuscitation.)
- Under what conditions do you want a mechanical ventilator to keep you alive? (This is called intubation.)
- If you are unable to swallow, do you want artificial nu-

Cares and Cures

By JANE KILIAN, M.D.

Turn, Turn, Turn

trition and hydration? If so, for how long?

- Do you want to donate organs or tissue?
- What are your desires regarding a memorial service, funeral, cremation and/or burial?
- If you are terminally ill, where would you like to die—in your home or in a health care facility? If you want to die at home, there are several hospice organizations in the Twin Cities to assist you with your needs while you are living at home.

Once you have answered these questions for yourself, it is time to get your wishes in writing. There are many tools/worksheets available to help you with this. Your physician may have pre-printed forms that you can fill out. Or you can simply write your wishes on a piece of paper. Resources are listed at the end of this article.

In order to be legal your paperwork must be signed by you and authorized by a notary public. Most banks have a notary public available. If you do not have access to a notary public, you can have two witnesses sign your document.

Give copies of your signed and completed document to your family, your close friends, and to your physician. It is also a good idea to talk in person with your doctor about your wishes. If your doctor understands your plans s/he can help your loved ones make decisions for you.

When should you prepare a health care directive? NOW!

People diagnosed with terminal illnesses are urged to prepare living wills. But life is fragile and unpredictable—a car crash, a tumble while roller-blading, and numerous other events can change your life and your health instantly. So don't wait. Let your loved ones and your physician know how you want to be cared for if you are suddenly very ill.

If you have questions about preparing a health care directive, you can schedule an appointment with your physician to discuss the issue. Most primary care doctors will help you prepare a health care directive if you ask them for assistance.

Musical Reference:
Turn! Turn! Turn! (To Everything

There is a Season)
words adapted from Pete Seeger

*To everything, there is a season
And a time for every purpose under heaven.*

*A time to be born, a time to die
A time to plant, a time to reap
A time to laugh, a time to weep*

*To everything - turn, turn, turn.
There is a season - turn, turn, turn.
And a time for every purpose under heaven.*

Resources

University of Minnesota Extension Service, 612-624-4900;
Order@dc.extension.umn.edu

Minnesota Board on Aging, 651-296-2770.

Office of the Ombudsman for Older Minnesotans, 651-296-0382

(Dr. Kilian is a family practice physician who lives and works in the Midway Como community. She believes that good medicine means caring for people as well as curing diseases. We want to address your health concerns so please let us know what topics you would like to see in future columns. If you have suggestions or questions, write to the Monitor c/o 1885 University Avenue West, #110, St. Paul, MN 55104. Or e-mail denisw@aplacetoremember.com.)

The statistics don't lie. One in every two marriages ends in divorce. Two of every three second marriages end in divorce. That means that there are a lot of blended families out there. According to the 1990 census, about 21 per cent. We know it's higher than that! For every blended family, there's at least 1 stepparent.

I'm a stepmother. My husband's a stepfather. Both of us have had to listen to the line, "You're not my father (mother). I don't have to listen to you!" I truly hate those words.

That line was used most when the kids were small, and usually, in trouble for something. Now that they're grown, the line is different. It's more refined, but the intent is still there.

Last weekend, I was in Southern California (a vast cultural wasteland) to help my stepdaughter plan her wedding. I brought a hefty check with me to pay for part of the wedding. We also attended a friend's stepdaughter's wedding.

My beautiful Finnish stepdaughter, Krista, took a day off of work to shuttle me around from one wedding site to another. I saw the bridesmaid's dresses (lovely), the church (very Scandinavian), the restaurant where the reception will be held (beautiful terrace with a breathtaking view of the ocean).

The following day we drove down to San Diego to attend my girlfriend's stepdaughter's wedding. We had a wonderful time. Although it was overcast and even misty, the ocean side ceremony went off without a hitch. Everyone was happy, everyone was lovely. The reception was wonderful, the food good, the wine flowing. Later that evening, it got interesting.

My stepdaughter had imbibed a little too much, but I wasn't concerned. After all, she wasn't driving anywhere, rarely drinks, and I was there to look after her. We went back to our room arm-in-arm. I was happy and thought she was too.

I hadn't even removed my pantyhose when she started



The Best Years

By SHERRI MOORE

A stepparent's lament

in. It was a list of offenses I committed while raising her. She'd state her claim, then back up her argument with statements made by my husband's two sisters and her mother. I quietly undressed, took off my make up and crawled into bed, while she ranted, raved, and paced, crying the whole time.

When I could get a word in, I told her I loved her, held her and comforted her while she cried about having the meanest stepmother in the world. She also cried about what a clueless father she has, since none of this was his fault.

My defense? I, an Irish-Catholic girl from the East Side of St. Paul, married a man from Finland, living in Los Angeles, with a large family. To be frank, I was welcomed into that family with all the warmth of the White House welcoming Saddam Hussein. My son and I moved to LA, a foreign country where very few people speak English. The large, Finnish family was so fearful of losing their native tongue, that they couldn't cease speaking Finnish to communicate with me. It was excruciating! No matter what I did, it was wrong. Eventually, I quit attending family gatherings because it was just too boring, and they had great difficulty concealing their hatred.

I raised the kids together, the same. We had Krista half-time. My husband started a new business, and worked 80 hours a week getting it up and running. His ex-wife, a woman driven to find a wealthy husband, was rarely at home with Krista. Amongst the three of us, I was the parent that hauled Krista to various activities, sewed all her costumes, took her shopping, to movies, museums and other

places. I also planned her birthday parties, sat with her when she was studying, helped her when she was sick, and even had her throw up on my satin pantsuit while helping her to the bathroom. Any good mother or stepmother knows what I did.

Sunday, we drove back to her home, talking all the way. In the cold light of day, with a hangover, she was seeing things in a more

tolerant light. I feel sorry for her that she held in her feelings all these years. I feel sorry that she believed the bold lies of her mother and aunts. I feel sorry for me. Yes, it's pity time here. If I would've done a lousy job, she'd probably feel the same about me. Who do I see to get my time and money back?

The thing about being a stepparent is; you do all of the work and get none of the credit. A stepparent has no legal rights to the stepchildren, but is expected to care for them, pay for them, and love them as their own. My father used to say it took a special man to raise children that weren't "his." I don't think he ever thought of his daughter raising a child that wasn't hers.

When we attend Krista's wedding, what will my role be? Am I to be a benevolent-aunt type? God knows, I'm not the trophy-second-wife type! How should I relate to people who have lied about me for 21 years? Is it considered bad taste to slug them? Just kidding, I haven't hit anyone since I became an adult. I haven't found an etiquette book that has provided me with any answers.

This is where you, the reader comes in. Have you had your stepchild blame you for everything? Have you attended a stepchild's wedding? Do you have any tips for me? I'm all ears.

(Sherri Moore is a freelance writer and former resident of the Como neighborhood. She and her second husband enjoy their empty nest home. She welcomes your comments and can be reached at sherrimoore92@msn.com.)

The year was 1982. I was seven years old, and my family had fallen on some hard times. My father had been laid off at the cardboard manufacturing company where he worked. He was having a very hard time finding work, so between minimum wage temp jobs, he decided to take some night classes in computers at the community college.

My mother had been a homemaker since dropping out of high school to have my older brother. With no money coming in and three young children, she took it upon herself to also take classes – getting certified as a CNA.

They both eventually found work, my mom at the nursing home, and my dad as a large machine mechanic at a local cannery. But in the interim, when things were at their worst in the winter of 1982, the Hamilton family saw a huge outpouring of generosity from family and friends, but also from some folks we didn't know.

First it was at Thanksgiving when we found huge boxes of food on our doorstep; complete with a huge turkey. Then again on Christmas Eve – more any-



New to the Neighborhood

By NATE HAMILTON

Nothing but gratitude

mous boxes of food. But what was most memorable, and what has vividly stayed with me to today – were the wrapped presents we found with the Christmas food stash. My folks had already done the best they could with what we had – a modest handful of presents for each of us. But to get all these extra presents – well that was truly something.

So here is the moral of the story: it is now that time of season where we should be particularly thankful for all that we have been given. And as part of that thankfulness, there is always a place in us that wants to give back.

Because here I am, 23 years later, feeling like I am the luckiest guy on earth. I have a wonderfully smart and radiant wife. I have the most fun, witty, inquisitive two-year-old son. We feel very

lucky that are all healthy. Our finances seem to be mostly in order, despite my not having worked full time for over two years now. My folks are still doing well for themselves, both still in the professions they found over a decade ago. No worries.

have some type of community outreach program you could get involved in. Many community and rec centers offer ways you can get involved tutoring or coaching area kids. I am sure you do not have to look very far to find someone less fortunate

**“I have a wonderfully smart and radiant wife.
I have the most fun, witty, inquisitive two-year-old son.
We feel very lucky that are all healthy.”**

But I think all of us have our own reasons to be thankful – and a reason to give back. At the end of this article, I have written some information about a couple local places where you can pitch in, donate, or volunteer your time. Also, most churches

than you - someone who could use some type of helping hand.

So I would encourage you to extend that hand to those in need—particularly a young person. You never know. The kid you reach out to today could be writing about the experience

with nothing but gratitude some thirteen years later.

*For the second year in a row, my ECFE class has "adopted" the Alley Shoppe - a family clothes closet offering gently used or new clothes, linens, cookware, and other household items and coats. We bring them all sorts of new and used household goods, clothing and toys - which they in turn distribute to needy families. We have been told that they particularly need toys for pre-teen kids to distribute around the holidays: things like footballs, basketballs, and girls' journals. In addition to donating, volunteer opportunities are also available including helping to clean and sort clothing and helping to distribute items.

*Meals on Wheels encourages volunteers to bring their children along with them when making home food deliveries to the elderly and shut-ins. This is a great way to get your children involved in helping out – and of course the elderly clients love to see young people. The Midway-Como area has several Meals on Wheels offices. Contact the one nearest you by visiting www.meals-on-wheels.com

Midway in a minute

Continued from page 2

Fuller. One building would contain 33 condominium units and about 12,500 square feet of first-floor retail space and 44 underground parking units. The other would contain 44 housing units and 44 underground parking spaces.

Lexington Park is planned at the southwest corner of University Avenue and Lexington Parkway. An old strip mall, car wash and Keys Well Drilling occupied the property for many years. An Aldi supermarket is under construction on University Avenue. TCF Bank is under construction on Lexington. Some community groups have criticized the project for not adhering to principles of transit-oriented development.

Wilder Foundation has plans to occupy much of the center part of the site with its new building and a parking ramp. Wilder would use about 3 acres of the property to consolidate many of its operations, moving administration, program and services from the current main campus in Frogtown and several locations in surrounding neighborhoods.

At the southwest corner of the site, Episcopal Homes has plans to build 50 units of senior citizen housing. The senior housing provider is waiting for word on a federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grant sought for that project. HUD will decide which grants to award by year's end.

Lexington Park owner-developer Steve Wellington said the plans are very tentative at this point and no building drawings have been prepared. The 77 units of new housing would be owner-occupied, and possibly offered to senior citizens. Building the housing would take "some level of city subsidy," he said. That amount isn't known.

Last summer Episcopal Homes, Central Community Housing Trust and Centex Homes presented preliminary plans for housing at Lexington Park. Since then Centex and CCHT have indicated they are no longer interested.

Also on October 27 the task force looked at the latest set of plans for a new Wilder Foundation headquarters and program building at Lexington Park. The complex, which would include a parking ramp, would be built on the Dunlap side of the property. It would include some outdoor garden and gathering space, which in turn features park of the original Lexington Park baseball field's retaining wall.

Wilder took its plans to city staff for a site plan review meeting November 2. Unless a community group petitions for a site plan review public hearing, there will be no Planning Commission review of the project.

Johnson Bros. housing project moves ahead

Redevelopment of the former Johnson Brothers liquor warehouse complex on University Avenue continues to move ahead. The warehouses will be transformed into housing. Because it is part of the recently designated University-Raymond historic district, the project requires extra local, state and federal reviews.

The University Carleton project has two phases. In the first phase, the old warehouses will be redeveloped into artists' lofts. In the second, phase, new buildings north of the site would bring about 250 condominium units.

The project won St. Paul Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) approval for its building permits October 20. That approval is final, as no appeal was filed with the St. Paul City Council.

On October 26 the City Council, acting as the Housing and Redevelopment Authority

(HRA) Board approved the issuance and sale of multi-family housing revenue bonds for Carleton Place Lofts. In Late September the City Council accepted a state grant for remediation of pollution at the site.

One of the next steps for the developers is to obtain historic tax credits toward the project's costs.

The HPC looked at the original plans for the building renovations several months ago.

What slowed the project down was the required state and federal reviews. The federal issues forced a redesign of some aspects of the project, including the new building that would connect the two buildings at 2285 and 2295 University Av. and its elevator tower. A design with more glass had to be scaled back and replaced with a link that has more brick work. There were also changes in window openings and other aspects of

the design.

Architect Gary Vogel said that as a result of the redesign, the project did lose some of its dwelling units. Although HPC approval of the building permits was unanimous and the design won HPC praise, some commissioners said they liked the original design better. One issue they asked staff to work on with the developers is the design of railings around gardens and walkways for the new complex.

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Best Buy, Lowe's look closely at Snelling bus barn site



Best Buy and Lowe's could be on the verge of relocating to the former Metro Transit bus garage site and other vacant land behind Midway Center, bringing more big box retail to the Midway. (Photo by Terry Faust)

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By JANE MCCLURE

Best Buy and Lowe's could be on the verge of relocating to the former Metro Transit bus garage site and other vacant land behind Midway Center, bringing more big box retail to the Midway. That could happen despite staunch opposition from a number of community organizations, including Snelling-Hamline Community Council and University UNITED.

But it isn't likely to happen without a land swap with Metro Transit and the Metropolitan Council. Before the Snelling site is sold to Midway Center owner RK Midway and anything is built on the bus garage site, transit and regional officials want a replacement site for a new bus garage.

A proposal to swap land on Hampden Avenue in South St. Anthony Park was on the drawing boards. But Ward One Council Member Debbie Montgomery, whose ward includes the Midway Center site, said she wouldn't force a land swap onto the Hampden neighborhood.

One concern the swap had raised was that it could have forced developers University Carleton Limited Liability Partnership to scale back their plans to develop the former Johnson Brothers Liquors site into a \$120 million housing project. Old warehouse buildings will be converted and new buildings built as part of the plan for the 2300 block area of university Avenue.

The land swap is opposed by St. Anthony Park Community Council and other community organizations. It also is opposed by the developers of the former Johnson Brothers Liquor warehouse complex on University Avenue.

Ward One Council Member Debbie Montgomery, who is working on the Best Buy and Lowe's project, said she won't force the bus garage onto the

Hampden site. She is willing to continue to discuss bus garage locations with other council members and with Metro Transit. She also would like RK Midway to be able to buy the bus barn site outright, rather than do the land swap. "There's just a lot of pieces to put together here," she said.

Montgomery said she is also committed to having a public process of site plan review for the property south of Midway Center, before any plans to put new retail stores there move forward. Neighbors have raised concerns about increased traffic and parking demand, the environmental sustainability of a new development and whether "big box" retail should be pursued the city. Some groups, including University UNITED, are asking that a mixed-use transit-oriented development be built at the site.

Lack of a community process in planning for the two retailers and questions about the traffic impacts on the already-busy Snelling-Interstate 94-University area are being raised. More than two dozen people representing more than a dozen organizations gathered at the former bus barn site October 13 to protest the city's actions. They are especially unhappy about a June 2005 development agreement with Midway Center owner RK Midway, saying the public wasn't given an opportunity to comment on the proposal. Nor were other developers or retailers allowed to submit proposals for the former bus barn property, which is owned by Metro Transit.

"We really need to start changing the rules of the game of community development in St. Paul," said University UNITED Executive Director Brian McMahon. "The city dropped the ball here."

Acting as the Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) Board, the St. Paul City Council

unanimously approved changes to its development agreement with RK Midway. The changes allow RK Midway to take the lead in negotiations for either a land swap or an outright purchase of the former bus barn property. The eight-month agreement is in its fifth month. It could be extended by the HRA if necessary.

Project negotiations have stepped up in recent weeks as RK Midway representatives have met with St. Paul Planning and Economic Development (PED) staff and City Council members Montgomery and Jay Benanav. The old Snelling bus barn site is in Ward One; the proposed new bus barn site is in Ward Four. Mayor Randy Kelly hailed the proposed redevelopment last month in a press release, saying the project should not be rejected "just because there are a few remaining issues to work through." He indicated there will be more community review of the plan.

But what could scuttle the whole redevelopment scheme is if the City Council rejects a resolution approving a land swap.

Metro Transit and Metropolitan Council have emphasized that the Snelling site cannot be sold or traded unless a new bus garage facility, for about 100 buses, is found in the area. The Snelling garage was torn down four years ago and replaced with a facility near the Phalen Corridor. More garage space is still needed.

City and regional officials disagree as to when Metro Transit made its needs for the additional garage space known, with Metro Transit saying it was always their intent to have some kind of Midway facility and city officials saying they agreed to relocate the old bus barn so that the Midway site could be freed for redevelopment.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11

Traffic study

Continued from page 1

Snelling and University is an extremely important transit intersection. It already has bus travel and the potential for LRT."

He said the intersection is the center for buses, vehicular, pedestrian and land use, as well as a possible LRT route. "How the heck is all that going to work?" he asked. "That's why we're doing the study."

Soler said that although people may think the study is about whether one of the solutions would work, that is not the real main focus of it. "It will offer possibilities to look at," he said. "But if the study suggests that the best solution for all the congestion is to build a bridge for light rail, for example, that doesn't mean that will happen."

He said that could be one of the suggestions, but the community may not feel it is the best one.

"The study itself is purely technical," he said, "and will not include community input. We've already met with various groups. Depending on when it starts, it should be done by the middle of next year. It's scheduled to start this month, but we don't have an RFP yet." He added that once the results are determined, that is when community involvement will become more pronounced.

Brian McMahon, executive director of University UNITED, is supportive of a study but feels it needs to be broader.

Earlier this year, the agency did a study that focused on the analysis of future transportation

nesses build on. If you propose solutions first, these create self-fulfilling outcomes."

McMahon advocates looking five, ten or twenty years down the road. "Transportation improvements usually need a 20-year implementation," he said.

He said University UNITED starts with the presumption that you can't build your way out of traffic congestion, but must intelligently plan for it, linking land use to transportation.

"We're putting in a drive-thru chain pharmacy at the corner of Snelling and University, and there are strong indications that Best Buy and Lowes are interested in building along University. That will probably greatly increase traffic," he said. McMahon is concerned that some of these decisions are dropped on the community without an opportunity for participation. "The community needs to be in the front end of these conversations, not the back end," he said.

"To solve the traffic problem, we want more non-auto use," McMahon said. "But when you build stores that are drive-thrus, you are saying welcome to cars, exactly the opposite of what we are trying to do."

He said University UNITED's approach is to try and attract land use and development that is not so heavily dependent on autos. "It is a very important concept in land use, even apart from traffic," he said.

McMahon said there might be alternatives for people to get off Snelling. "We have to think comprehensively," he said. "All along University there is a shortage of north-south connections," he said, as he cited the possibility of a new bridge that would cross over Vandalia.

He said the data from a major study could indicate the problems



Possible options the new traffic study will discuss are widening University, Snelling or both; completion of the "ring road" around the intersection; grade separation of University Avenue traffic and/or Light Rail Transit (LRT) or busway; possible alignment alternatives or various combinations of these choices. Over on Hiawatha Avenue in Minneapolis (pictured above), the advent of light rail and its impact on traffic is already being dealt with on a daily basis. (Photo by Terry Faust)

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"If we widen the streets, which is one of the proposed solutions, we may end up buying back some of the land we have just had new businesses build on."

needs on St. Paul industrial areas. University UNITED focused on the St. Paul Industrial Midway, covering an area bordered by Highway 280 on the west, I-94 on the south, Burlington Northern Santa Fe rail yards to the north and Prior Avenue to the east.

"We projected 100,000 trips per day within and across the St. Paul Midway and Southeast Minneapolis industrial areas," McMahon said. "These are trips by vehicle, transit or other means."

McMahon said he does not believe the current infrastructure can handle such traffic.

"To just pluck out Snelling is not too well advised," McMahon said. He suggested that rather than looking at Snelling, Pierce Butler and other areas separately, the traffic study should be done in a wider context.

"Let's look at I-94 on the south, Highway 36 on the north, 35E and 35W," he said. "We need facts, and we can start with a major transportation study of a larger area."

McMahon said he sees the Snelling study as problematic, and proposed solutions may be non-starters.

"If we widen the streets, which is one of the proposed solutions," McMahon said, "we may end up buying back some of the land we have just had new busi-

and open up some solutions. "The problems at Snelling may be resolved somewhere else," he said, "with solutions that are more cost-effective. We have to look at the whole network."

McMahon said he embraces light rail and sees it as a means to reduce car traffic. "LRT will create pressure on University Avenue," he said, "forcing people to look at traffic changes."

He said light rail will only work, however, if projects are built that are transit-connected and pedestrian friendly. "If we spend a billion on light rail, let's do it right," he said.

McMahon said the key is to be aware of the developments that are made.

"Drive-thrus should be prohibited and auto-oriented development should be prohibited at key stationary intersections," he said. "We need to be strategic about where we locate some of these things."

McMahon said that everyone assumes car traffic will expand in the future, but that with intelligent planning car use can be reduced.

"Vancouver, for example, shows a decline in car ownership and ridership in the use of land development and program enhancements, such as biking pathways," McMahon added.

Como dental assistant brings smiles to fatherless kids from Kosovo



Dawn Johnson's mission was to bring smiles to fatherless children in Kosovo who never owned toys or even toothbrushes. (Photo by Terry Faust)

By KAREN TRUDEAU

Large boxes filled with dental supplies were delivered recently to a volunteer dental clinic in Kosovo. Alongside these boxes were stacked others containing soft stuffed animals, balls, t-shirts, and baseball caps. Como area dental assistant Dawn Johnson sent these supplies and toys—shortly before arriving in Kosovo herself.

Her mission was to bring smiles to fatherless children in Kosovo who never owned toys or even toothbrushes. Johnson normally works for dentist Charles Kath in St. Paul's Bandana Square, but decided to spend two weeks during September traveling to Kosovo and tending to dental needs of women and children there.

Johnson learned of this need while at a dental convention a couple of year ago. She

met dentist Mark Ortinau who had already made a few mission trips. Ortinau told Johnson of the need for hope in Kosovo.

This need stems from the destruction of a war from 1996 until 1999 over ethnic Albanians (today called Kosovars) wanting independence from minority Serbs. International officials arrived five years ago to help restore order within the country. Many National Guard soldiers currently remain as a deterrent against violence.

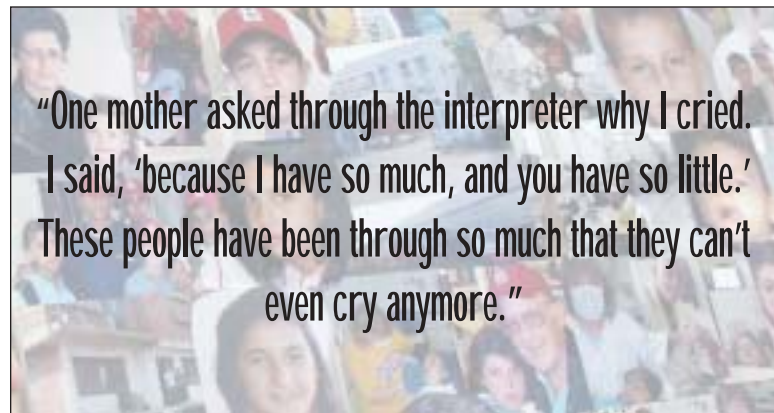
Meanwhile, Johnson found herself helping in this country thanks to a meeting with Dr. Ortinau. Thus, dentist and dental assistant became part of a team organized by Service International which is affiliated with a non-denominational church from Missouri.

For ten days during September, Johnson worked in the city

of Gjakova which is home to approximately 80,000 Kosovars. She worked inside of an unused foundry building which had been converted into a dental

ed stuffed animals and hugs.

"For lots of kids that stuffed animal or bouncy ball was their first toy," Johnson observed. "These people are not as fortunate as us."



clinic. Johnson saw 25 patients each day cleaning teeth and teaching oral hygiene with the help of an interpreter. The St. Paul dental assistant also provided

stuffed animals and hugs. "For lots of kids that stuffed animal or bouncy ball was their first toy," Johnson observed. "These people are not as fortunate as us." And, through an interpreter, there was always a 'thank you' and a returned hug along with a wide smile which required no interpretation.

Johnson also brought along a Polaroid camera which was a big hit. "Lots of mothers wanted their kids photos taken with me."

Through this mission, many Kosovars were provided with enough toothbrushes, toothpaste, and dental floss to last a year—supplies most of them had never before seen or used. Johnson even gave money to many of Gjakova's inhabitants. The supplies and money were donated by patients of the dental practice where Johnson works in Bandana Square.

"I let them (the patients) know about my trip, and they wanted to help," Johnson acknowledged. "Over 200 people generously donated to this mission."

Along with the supplies and toys, and the dental care, Johnson wanted to offer Kosovars 'hope' by her presence there. "I wanted to offer them hope that life will get better."

"There are hardly any men because they were either killed during the war, or they are working outside of the country in order to support their families," explains Johnson.

She also shares which encounter affected her the most in Kosovo. "I ran across a graveyard outside the town of Hereq," recalls Johnson. "There was a wooden headstone with the names of a dad and his little boy. I think I treated the mother later because I recognized the name. But I didn't make the connection until after she left, and it actually made me sick—what has happened to these families. This particular family's story was that the Serbs came to take the father. The little boy ran out after his father and they were both shot."

Yet despite what the people in Kosovo have experienced, Johnson describes them as warm and appreciative. Their reaction to her visit appeared to be one of gratefulness. However, Gjakova is a city comprised mainly of young widows and their children. Many live in rundown houses, some charred from having been set afire during the war.

Johnson noted the solemn scene. "We have everything and they have nothing, but they make the best of having nothing.

"Our kids are used to movies, Mall of America, and waterslides. These kids make due with beat-up soccer fields where they play with a ball patched with duct tape." Johnson wants to someday return to Kosovo to again help the children there. "I gave them dental care and toys, but I wanted to do so much more. It was devastating to see how little they had."

That is why Johnson admits she cried each day she worked in Kosovo. "One mother asked through the interpreter why I cried. I said, 'because I have so much, and you have so little.' These people have been through so much that they can't even cry anymore."

However, along with the desolation which Johnson encountered in Kosovo, she also found something to be happy about. "I made lifelong friends, even if I never see them again, because I know I touched their hearts—just like they touched mine."

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There was frost on the tips of every blade of grass, and the birdbath was frozen solid. The hot coffee and cider were going to be popular with the volunteers on this cold morning. My mind was racing. How many volunteers would show up? How many pastries should we buy? Were we going to get the use of any Weed Wrenches this time or do we have enough handsaws?

The sun had just cleared the horizon and lit up the park with a rosy glow, but clouds were moving in fast from the west. Please don't rain on our buckthorn bust today - it's hard enough work without being wet and cold.

That is how the Como Park buckthorn bust began on the morning of October 22. At that point it was time to stop worrying and get to work. When I showed up at the Como Pool parking lot at 8:45 a.m. to set up the refreshment table, 82-year-old volunteer, Roy Carlsted, was already there roaring to go. Roy's vigor and tenacity, which I'd witnessed at last spring's park clean up, is inspirational. He's the sort of volunteer that could conquer the equally tenacious buckthorn trees.

Common buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*) has nearly taken over the shrub layer in Como Park's woodlands. This non-native



Neighborhood Naturalist

By DEB ROBINSON

Giving thanks for the spirit of volunteerism

tree is displacing native woodland plants that provide habitat and food for wildlife. Female buckthorn trees produce oodles of purple berries that hungry birds eat when nothing else is available. These harmful berries cause diarrhea in the birds so the seeds go through the birds' digestive track unharmed. In this insidious way, the birds unwittingly spread buckthorn seeds far and wide, creating a vicious cycle where soon nothing is left for the birds to eat but the unwholesome buckthorn berries.

Total eradication of buckthorn may not be possible, but allowing the aggressive buckthorn to transform our diverse natural forested areas into solid monocultures of buckthorn trees would be a disastrous mistake.

It has been alarming to see how open and bare the woodland along Horton and Hamline Avenues is when the buckthorn is removed. Buckthorn has a longer

growing season than our native trees. The shade that buckthorn casts over the forest floor has suppressed the regeneration and growth of native understory shrubs like dogwood, elderberry, serviceberry, and cherry trees. Native shrubs will need to be reintroduced, and volunteers will have to keep pulling buckthorn seedlings for years to come because the buckthorn berries are viable for up to eight years.

If nearby homeowners removed the buckthorn hedges in their own yards it would help keep the park woodlands from being reinfested so quickly, but that is a high hope for the future. The enormity of the task at hand can paralyze a buckthorn eradication effort. For the sake of practicality and volunteer moral, it is best to focus on a manageable area and start wrenching, cutting, and hauling on a regular basis.

Within a few hours that

morning, 29 volunteers had cut and hauled enough buckthorn to make a pile 65 feet long - all ready for deposit to the district heating facility for burning. The sun came out and the coats and sweatshirts came off as the work continued through the morning. Jokes were made about who had the biggest ball of burdock seeds stuck to their cloths or who had found the biggest puffball mushroom.

The one chainsaw we had couldn't keep up with this enthusiastic bunch. Roy was using a handsaw to cut down 12-foot tall trees. He had the energy that volunteers half his age envied. At first, I went out of my way to keep an eye on Roy when he was really exerting himself - just in case, but who was I kidding? Roy competes annually in the Birkebeiner cross-country ski marathon and he logs more miles bicycling in one year than I do in a decade. During this buckthorn bust I was definitely more

likely to need a medic than 82-year-old Roy Carlsted.

Unfortunately, our bust had the use of only one Weed Wrench (brought by a volunteer). Nothing is as satisfying as griping a buckthorn trunk with a Weed Wrench and, with a strong pull, levering the invasive tree out of the ground with an audible thunk. Trees over 3 inches have to be cut and the buckthorn stump must be treated with herbicide to prevent it from resprouting.

Adam Robbins and Nathan Johnson, St. Paul Park and Recreation Department staff, welded the chainsaw and the herbicide sprayer for the District 10 Community Council's two buckthorn busts this October - their hard-working assistance was much appreciated.

It's the volunteers that can't be thanked enough for giving up a beautiful Saturday morning to do the dirty, exhausting work of buckthorn busting. But, of course, we had some fun too.

Endnotes: *A thousand thanks to Single Volunteers Twin Cities, District 10 Community Council Environment Committee members, and the local citizens that volunteered to remove buckthorn from Como Park on October 1 & 22. *To contact this writer: dmrobinson@bitstream.net



Just a few of the hard-working volunteers that came out to help eradicate invasive buckthorn trees from Como Park's woodlands this October. (Photo by Matt Schmitt 11-05)

Orchard Rec Center holds holiday bazaar November 12

Orchard Recreation Center, 875 Orchard Avenue, will hold their holiday bazaar on Saturday, November 12, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Start your holiday shopping early.

There will be a special room for children to shop for their parents. There also will be a free door prize drawing at 1 p.m. The event is free to the public. Orchard Rec is located off of Front Street between Dale and Lexington. Turn north on Milton and go two blocks straight to center.

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In Our Community

Storytimes at Hamline Midway Library

Fall storytimes at the Hamline Midway Branch of the St. Paul Public Library conclude on Tuesday evening and Wednesday morning, November 15 and 16. Two storytimes have been added in December, on the 13th and 14th. Bedtime storytime for preschool and early elementary-aged children will be offered on Tuesday, November 15 and December 13, at 7 p.m. All children are encouraged to wear their pajamas and bring a favorite bear or blanket to storytime.

Toddler and preschool storytime will be offered on Wednesday, November 16 and December 14, at 10:30 a.m. Parents with babies are welcome. Both storytimes include storytelling, songs, fingerplays, movies, and much more. Pre-registration is requested, but is not required.

For more information or to register for storytime, please contact the Hamline Midway Branch Library at 651-642-0293. The schedule also appears on the Library's website, www.sppl.org.

Pancake Brunch and Silent Auction at Central

Central Lutheran School will hold its 35th annual Pancake Brunch on Sunday, December 4, from 9 a.m.-1:30 p.m. The menu includes all the pancakes you can eat, plus sausages, coffee, milk, and orange juice. Drawings for door prizes will be held every half hour. There will also be a Silent Auction and Book Fair.

Central Lutheran School is located at 775 N. Lexington Parkway. Central Lutheran School offers Christian education, preschool through eighth grade, and before and after school child-care.

Adult tickets are \$5 in advance and \$6 at the door. Children's tickets (ages 2 through 8th grade) are \$2 in advance and \$3 at the door. You may purchase tickets from any CLS student or you may send your ticket order with payment to CLS and we will have your tickets available for pickup. For more information call the school at 651-645-8649.

Zion Church hosts Holiday Bazaar November 12

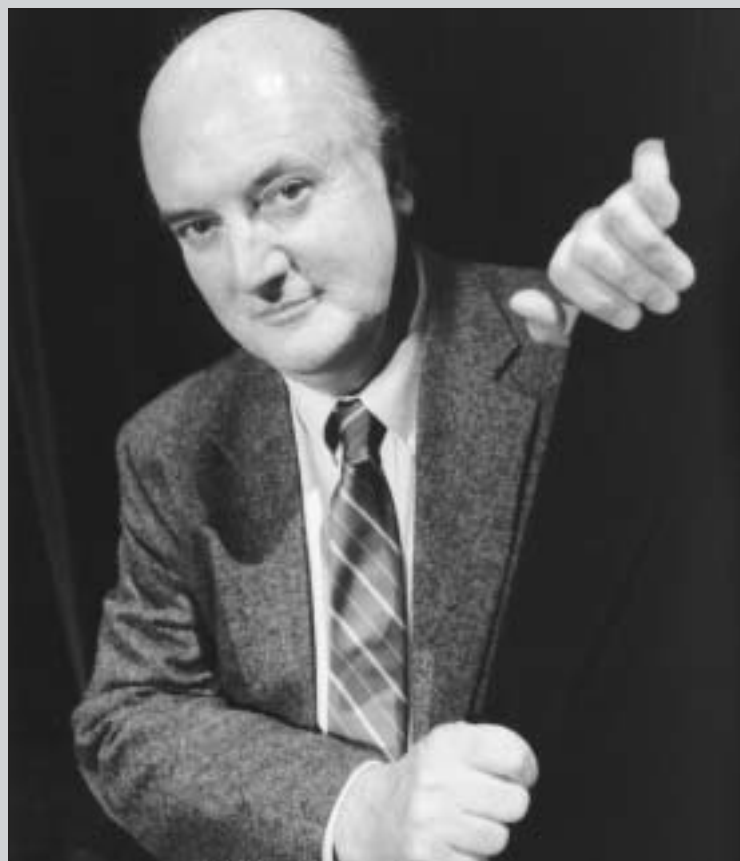
Zion Lutheran Church at 1697 Lafond in the Midway will host a Holiday Bazaar on Saturday, November 12, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Bake sale, craft, recycled Christmas items, coffee and cookies will be available for purchase. A light lunch can be purchased between 11 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. There will be musical entertainment. Bring your neighbors and friends. For more information call 651-645-0851.

'A Child's Christmas in Wales' read at Hamline

Hamline University will host a holiday theatre reading of *A Child's Christmas in Wales* by Dylan Thomas on November 20. Hamline Professor Emeritus Bill Kimes will be the featured reader at the event. The reading will be held at 4 p.m. in Anne Simley Theatre, located at 1530 Taylor Ave.

The event is open to the public. There is no charge to attend the reading, but donations will be accepted with all proceeds benefiting the William Kimes Theatre Scholarship Fund at Hamline University.

For more information and to RSVP, please contact Carrie Albers at calbers01@hamline.edu or 651-523-2684 by November 14.



Hamline University will host a holiday theatre reading of *A Child's Christmas in Wales* by Dylan Thomas on November 20 with Hamline Professor Emeritus Bill Kimes as the featured reader.

GINKGO coffeehouse to host its Art and Craft Fair

On Friday, December 2 (in the coffeehouse on Como), and Saturday, December 3 (in the Snelling Ave. coffeehouse), artists will display a wide variety of products for sale.

Many different artists bring their wares to GINKGO, presenting the perfect opportunity for buying unique, well-made, affordable merchandise.

It's the perfect event for picking up gifts for friends, family, coworkers, or yourself. Among the many items for sale this year will be mosaics, felted bags, house portraits and jewelry.

Items are selected for their quality and unique character.

The fair will take place on Friday, from 11 a.m.-5:30 p.m. in the lower level of GINKGO in the Park, 2300 Como Ave (at Doswell). For more information, call 651-644-7699.

The fair will take place on Saturday, from 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m. at GINKGO coffeehouse, 721 N. Snelling Ave (at Minnehaha). For more information, call 651-645-2647.

Carnival Royalty at Elders luncheon December 13

The Senior Winter Carnival Royalty will provide entertainment at a luncheon sponsored by Hamline Midway Elders on Tuesday, December 13 at 11:30 a.m. at the United Methodist Church, 1514 Englewood. All HM persons 62 years and older are invited. A free will donation is taken for the meal and free transportation is available by calling 651-209-6542.

Hamline Midway Elders is looking for a volunteer driver/medical advocate to transport HM residents to occasional appointments, and be trained to write elders' questions and keep track of the doctor's responses. The need is sporadic but ongoing.

Volunteers of all ages are needed to help with gift wrapping at Border's Books during two hours shifts on selected dates in December. Please call 209-6542 for information about both these opportunities.

SAP Elementary sees success reflected in MCA

Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA) results from the past year indicate St. Anthony Park Elementary School students continue to score well above district and state averages in the 3rd and 5th grade reading and math assessments and in the 5th grade writing assessment. Remarkably, these MCA tests showed 69-86% of St. Anthony Park students performed above their actual grade level.

These results are welcomed by all the students, parents, and staff who have worked hard together to create a quality learning environment. For additional data and comparisons, visit www.spps.org and click on the "Data Center" link.

Luke Live! presented at St. Columba Nov. 19

Luke Live! A Dramatic Proclamation of the gospel of Luke with Fr. James DiLuzio. St. Columba Church 1327 Lafond Avenue. Four evenings of scripture, drama, music and fellowship beginning Saturday November 19th @ 7:00pm, through Tuesday, November 22 open to all denominations. For more information, please call - 651-645-9179.

Board member openings for Como Block Nurse

Do you like the idea of neighbors helping neighbors? Thinking about an opportunity to govern a grassroots, non-profit organization that supports your neighborhood elders? The Como Park Living at Home Block Nurse Program is looking for new board members with strong leadership and/or organizational skills to join their dynamic team. Please call the office to set up an interview, 651-642-1127.

Special events at MMSA in November for holidays

Thanksgiving Mass—Friday, Nov. 18 at 10 a.m. Join students and staff for Thanksgiving Mass. Bring a non-perishable food item. The students will be collecting food for area food shelves.

Wreath Sale—Just in time for the holidays! Beautiful wreaths, swags and garland for sale. Call the school at 651-489-1459 for more information. Proceeds benefit MMSA School.

Free computer classes offered at St. Stephanus

Free computer classes are being offered Sunday afternoons through the month of November at St. Stephanus Lutheran Church, 739 Lafond Avenue, corner of Lafond and Grotto in St. Paul. The classes will run from 3-5 p.m. each Sunday. Study topics include computer desktop functions, letter writing and email. Contact the St. Stephanus Church office at 651-228-1486 to register, or Marie Benson at 651-646-6207 with questions.

German Immersion holds open house November 11

The Twin Cities German Immersion School is holding its first open house on November 11. The event will take place at the school, located at 1399 Eustis Street and will run from 3 to 6 p.m.

Please join us in celebrating our ribbon cutting ceremony and lantern parade. Besides homemade deserts and hot coffee, the students will be singing, putting on a play, and hosting their own art show. We also encourage you to tour the school building and meet the directors.

Please bring a non-perishable food item for TCGIS's food drive. For further information please call TCGIS at 651-492-7106.

Chelsea Book Fair fundraiser December 3

The Chelsea Heights Elementary School PTO and Barnes & Noble Bookseller Book Fair Fundraiser will be held on Saturday, December 3 from 9 a.m. -11 p.m. at Har Mar Mall.

As part of the book fair, check out the second annual student school work and art fair held during store hours.

Come support the Chelsea Heights PTO by shopping at this great book store. The PTO earns a percentage of the sales made during the day using the sales vouchers for Chelsea Heights.

Sales vouchers will be available at the registers all day, school office or any Chelsea Height student. Funds raised will be used for student enrichment and classroom support.

Come visit the student school work and art fair, along with other music, theater and special appearances planned during the afternoon hours.

Come support this great neighborhood school while you do some holiday shopping.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11

In Our Community

Continued from page 10

Nutrition and weaning topic of La Leche Dec. 13

Nutrition and Weaning is the topic of the next meeting of Como-Midway La Leche League, to be held on Tuesday, December 13, at 7 p.m.

Mothers-to-be, mothers, babies and toddlers are invited to attend. La Leche League meetings offer breastfeeding information and support through mother-to-mother helping.

A lending library on a wide variety of related topics is also available. For meeting location or more information, call Heidi at 651-659-9527.

Local artist exhibits at Ginkgo Nov. 16 - Jan. 3

Local artist Woo Zonneveld is showing oil paintings at Ginkgo Coffeehouse at Snelling and Minnehaha from Nov. 16 to Jan. 3.

Lex-Ham Community Theater performs 'All My Sons'

The Lex-Ham Community Theater will present Arthur Miller's classic drama, All My Sons, at St. Paul Central High School, October 28 to November 12. The play is directed by Kevin T. Houle.

All My Sons follows Joe Keller and his family during World War II. Joe's firm manufactured faulty cylinder heads for P-40 planes resulting in the death of 21 pilots. Joe's partner went to prison while Joe was exonerated. Joe and his wife, Kate, have two sons: Larry, a pilot who is missing in action, and Chris, who hopes to move on with his life.

The show is especially timely given news accounts of over charges by U.S. firms involved with the war in Iraq and the role of personal responsibility of soldiers involved with prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib. Performances are at the following dates and times:

7:30 p.m., Thursday, November 10; 7:30 p.m., Friday, November 11; 7:30 p.m., Saturday, November 12.

Ticket prices are \$15 or \$11 for children, students, or seniors aged 65 or older. The performance on November 6 will be "pay what you can." Note that the play contains some themes that may not be appropriate for young children.

Afternoon tea returns to Como Park Conservatory in December

Afternoon Tea has become a tradition at the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory. The new Visitor Center continues to expand its possibilities as it becomes a tea venue on Friday December 2 and 9. Seatings are at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. each day.

The Visitor Center's Porch with an east facing glass wall will be transformed into a sidewalk café by a creative group of volunteers, the Tea Ladies. The décor, and the vintage linen and china table settings will create a charming effect—suitable for a romantic tea for two or for a get together of friends.

The menu, selected by the Tea Ladies and their caterer, features six courses of delectables both sweet and savory and, of course plenty of hot tea. It will be served by uniformed and charming Tea Ladies. Guests will not only enjoy the ambience, but have the opportunity to put on their best hat to fit right in.

Each tea guest receives a seasonal hand-made favor—created by the Tea Ladies—and the opportunity for a visit behind the scenes at the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory following the meal. The cost is \$40 per person, a portion of which is tax deductible.



Afternoon Tea has become a tradition at the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory with the new Visitor Center to expanding its possibilities as it becomes a tea venue on Friday December 2 and 9.

Bus barn

Continued from page 6

The old 10-acre bus barn site would have been traded for a Hampden Avenue warehouse property in the University-Raymond neighborhood. That resolution was tentatively set for the October 19 council agenda but has been postponed. No new date has been set.

RK Midway isn't commenting on the proposed redevelopment and land swap. Montgomery sees the old bus barn site as a great opportunity for bring in as many as 325 new jobs. Preliminary estimates are that a 215,000 square-foot shopping center could generate \$900,000 per year in property taxes and about \$300,000 in sales taxes.

However, the property tax impacts would be much less if the city puts the property in a tax increment financing or TIF district. In a TIF district, additional property taxes generated by redevelopment are used to pay off project expenses, such as infrastructure. It's not clear yet if TIF would be used in this development.

Montgomery has met with Benanav to discuss his concerns. Benanav said the new development has to be weighed against the problems of bringing a bus barn, which more than 100 buses, to St. Anthony Park. He also said any large retailers on the old bus barn site have a direct traffic, parking and air quality impact on Ward Four neighborhoods along Snelling Avenue.

Snelling-Hamline residents and SHCC members say that building two large retail stores on already-congested Snelling Avenue will create traffic gridlock in an area already affected by Snelling Avenue and Ayd Mill Road. "It's the classic business as usual, politics as usual attitude," said Snelling-Hamline resident Paul Bush. "This flies in the face of what we need."

McMahon noted that the

proposed construction of light rail on University Avenue has already prompted St. Paul and Ramsey County public works officials to start a study of LRT's traffic impacts on the Snelling-University intersection. Getting north-south traffic could the area could mean building ring roads around the intersection, an overpass or a tunnel.

Building a bus garage on Hampden Avenue, behind the former Johnson Brothers Liquor warehouses on University Avenue is opposed by the St. Anthony Park Community Council and St. Anthony Park Community Foundation. St. Anthony Park representatives say putting a bus garage behind the historic Johnson Brothers Liquors warehouse-

which are being renovated into housing, is contrary to plans for the community.

"This came up so quickly," said SAPCC Community Organizer Amy Sparks. "We found out about it by accident." She and others said a bus barn shouldn't be put in an area that is the focus of community revitalization efforts.

McMahon said the Best Buy and Lowe's stores' location near the proposed Central Corridor light rail transit (LRT) line is contrary to community goals for more dense, mixed-use development in the University and Snelling area. He displays a 1998 plan that would have rebuilt Midway Center into a retail-office-hotel complex. He also ques-

tioned whether building big box retail instead of transit-oriented development would hamper efforts to get federal funding for the Central Corridor.

But Kimberly notes that recent transit-oriented development studies for University and Snelling suggest the areas as one of the few locations suitable for big-box retail development. Kimberly said if traffic congestion is a problem, the more dense development advocated by UNIT-ED would make matters worse.

One area where the community could have a lot of say is during the site plan review process. "The Lowe's and Best Buy representatives have heard a lot of feedback and know that they won't be designing build-

ings for a suburban location," Kimberly said. "Before we jump to conclusions, they should see what is proposed here."

No timeline has been set for the site plan process. Typically site plan reviews are done by city staff. But larger projects can be sent to the Planning Commission and its Zoning Committee for review, if there is public support for an extra step in the process. Site plan decisions are made by the Planning Commission and can be appealed to the City Council.

Kimberly believes the Best Buy-Lowe's project will have strong community support. "Many of my neighbors would like to be able to shop at a Best Buy or a Lowe's," she said.

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Peru native makes long journey to the Midway



About the time Vanessa Zarate, 33, from Cusco, Peru, thought of being part of the AFS program, Frank and Kathy Schweigert were thinking about the merits of taking on an exchange student. Above, Kathy, Vanessa and Frank discuss Vanessa's stay with the Schweigert family in the Midway area. (Photo by Terry Faust)

By DEBORAH BROTZ

About the time Vanessa Zarate, 33, from Cusco, Peru, thought of being part of the AFS program, Frank and Kathy Schweigert were thinking about the merits of taking on an exchange student. Employed as a crafts teacher in Peru, Zarate is currently working as an AFS exchange teacher at Perpich Center for Arts Education in Golden Valley and staying with the Schweigert family in the Midway.

Winning a scholarship in her country, Zarate received money from Bremer Foundation to come here. She teaches Spanish I, III, and V and explains about her culture in the afternoon.

"Peru is very famous," she said. "The center of the Inca Empire was my town, Cusco. The Spaniards conquered my town. There is a big archaeological place called Machu Picchu, a sacred temple. It was a custom at that time to pay for the earth with sacrifices. They were very connected with nature, too."

Studying to be a kindergarten teacher in Peru, Zarate never taught them. Instead, she went to school to study English.

"I like arts and crafts," she said. "I decided to study to be a teacher because I like to share. That's more important for me and for people to show their possibilities."

As a crafts teacher, Zarate wants to bring out her students' creativity.

"In my town, there are poor people," she said. "The poor have less possibilities."

In Cusco, children have to work in the morning selling newspapers, cookies, candy, and other products.

"They sell different things sometimes for their family or themselves for education," said Zarate. "Public education is different. They have to buy materials." Zarate feels crafts are a nice change of pace for the people.

"It's something different for them to do," she said. "They're poor people with many talents."

Zarate, the oldest of six children, grew up in rural Cusco with three sisters and two brothers. Her mother was a teacher.

"We were at medium level," she said. "My father was an ele-

mentary teacher in charge of some teachers in the rural area outside Cusco. In the rural area, their first language is Quechua. He would orientate teachers to talk in Quechua."

For Zarate, having lots of material things is not as important as having values.

"If you have a fancy house and a big modern car and nothing in your heart, your mind is nothing," she said. "For me, material things are not first. They compliment feelings and values."

Life in Peru is very different from life in the Midway for Zarate.

"For example, in my town if I go someplace, I could walk," she said. "Here, I have to take a bus or carpool. The distance is so long. It's a different culture, a different custom."

Zarate has been treated well in the Midway.

"People here are very friendly," she said. "All the time, they're friendly and nice with me."

Kathy and Frank Schweigert along with their daughter Teresa, who is a student at Perpich Center for Arts Education, enjoy being a host family. They decided to be a host family because of the opportunities it presents.

"The main reason is I feel a lot is learned both ways; what we learn and get from them being in our home," said Kathy. "I feel the world would be a better place if we build relationships with people from other countries. We want to share some ideas and values with people from other countries who come to learn about America. We believe we can build a more peaceful world if we're in relationships with people from other countries."

About two years ago, the Schweigert's had an AFS high school student from Italy stay with them.

"I just think it enriches our lives," said Kathy. "There's a lot we can learn from people from other countries."

Kathy says they get a lot out of being a host family.

"Our lives and our understanding of the world is greater," she said. "I feel we build friendships with people that will stay with us. We understand the whole world better by being in a relationship with people from other countries."

Married to Saul Cayo, who is an anthropologist at the Public University in Cusco, Zarate has a daughter, Sharmely Cayo, 12. Zarate has not traveled to the United States before now.

"This is my first time," she said. "I have never been to other countries besides my town. I have lived in Cusco all my life."

Zarate wanted to come to the United States for several reasons.

"It was an opportunity to improve my English, to know another culture, interchange ideas, learn other things from teachers, and learn new techniques for teaching," she said.

As an AFS exchange teacher, Zarate can explore her interest in other cultures.

"I would like to share about my culture at the same time I learn about American culture, too," she said. "I'm very interested about native Americans. They have many of the same customs as the Incas. They're very connected to nature. There are similarities in both cultures. I'm interested to find out what those similarities are."

The most difficult thing being an AFS exchange teacher for Zarate is the language.

"Sometimes I can't understand the language," she said. "I feel frustrated. I want, but I can't. They help me. They try to explain. They are very polite."

While Zarate has been to a movie and gone out to dinner with her host family in her spare time, she enjoys just being at home.


"I don't watch TV here," she said. "I like to write English with grammar and to do crochet. In Cusco, I do different things with my hands. I like flower arrangement. I made a flower arrangement for my host. Flowers are cheaper than in Cusco."

During her time as an AFS exchange teacher, Zarate looks forward to doing many things.

"I hope to improve my English, share my culture and learn about American culture involving education and customs, too," she said. "I would like to share what I learned about American culture with my family, colleagues, and my students."

For information on AFS, call 651-647-6337.

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The Cheapskate:

Although the prices rival fast food, this is not fast food. Not in any sense of the word. For one thing, it's deliciously homemade. For another, it's not particularly fast. There's only Ali and Sema, a delightful couple whom I have yet to catch being anything but cheerful and quick about their work. But the two of them do everything – cook, wait tables, clean up, run the cash register – for a lunch crowd that usually fills the place to capacity. So if you're in a big hurry, I suggest that you go early, call in your order, or order something very quick, like a gyro sandwich with a side of rice.

But what's really important at this time of year, when we crave something warm and nourishing, is that the whole Black Sea package is warm and nourishing. The food itself, the steamy aroma filling the dining area from the open kitchen, the charmingly close quarters (you could easily dip your pita in the hummus on the next table if it weren't for the bead curtains), the bright colors of Turkish textiles and copperware that Ali and Sema bring back from their annual summer month-long trek back to Turkey. It's all warm and friendly.

And cheap. Where else can you look for warm lunch entrees under \$5, and actually have a selection to choose from? But because the prices are so reasonable, I usually splurge on something fancier – like the deliciously spiced meatball platter or, another of my favorites, the sautéed spinach platter with a poached egg nested in the middle. For dessert, try the rice pudding – it's the kind with actual firm rice grains in a creamy sauce, not the toothless mush that the Bachelor was apparently expecting on our last visit.

The beverage situation also meets the approval of the Cheapskate. Your soft drink will be refilled for free the moment Sema notices it's empty. And you can have a refreshing, cold yogurt drink on ice that is a perfect counterpoint to the meaty entrees. Just don't waste any on the Bachelor. He almost spit it across the table. I guess if Coca-Cola doesn't bottle it, he's not having any.

If you are a hard-core coffee drinker, finish up with a Turkish coffee – the superfine coffee grounds sink to the bottom of a classy little demitasse cup, and you get to drink the bitter, syrupy brew sweetened with lots of sugar. Of course, it's a little too strong for the likes of the Bachelor – but if we limited ourselves to the Bachelor's palate, it would be a sad, small world indeed.

The Bachelor

Now listen here, Missy, I hauled my Mountain Dew-numbed taste buds all the way across the Bosphorus to the real Turkey a few years ago. And let me tell you, I didn't see any of those "refreshing" cold yogurt drinks you fawn over. Apparently they, like your beloved Bachelor, prefer to stay away from chilled saltwater mixed with sour milk.

But there was one incident that occurred while I was in Turkey that I desperately wished could have been recreated on our



Without Reservations

Black Sea package is warm and nourishing

trip to the Black Sea, at the expense of the Snob or Cheaps. I had just arrived in Istanbul and met up with my sister who had already been in Turkey for a few days. We decided to grab a late lunch at a café near our hotel. The lunch itself was fine - in other words, I can't really remember it. What I do remember is what happened as we prepared to pay the bill. Our waiter came strolling out holding an unmarked squeeze bottle filled with some vaguely yellow-colored liquid. He made a beeline for my sister, grabbed her hands, and proceeded to squirt this mystery liquid all over her palms. My sister could only stare at me blankly and say "What's happening here?"

Now this could very well be one of those "I-guess-you-had-to-be-there" moments, but let me tell you, the combination of fear, curiosity, and bewilderment on my sister's face was priceless. Alas, she quickly figured out that the yellow-colored liquid was simply a sort of lemon water that leaves your hands feeling refreshed and smelling like a Jolly Rancher.

Unfortunately, the-great-yellow-water-scary, as it's now called, was not to be relived at the Black Sea. Oh, but it would have been sweet to watch Cheapy and the Snob squirm in polite horror. Oh, well, what can you do.

What I did was turn my attention to the platter of chicken gyro meat and bite-size pieces of pita bread, smothered in white and red sauces. This isn't a dish for those who are looking for some sort of taste bud revelation. Dare I say it was somewhat pedestrian. Not in a bad way, just in a very safe way. It was a good-size plate of food, covering an area approximately the size of a flattened football. Surprising my companions, I actually noticed the flavor of the tomato-based sauce. It was a bit too reminiscent of Heinz. Don't get me wrong, ketchup has its place, and that is most places, just not in a Turkish restaurant when I'm looking for the exotic.

However, since four of the five eaters at our table downed the same chicken gyro platter with gusto, I think the special has to be recommended.

I also discovered that the – for me – alarmingly chunky rice pudding makes a great dipping sauce for the leftover pita bread I scavenged off Cheapy's plate. Of course, bear in mind that in the Bachelor's world, anything remotely liquid falls into the category of dipping sauce.

The Interloper

I have dined with the Bachelor, the Cheapskate and the Food Snob many times. However this is the first time they have asked me to weigh in and share my opinion (at least in print). First, I'd like to describe how I fit in with this motley crew. Like the Bachelor, I am single. However,

as a bachelorette I think I possess a certain refinement and dignity that he lacks. Like the Food Snob, I love great food and wine. However, I have never sent a rib-eye back to the kitchen three times because it was not cooked to my exact specifications. Like the Cheapskate, I appreciate a low-cost meal. However, I am enough of a snob that flavor and ambiance often outweigh value.

My food quirk is that I do not like to get my hands dirty while dining. I have a strong preference for meals I can eat using silverware. The house specialty at Black Sea, the Iskender beef/lamb or chicken gyros special, is perfect for my food compulsions. Rather than the typical sandwich-like gyro, the ingredients are cut into bite-size pieces and layered on a large oval platter for easy consumption with a fork and knife. The layers include pita bread, beef/lamb or chicken, the tomato sauce that the Bachelor disparaged, and a tangy yogurt/sour cream sauce. I have had both the beef/lamb and the chicken Iskender and, I must admit, they don't taste significantly different to me. However, I was able to eat them with ease and no mess! The portion is huge and, unlike the Bachelor who wiped the last bit of sauce off his plate about 20 minutes before I finished eating, I had enough food left over for a take-

out container. As the meals are so large, on several occasions I have ordered the rice pudding to go. As the daughter of a Swedish immigrant, I grew up eating rice pudding and particularly enjoy the ice-cold milky and creamy dessert that is covered with cinnamon at Black Sea.

While I recommend the food, I find any dining experience is heightened by the dining companions. The Food Snob was absent during my most recent visit to the Black Sea Restaurant.

However, I can easily imagine her quizzing the waitress and chef about the exact origins and preparation of each food item. The Bachelor, who was there, spent much of his meal commenting on the Turkish merchandise that was on display and for sale. He wondered out loud how he would look wearing the traditional pointed Turkish slippers and ladies' veil hanging on the wall. The Cheapskate, true to her name, scanned the menu and commented that where else could you go and buy a sandwich of this quality for only \$4?

(Note: The Food Snob was temporarily excused from this month's column, since she spent the greater part of the month relentlessly hounding chefs and waitstaff on the other side of the globe. You can contact the Gang of Three by email at: withoutres@yahoo.com)

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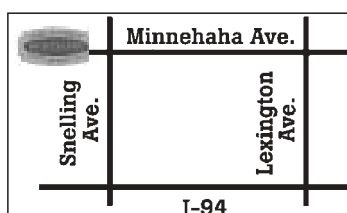
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Billboard beef back before City Council

By JANE MCCLURE

Bigger, brighter and blighted signs and billboards and the battles they generate are back before the St. Paul City Council. After much debate October 21, the St. Paul Planning Commission approved more than a dozen regulatory changes for billboards, advertising signs, sign lighting, skyway banners and street light pole flags.

Now the arguments move to the City Council, which hasn't set a public hearing date for the Planning Commission's proposed recommendations. With some commission recommendations in contradiction to changes the City Council wants, it's likely the regulations will see revisions before the council gets the last word.

The issues are being followed closely in area neighborhoods, with University UNITED and district councils from Merriam Park and Snelling-Hamline weighing in with recommendations to reduce sign clutter. The Planning Commission is sending the City Council more than a dozen pages of recommendations on regulations for advertising signs, billboards, temporary signs, street light poles, sports facilities signs, skyway banners, sign light and abandoned business signs. The Planning Commission was asked to review a number of ordinance changes that citizens, district councils and anti-billboard activists sought at a City Council public hearing last summer.

Because the City Council made so many ordinance changes, council members decided to send all of the proposals back for another review by the Planning Commission. However, many Planning Commission

members disagree with the City Council on the proposed changes.

For example, the City Council wants abandoned business signs down after 90 days. The Planning Commission wants to give up to a year for a new business to come in and reuse a vacant sign. The commission also rejected the council's suggestion of a \$148 per-sign monitoring fee for abandoned signs.

The Planning Commission isn't taking as hard a stance on billboard regulations as the City Council would like. The City Council wants to totally ban billboard extensions. Planning Commission members disagreed, saying the extensions should remain in place, allowing them for up to 90 days at a time. The council also wants to declare billboards a nuisance if a deteriorated sign face or an out-of-date message remains in place for more than 60 days. The Planning Commission disagreed, saying there are already procedures in place to deal with deteriorated signs on a citizen complaint basis. The commission questioned whether the city even wants to get into regulating signs when an advertised event or deadline has passed.

The City Council wanted to prohibit rooftop business signs, such as the sign on top of Chevy's Restaurant at 389 N. Hamline. But the Planning Commission disagreed, saying that they haven't heard of significant problems with rooftop signs.

The council proposed more than a dozen different recommendations on sky banners and light pole flags alone, asking that the banners only be used for charitable organizations, events and public service announce-

ments. The council wants to limit how large a sponsoring business's logo should be on a banner, so the banners aren't used for for-profit business advertising.

The Planning Commission had lengthy debates over what constitutes a nonprofit organization and whether it's more important to regulate who puts up signs or what the message of a banner is. The commission is rec-

ommending that the commission, City Council and city staff work together to development guidelines for determining banner content, and who is eligible to sponsor banners.

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STAR grants and loans awarded October 19

By JANE MCCLURE

After almost a month's debate the 2005 Neighborhood Sales Tax Revitalization (STAR) large grants and loans were awarded October 19 by the St. Paul City Council. Council members had spent much of the past month making changes to the list recommended by the Neighborhood STAR Board.

Three neighborhood projects were added to the neighborhood STAR allocations. The council approved a \$100,000 grant to Steppingstone Theater, to help with the renovation of the former Grace Community Church at Portland and Victoria. The youth theater will move to the church from its longtime Landmark Center home. The neighborhood STAR Board had rejected Steppingstone's request for a \$350,000 grant and \$175,000 loan toward

the project.

The council also allocated a \$17,000 grant toward the Longfellow Elementary School's playground replacement project. In total the council allocated almost 41.5 million in loans and grants. The school had sought more than \$41,000. Ames Elementary playground on the city's east Side received \$36,740.

Monitor area projects met a mixed fate. University UNITED's University/Snelling commercial building facade improvement program, was awarded a \$75,000 grant and \$75,000 loan. Sparc was awarded \$100,000 for its lead abatement program and \$75,000 for its Rice Street Program. The council added \$200,000 to the Rice Street streetscape program. But other projects were rejected.

While the October 19 vote is

welcomed by organizations and businesses that have waited many weeks for their grant and loan dollars, it isn't likely to end the long-simmering feud between the City Council and Neighborhood STAR Board members. For several months the board and City council have clashed over the council's Neighborhood Investment Initiative Fund (NIIF), a discretionary fund controlled by council members. The Neighborhood STAR Board has pushed for the council to change the process used to allocate NIIF dollars. The council has criticized the Neighborhood STAR Board and recently refused to reappoint Board Chairperson Steve Gordon. Gordon is still serving as the board chair, because Mayor Randy Kelly declined to appoint a replacement for him.

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Sheraton Midway

Continued from page 1

the Midway. "Four Points was one of our active members, and we had many events there, including my own Como Park reunion some years back. Unfortunately, different management companies and owners couldn't make it work, and several prospective management companies didn't see it as worth the risk. While we'll miss the hotel, we are excited for Target to bring new business to the Midway and help continue the growth we are seeing in the area. We hope to see a hotel and banquet facility in the Midway again in the future."

Target has not publicly confirmed its plans for the site other than that it plans to demolish it for expansion of its current Midway store, and will likely hold a public auction or liquidation sale of hotel furnishings sometime in November. Target Corporation did not return calls for comment by press time.

Many employees, guests and community organizations were saddened by the closure and held or attended events at the hotel over the years. Concordia University, Aspen Medical Group, Minnesota Department of Transportation, St. Paul Public Schools, Marsden, Merrill, Midway Chamber of Commerce are among many such organizations, not to mention countless individuals and groups who held weddings, school reunions, anniversaries and other special



Many employees, guests and community organizations were saddened by the closure and held or attended events at the hotel over the years. Concordia University, Aspen Medical Group, Minnesota Department of Transportation, St. Paul Public Schools, Marsden, Merrill, Midway Chamber of Commerce are among many such organizations, not to mention countless individuals and groups who held weddings, school reunions, anniversaries and other special events in its Capitol and Minnesota ballrooms. (Photo by Tom Conlon)

events in its Capitol and Minnesota ballrooms. The Gretchen Moravec—Jim Selle wedding was the last event to be held at the hotel the evening of October 29.

Lou Kanavati, St. Paul Public Schools, interim superintendent, said the hotel's closing is a real loss to the community and the school district. "The Four Points

Sheraton Midway has been one of the main hubs for St. Paul Schools, gatherings for staff and students alike," he said. "It's going to be very difficult to see it torn down after all the time and energy we've participated in at this site."

Doug Brennecke, of Lincoln, NE, spent the final night at the hotel as a long-time customer with his two young sons. "One of my sons, who has cerebral palsy, came here at least ten times in the past 3 years for treatments at the Minneapolis Shrine Hospital," he said. "He and his brother enjoyed time at the swimming pool and the fitness area. The restaurant and front desk staff remembered us and always treated us well. I am sad we'll have to find a new home when we come back to the Twin Cities."

About five years ago, Sheraton introduced a new brand of hotels and the Sheraton Midway then officially became the Four Points by Sheraton St. Paul Capitol, often called Four Points Sheraton for short. Around the same time, Northwest Airlines, which had a ticketing office in the lobby across from the reception desk, moved out and the area was converted to more guest seating. The mid-priced hotel was also unique in that had a 150-seat auditorium next to its original Capitol Ballroom, making it a favorite for small conventions.

Steven Tachney, the hotel's general manager, said the 197-room hotel was a casualty of the post 9/11 drop in hospitality business industry-wide, but had recently rebounded to its healthy 70-80 percent average occupancy on most nights. "I think we were

doing well and would have remained profitable, but the ownership questions had to be dealt with first," he said. "There is really nothing we could have done as a hotel to prevent the closure under those circumstances. I feel bad about that."

Tachney said the Port Authority provided a very good severance package for employees who stayed up through the closing, including years of service calculations. They also received dislocated worker and job fair assistance to help find new employment. Some have found new jobs or have offers in progress at other hotel, while others are taking time off, returning to studies or consolidating hours at other jobs.

The impact of the closing on surrounding businesses remains to be seen. Chevy's Restaurant, across the street, got a lot of hotel patrons and itself is for sale, according to one employee. Other groups who had contracts with hotel for several years, such as the Shrine Hospital on River Boulevard in Minneapolis, now must find new space for their guests. State Fair goers, downtown state high school tournament participants and guests, plus others who wanted free parking and a central location, were regulars at the hotel over the years, Tachney said.

Due to the popularity of its banquet space and 150-seat auditorium, several community groups also used space frequently. In 1997, the hotel merged its restaurant and bar into one space to provide additional and more profitable banquet space in the new Minnesota ballrooms.

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Time: 7-9 p.m.
Cost: \$10
Location: Giddens/Alumni Learning Center, Room 100E
Contact: For more information, 651-523-2047

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Date: Thursday, November 17
Time: 4-6 p.m.
Location: Sorin Hall, Room A/B
Cost: \$10

To Receive Credit: \$25 (for the Graduate School of Management, CEUs, or CLEs)
Contact: Kristen Norman-Major, 651-523-2814

The Oratorio Society Thanksgiving Fiesta

Dates: Saturday, November 19; Sunday, November 20
Time: Saturday: 7:30 p.m. Sunday: 4 p.m.
Location: Sundin Music Hall
Contact: For tickets and information, Ticketworks, 651-379-2499, 800-762-6353 or www.oratorio.org

DECEMBER

Hamline University Jazz Ensemble Fall Concert

Date: Thursday, December 1
Time: 8 p.m.
Location: Sundin Music Hall
Cost: Free and open to the public
Contact: 651-523-2459

Hamline A Cappella Choir Annual Holiday Concert

Date: Sunday, December 4
Time: 4 p.m.
Location: Hamline United Methodist Church
Cost: Free and open to the public
Contact: 651-523-2296

Hamline University Wind Ensemble and Women's Chorale Fall Concert

Date: Saturday, December 10
Time: 4 p.m.
Location: Sundin Music Hall
Cost: Free and open to the public
Contact: 651-523-2459

Hamline University Orchestra Fall Concert

Date: Sunday, December 11
Time: 4 p.m.
Location: Sundin Music Hall
Cost: Free and open to the public
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