



Midway Como monitor

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JANUARY 2007

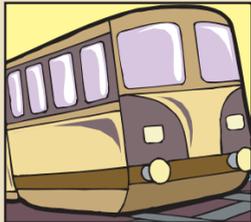
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Three-term Council member won't run for re-election...

Benanav plans departure from Ward 4 City Council

By JANE MCCLURE

Saying it's time to move on and make way for new leadership, St. Paul Ward Four Council Member Jay Benanav is stepping down at year's end. The three-term council member has decided not to run for re-election this fall.

"It's a great job, it really is," said Benanav. "But 10 years is a long time."

Benanav credits ward residents and business owners for the accomplishments of the past nine years. "I'm proud of what we've been able to accomplish during that time. You certainly don't work alone in this job. You have to work with the people in the neighborhoods." Ward Four includes all or part of St. Anthony Park, Como Park, Hamline-Midway, Merriam Park and Macalester-Groveland.

The Merriam Park resident describes City Council services as "the most rewarding but most intense kind of work you can do." He has enjoyed working with neighborhood residents and

business owners on issues important to them and will miss that.

"But there also comes a time when you need to make way for new ideas and new leadership." With several prospective candidates expressing interest, Benanav said he leaves knowing Ward Four residents will be well-represented. He is not supporting any successor at this time. Benanav said he only recently made the decision not to run again. Last fall he lost a hard-fought race for a spot on the Ramsey County District Court bench.

What has Benanav liked most about City Council service? "Making a difference, working with people. What we do affects people in so many ways. We open our doors every morning and 80 percent of what we see are issues that are affected by the city—streets, public safety, parks, libraries."

He won't miss the political fights among elected officials and the disputes that sometimes

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St. Paul Ward Four Council Member Jay Benanav is stepping down at year's end. (Photo by Terry Faust)

Carleton Lofts a new 'mecca' for artists along University Ave.

By JAN WILLMS

Carleton Artist Lofts tenant Kevin Caufield is never sure whether to describe his new home as a loft or an art gallery.

"The whole building is actually a gallery," he said as he talked about his living and working space at 2285 University Avenue.

Caufield closed on his six-acre home in Lindstrom, where he had lived for the past eight years, on Oct. 31. The next day he moved into the Carleton Lofts, a new mecca for artists along University Avenue.

The Carleton Artist Lofts project has been described as the first project that adaptively re-uses an existing building, the first that conforms to the guidelines for converting a designated his-

toric structure and the first specifically designed for artists.

Johnson Liquor Company, a wholesale wine and liquor distribution, previously occupied the site for more than 30 years.

Brad Johnson said that after the liquor company moved to the other side of Saint Paul, the family formed a limited liability company, University Carleton Development LLC.

"The Lofts have been in development for three years," Johnson said. "I started talking to potential developers even before that."

The Johnson family selected Dominion Housing as its development agent.

"I give a lot of credit to them," Johnson said. He said that he personally was going to

rent out the complex, which consists of three large multi-story brick warehouses, for miscellaneous office units.

"We had 50 per cent occupancy, and we had to do major changes or do something radically different," Johnson said.

He said Dominion proposed considering residential rehabilitation, quite a departure from the office units.

"The buildings are historic, and we received federal tax credits to keep the integrity of the exterior," Johnson said. "The oldest building is nearly 100 years old."

Johnson said the new complex offers a community room, art gallery and leasing office. He said there is also a floor that can be used as a dance studio.

"It's a wood floor, but it has a springiness to it for the dancers," Johnson said.

He said his company owns a couple of other parcels across the street from the Lofts.

"We are discussing phase two to this project," he said. "We are considering market rate leasing at the moment with mixed use by retail."

He said the neighborhood has been part of his family for many years.

"It is great to bear witness to some of the exciting changes coming down the pipeline," Johnson stated, referring to the new development and potential light rail transit along University Avenue.

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1885 University Ave.
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The Midway Como Monitor is a monthly community publication in the Midway and Como areas of St. Paul, owned and operated by deRuyter-Nelson Publications, Inc. All correspondence should be sent to the Monitor, 1885 University Ave., #110, St. Paul, MN 55104. Editorial and advertising offices can be reached at 651-645-7045. Our fax number is 651-645-4780.

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Pizza parlor needs more off-street parking

Before a proposed pizza parlor can open near Snelling and Minnehaha Avenues, more off-street parking must be found. The City Council voted December 6 to deny Fred Macalus Jr.'s appeal of a September 2006 Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) decision.

But that vote doesn't necessarily end the quest to open a restaurant at the property.

Ward Four Council Member Jay Benanav said he wants to see the restaurant owner and landlord work more closely with Hamline University to secure needed off-street parking.

However, if the off-street parking is more than 300 feet from the business, the Macalus and the Hagen family will have to go back to the BZA for a variance for the building at 735 N. Snelling Av. Having leased parking more than 300 feet from a business still requires a variance, even if the lease meets the off-street parking requirement for a business.

The original variance request has sparked debate between Hamline students and other supporters of the restaurant, and some neighborhood business owners who fear loss of parking space if a restaurant opened nearby. Hamline Midway Coalition opposed the variance.

Midway Transportation Manager Organization (TMO) has offered to work with area businesses on shared parking.

The two-story building where the restaurant would be located recently housed two different consignment shops. Putting any kind of restaurant there would require more off-street parking or a variance to the city's parking regulations. The pizza restaurant as proposed

would require an additional eight spaces, prompting the need for a variance.

BZA staff recommended approval of the variances on the condition that the restaurant owners and landlord lease space from Hamline Hardware or find another parking lot within 300 feet. Another condition would have limited restaurant hours from 4-11 p.m.

Vacant Como service station to reopen

A long-vacant Como-Dale-Front service station will reopen soon. The St. Paul City Council unanimously approved licenses for Carter's BP at 623 Como Av. December 27. The business was granted licenses for gasoline station operations, retail food, and cigarette and tobacco sales.

There has been a gas station on the corner since the 1950s. The facilities were extensively remodeled about 20 years ago. The previous gas station closed in early 2005.

New owner John Carter has agreed to meet several conditions. He will provide video surveillance cameras and records on the premises, to monitor activities inside and outside. The tapes must be maintained for 30 days and made available to city licensing staff and police upon request.

Carter is remodeling the facilities before reopening and has no objection to the city's request that the station have video cameras.

When the new station opens its hours of operation will be 6 a.m.-11 p.m., seven days a week. Carter has operated a gas station in Brooklyn Park for more than a decade.

Since the station closed in 2005 the Como-Dale-Front intersection was rebuilt as a traffic calming and pedestrian safety

measure. Two of the station's four driveway as were removed at that time to make the area safer.

The request for licenses was discussed at a December 21 legislative hearing. City officials received two letters from neighborhood residents stating concerns about loud music from vehicles at the station and gas fumes. No citizens appeared at the legislative hearing.

The District 6 (North End-South Como) Planning Council and Sparc are supporting Carter's efforts to reopen the station and see the new station as part of the efforts to further revitalize the corner and the surrounding Great Northern Corridor area, which includes business, homes and a light industrial park.

City moves to promote independent businesses

An initiative to promote shopping at local, independently owned businesses was announced December 7 by Mayor Chris Coleman and Ward Four Council Member Jay Benanav. They made the announcement at Choo Choo Bob's Train City, a model train store at Cleveland and Marshall avenues. More than 40 people, including members of the Twin Cities chapter of the Metro Independent Business Association, attended the news conference.

Coleman and Benanav used the press conference to emphasize the need to support St. Paul's locally owned neighbor-

hood based businesses not just during the 2006 holiday shopping season but year-round. Coleman called small businesses the "lifeflood" of the city and urged residents to shop locally.

The city is looking for ways to better support neighborhood business districts and small businesses. Ideas will be brought back to the City Council to act on in early 2007.

Cleveland and Marshall was used as a backdrop for the press conference as it is a corner where there are several small, independently owned business. Several of the business owners took the opportunity during the press conference to tell their stories of starting and operating a small business.

Cleveland and Marshall may be the site of St. Paul's first IBIZ zone, an idea taken from Austin, Texas. IBIZ stands for independent business zone, a concept for an area a city designates as bring friendly to independent businesses. The Austin program includes streetscape improvements and public art. St. Paul could use Neighborhood Sales Tax Revitalization (STAR) dollars to pay for the local version of the program.

Metro IBA Executive Director Tim Dykstal used the press conference to cite some statistics tired to independent businesses. One study indicates that 68 cents of every dollar spent at a local business is spent at other local businesses. That figure drops to 43 cents for a chain businesses.

- Compiled by Jane McClure

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Engineering work begins in April...

Central corridor light rail passes another milestone

By JANE MCCLURE

The long-awaited Central Corridor light rail line has passed another milestone, winning federal approval to start preliminary engineering. January 17 is the deadline for engineering firms to submit proposals to lead the studies, with Metropolitan Council officials selecting a consultant by spring. The actual engineering work, which will take about two years, is expected to start in April.

The start of preliminary engineering is a huge step for Central Corridor, an 11-mile rail line between downtown St. Paul and Minneapolis. The Federal Transportation Administration (FTA) announced December 14 that Central Corridor could move to preliminary engineering. The FTA had spent the past several months studying the environmental impact statement (EIS) of Central Corridor, along with hundreds of public comments made at hearings last spring.

If a proposed schedule is followed, construction would begin in 2010 with the first trains running in 2014. Central Corridor would have a projected ridership of 38,200 by 2020 and 43,300 by 2030. That would exceed the ridership of Hiawatha Corridor, the region's first light rail line, which began operations in 2004.

The Central Corridor rail line would have 31 light rail vehicles. Trains would operate every 7.5 minutes during rush hour. There would be 16 new stations, as well as five stations shared with the Hi-

awatha light rail line in downtown Minneapolis.

The FTA decision was hailed by St. Paul City and Ramsey County officials, as well as Metropolitan Council representatives. Despite the debate ahead over project costs and which aspects of the project must be cut, officials are optimistic about the FTA decision.

"This is what we have been working toward so diligently," said Ramsey County Commissioner Rafael Ortega. "It is an acknowledgement by the federal government that we have a strong and viable project."

Ortega, who chairs the county's Regional Rail Authority, said the county looks forward to working with Metropolitan Council, Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), Hennepin County, St. Paul and Minneapolis on the project.

"This announcement means it is no longer a matter of if, but rather when LRT will be coming to the Central Corridor," said St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman.

"In the eyes of the FTA, we clearly have a very viable project," said Metropolitan Council Chairperson Peter Bell. He said approval came after regional officials answered hundreds of questions about the project's financial and management details.

Coleman, Ortega and Bell have cited the great potential for redevelopment that light rail would bring to University Avenue and St. Paul, with Coleman saying

the project will "transform" the city.

"It (Central Corridor) would provide improved access to employment, education and economic opportunities in the two downtowns, the University of Minnesota, the Midway district and the State Capitol complex," said Bell.

"It will al- s o



support and encourage the revitalization already taking place along University Avenue."

But the start of preliminary engineering signals the beginning of some tough choices in the efforts to hold down the project's estimated \$930 million costs. The design decisions will affect businesses along University Avenue, and residents in surrounding neighborhoods. Traffic flow along University and on north-south streets will be affected. Project features including a tunnel at the University of Minnesota West

Bank campus, the number of stations, the St. Paul downtown route and streetscape improvements along University Avenue could be on the chopping block. How to redesign the Snelling and University intersection, which isn't part of Central Corridor but a separate Ramsey County-St. Paul project, could also be affected.

But without cuts, Central Corridor isn't likely to meet federal guidelines on cost efficiencies. That in turn means federal funding could be more elusive. Project funding is anticipated to be a 50-50 split between federal sources, and state and local funds.

Allen Lovejoy, a St. Paul city planner who is working on Central Corridor, said that one challenge over the next six months will be deciding what's important. "This is going to be a real balancing act," he said.

With federal, regional, city and county officials at the table, there's likely to be disagreement. Lovejoy said one of the sticking points for St. Paul is expected to be streetscape improvements, which have been discussed extensively by a Planning Commission task force studying light rail on University Avenue. "That might not be considered for others but that's very essential for the city," he said. The streetscape improvements are seen by the task force as key to spurring redevelopment along University.

The University Avenue task force, and a second task force studying light rail downtown, are

expected to release recommendations by spring.

Another potential controversy centers on Ramsey County's desired downtown loop. County commissioners want to change the downtown route, which currently extends down Cedar and Fourth streets to Union Depot. The County Board wants to see the rail line loop around downtown, in a route including Regions Hospital, the depot, Xcel Energy Center and St. Paul College. In December the County Board asked for changes in a consultant's report on the loop. Those changes and cost figures should be released soon.

County commissioners contend the loop would increase ridership and reduce motor vehicle traffic congestion downtown. But Metropolitan Council officials have questioned the potential for added costs, at a time when it's not even clear that the line can be extended to Union Depot. St. Paul Public Works is also questioning what the loop would add to Central Corridor travel times. The current Central Corridor travel time is estimated 35 minutes from downtown to downtown. Travel time is one of the factors in federal funding decisions and the cost-effectiveness studies of transit projects.

About 60 percent of the project design work will be done during the preliminary engineering phase. Bell is saying that during that time there will have to be changes. "During preliminary engineering, every facet of the project and every cost will have to be scrutinized very closely," he said.

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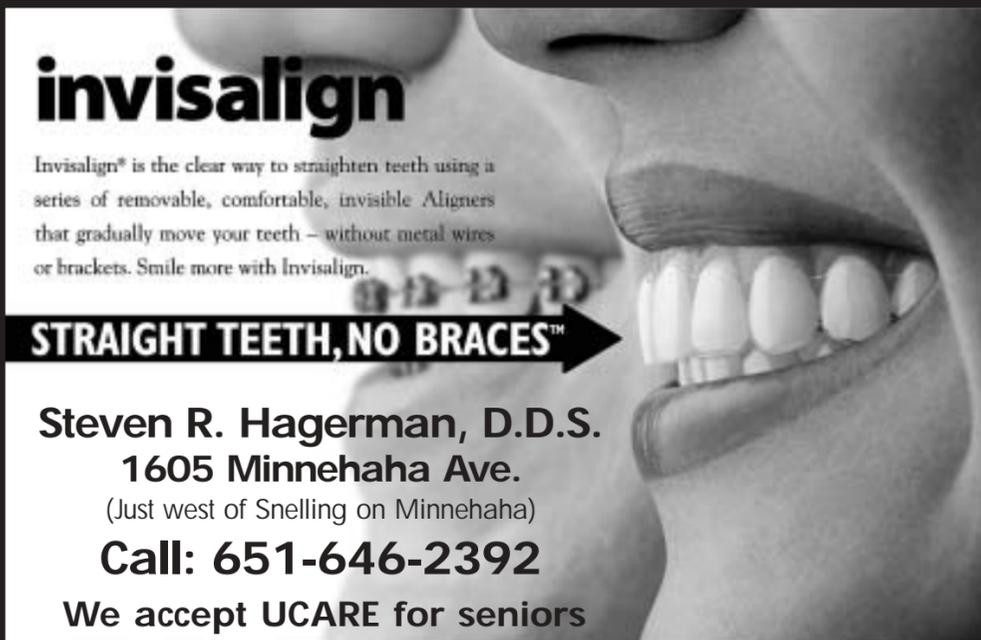


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Viewpoints

Hopefully you are enjoying the New Year. During this season we see familiar media images representing the ending of the old year (Father Time) and the beginning of the new year (usually a diapered child wearing a top hat). These images span the ages, and there are new vaccinations available which span the ages as well. Knowing about these new vaccines will help you to make good choices about preventive medicine for you and your family.

Rotavirus is a very common childhood illness. It causes severe diarrhea, nausea, vomiting and dehydration. Often children are hospitalized with the disease in order to provide them with intravenous fluids. There is really no other treatment for the illness; because it is a virus, it just needs to run its course. A new vaccine is available to prevent this virus in children. It is an oral vaccine, and the first dose must be given before the infant is 12 weeks old. The second and third doses are then given two months apart (the last dose needs to be given before the age of 32 weeks). So for most infants, this schedule fits perfectly with the routine well child exams recommended at 2, 4, and 6 months of age.

Side effects of the vaccination can include mild fever and diarrhea. In 1999 there was a different vaccine introduced against rotavirus. The vaccine was found to slightly increase the risk of an unusual type of bowel obstruction called intussusception, and the vaccine was removed from the market. Intussusception has not been found to be a side effect of the current vaccine.

Whooping cough (pertussis) is on the increase and we are finding that the immunity provided by childhood vaccines is waning by adolescence. Now there are two boosters, one for people ages 10-18 years, and another for ages 11 and older. The boosters combine vaccination for tetanus with a pertussis immunization. Usually

Cares and Cures

By JANE KILIAN, M.D.

New Year ... new vaccines

tetanus boosters are given every 10 years. If you have had a tetanus booster more than 3 years ago, you can get the new combined tetanus/pertussis booster.

At this time, it is thought that one pertussis booster will be good for life. But – recommendations do change from time to time, so we don't really know if that will hold true forever. For now, if you need a tetanus booster, you may want to ask about the combined immunization. If you cannot remember when you were last immunized for tetanus, you are probably due.

A very exciting new vaccine became available just this summer. This is a vaccination against HPV (human papilloma virus) – the virus that causes cervical cancer. There are many strains of HPV, but certain strains have been linked with cervical cancer. The new vaccine is recommended for females between the ages of 9-26. An optimal time for young women to get this vaccine is at the time of their 7th grade physicals, when they are usually due for other shots anyway.

The HPV vaccine is given as a series of 3 injections over a 6 month time frame. Most insurance companies are paying for the series if it is initiated while someone is 26 years old. So if you are close to turning 27, I would suggest seeing your doctor to discuss starting this series as soon as possible. Women over the age of 26 will still benefit from the vaccine, but their insurance may not pay for it (don't get me started on the politics of health care!).

The final vaccine I will discuss is one for people over the age of 60 who have had chicken pox. This is a vaccine against shingles. Shingles is a viral illness that can

develop any time, but happens most often in the elderly. It is caused by a re-activation of the varicella virus (the virus that causes chicken pox). People usually experience a cluster or line of blisters/sores on one side of their body. Prior to the sores appearing, people might feel a burning or pain on their skin in the area where they will develop sores. There are medicines to shorten the course of this virus, but the medicine must be started within 72 hours of the sores appearing. Unfortunately, even after the sores heal, some folks have discomfort on their skin for a long time.

You have probably seen the full-page newspaper ads about this vaccine. While public awareness is a good thing, I think the ads make the virus sound much worse than it usually is for most people. And, unfortunately, obtaining the vaccine has become complicated by the politics of health care (I know, I shouldn't start on that subject.) Most clinics are unable to provide the vaccine because they will not be reimbursed for it. And many people who qualify for the vaccine are unable to afford it.

With any vaccine, there are risks of allergic reactions at the site of the vaccine (usually ice and benadryl help those symptoms). And it is not uncommon for someone to have a sore arm for a few days after receiving an immunization. Despite these side effects, most of us benefit from the protection provided by vaccinations.

Happy New Year. Stay happy and healthy.

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 Food Snob

"This must be St. Paul's best-kept secret," exclaimed one of our merry band of diners after tasting the array of delicious dishes that appeared in front of us at Café BonXai. Well if it's up to me, this Hmong-owned French/Thai/Italian restaurant will become a household name, at least in Midway-Como.

I admit it was a titanic struggle to get me there. Rarely does the Cheapskate assert herself, but when she does – watch out. I was determined to visit a highly regarded Middle Eastern place on Grand Avenue (stand by for next month's review), but Cheapy insisted on staying in the neighborhood.

Naturally, the Bachelor sided against me. He kept screaming "Banzai!" as if auditioning for the role of a kamikaze pilot. Little did we know that the restaurant was named for the miniature trees that are tortured into submission over decades. One of the owners admitted that they didn't know what to call the restaurant, but on a visit to Menard's, spotted a mini-grove of bonsai trees. Thus Café BonXai was born. I'm very glad.

Let me count the ways. First, because a former Best Steak House has been reborn as a hip, casual, affordable spot with really good food. Second, because the menu is truly wacky, running the gamut from gyros to fajitas to pad thai to fettuccine alfredo. Third, because the homemade desserts would do credit to any swanky downtown place but are half the cost. And fourth, because watching the Bachelor compose a three-course meal based completely on coconut was a delight.

There are many more: truly fresh grilled salmon for a change (only \$7.95), a succulent pork chop with sautéed fresh mushrooms (\$5.95), one of the best and lightest versions of pad thai around (\$5.50 with tofu), and extra-vigilant service (perhaps motivated by my refusal to hand back the menu so I could take notes on it).

My final word: Put down the newspaper. Get in your car. Go to Café BonXai. Scream banzai all you want on the way. You'll be smiling on the way home.



Without Reservations

Café BonXai: 'Hip, casual, affordable'

Now let me explain my comment on the design and atmosphere. While the Food Snob might say otherwise, the real reason it was so hard to convince her to eat here is that Café BonXai has no curb appeal. The vinyl banner covering up only two-thirds of the leftover "Best Steak House" sign doesn't at all prepare you for what awaits inside:

black furniture and ceiling, burnt-orange walls, and deep blue hanging lights that create a soothing atmosphere. My advice to Café BonXai: Give the exterior the same love and while you're at it, trade in the photocopied menus so we know you're here to stay.

The Cheapskate

The Chowhound may offer unsolicited advice to restaurant owners, but I am here to advise our readers. And all I can do is to parrot the Food Snob: Put down the paper and go. Drive, walk, take the 16 bus, but get there soon so that this amazing restaurant, just a stone's throw from Cheapskate Manor, can become a permanent part of our neighborhood.

The chef makes up a new special every morning, so next time I'm going to try that. For the record, I don't mind the photocopied menus. They may not meet the Chowhound's aesthetic standards, but I like knowing that this chef can change it up any time he wants.

Here is the watertight case for Café BonXai. The Food Snob ate her own words, falling in love with a place she was determined to disdain. The Cheapskate walked away with change after paying for a ravenous group of five (we four plus one groupie) on our starving-artist wages. The Chowhound with his discriminating eye kept looking around and saying, "This place is actually really nice." And the tough-guy Bachelor was so entranced by his coconut trifecta (coconut soup, coconut curry with rice, coconut panna cotta) that he swooned after two bites of dessert. I saw it. His eyes rolled right up into his head.

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Snelling-Hamline Council demands voice in Snelling bus barn decision

By JANE MCCLURE

If and when the former Metro Transit Snelling bus garage site is redeveloped, it needs to be done in a way consistent with principles for transit-oriented development. Worried that city and regional officials and prospective developer RK Midway are making decisions without community input, Snelling-Hamline Community Council voted unanimously December 7 to demand a say in any plans. Merriam Park Community Council voted unanimously December 13 to support Snelling-Hamline.

SHCC is asking that before the 10-acre Snelling and St. Anthony avenues site is transferred from Metropolitan Council to Midway Shopping Center owner RK Midway, the council must put covenants on the site restricting its redevelopment. Plans on the table currently call for a Best Buy and either a Lowe's or Home Depot store, a proposal some have criticized as not being oriented toward transit and the planned Central Corridor light rail line on University Avenue.

Metropolitan Council's own



Plans on the table for the old bus barn site call for a Best Buy and either a Lowe's or a Home Depot store, a proposal some have criticized as not being oriented toward transit and the planned light rail line on University Avenue.

planning documents include a 100-page guide to transit-oriented development. SHCC members and University UNITED, a collaborative of University Avenue district councils, are pushing for the restrictions based on that document.

The district council also is

asking Metropolitan Council and the city for public hearings before any decisions are made.

One concern is that a St. Paul Planning Commission Central Corridor Task Force is working on a land use plan and transit-oriented development guidelines for the areas north and

south of University. The bus garage site is within the planning area. But for almost a year, drawings of Best Buy and Lowe's on the bus barn site and land RK Midway owns at Pascal and St. Anthony have already been floating around St. Paul City Hall. SHCC is concerned that these plans could get approved before the city adopts its own transit-oriented plan, which isn't expected to happen until later in 2007.

SHCC members and neighborhood residents also question whether they will have a chance to comment before new uses are selected for the old bus barn site, or whether RK Midway. "RK Midway is not the most community-oriented developer," said Snelling-Hamline resident Joe Mayo-Cullen. He and others said there needs to be more community input before final decisions on a land swap are made.

"If we don't do something now, we're going to be fighting with RK Midway," said SHCC Board President Travis Snider.

"We know what's going to happen," said United UNITED Executive Director Brian McMa-

hon. "We're going to read about it in the papers."

The Metropolitan Council, which oversees Metro Transit, and Midway Shopping Center owner RK Midway are currently discussing a land swap. RK Midway spokesperson Paula Maccabee and Metro Transit spokesperson Bob Gibbons could only say that the land swap is being discussed, but could not get into specifics. RK Midway also cannot discuss prospective new occupants for the land south of its shopping center, as there have been no agreements signed yet with anyone, said Maccabee.

Ward One Council Member Debbie Montgomery, whose ward includes the Snelling garage site, said she is following the negotiations closely. But she defends the preliminary proposal for Best Buy and Lowe's or Home Depot, saying the retail area would be designed in a way that promotes biking and walking to the stores. "We're trying to address the issues that have been raised," she said. But Mont-

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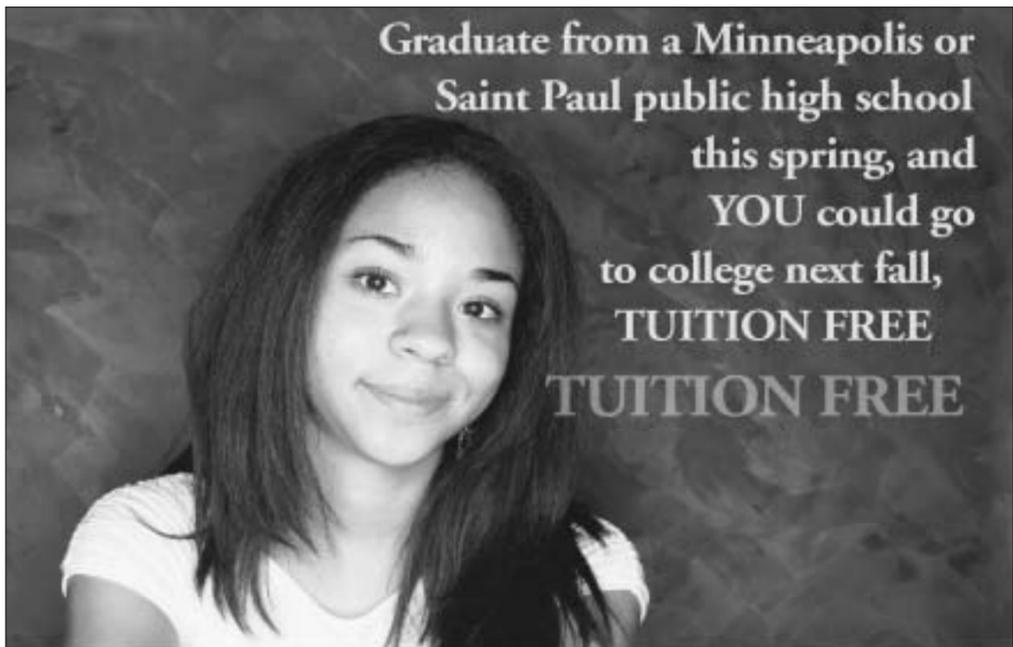
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Carleton Lofts

Continued from page 1

Chris Barnes, one of the developers working on this particular project, said Dominion does a variety of housing options in 16 states. This, however, is the first artist loft project that has been done.

Barnes said that 25 per cent of the units are reserved for people who work in the arts, but are not artists. That includes those working in administration or as a curator or in some way supporting the arts.

University UNITED named the \$60 million project aimed at providing affordable rental housing to artists, the 2006 Project of the Year.

According to Brian McMahon, executive director of University UNITED, awards are presented annually to projects that have been built during the prior year and meet the guidelines of transit-oriented development and enhance the quality of life along



Carleton Artist Lofts tenant Kevin Caufield is never sure whether to describe his new home as a loft or an art gallery. (Photo by Terry Faust)

University Avenue. Because of the federal historic tax credits, tax-exempt

bonds provided by the city and 25 years of tax-increment financing, the units at the Carleton

Artist Lofts are affordable housing. Potential tenants must earn

Bus barn

Continued from page 5

gomery also said that the demands for transit-oriented de-

velopment also have to be balanced with the jobs and economic benefits the two new stores would bring.

Under the land swap proposal, RK Midway would purchase land near Wabash and

Vandalia for a new bus garage, then trade that land to Metro Transit in exchange for the 10 acres at Snelling and St. Anthony. Property appraisals and environmental assessments for the new bus barn site are underway.

Most of the environmental cleanup at Snelling and St. Anthony is complete, although the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency has not yet signed off on the work.

In October the Metropolitan

Council's Transportation Committee directed staff to work on the land swap with RK Midway. "All I can tell you is that we're continuing to negotiate," said Tom Thorstenson, director of engineering and construction for Metro Transit.

The Snelling garage used to house as many as 240 buses, said Thorstenson. But as the facility grew older, fewer buses could be housed there. A new east metro bus facility opened north of downtown St. Paul five years ago and the Snelling garage was demolished in 2002. But even with the new garage, that still left a need to find garage space for about 100 buses in the St. Paul area.

Metro Transit has studied reusing the Snelling site, possibly in conjunction with a development that would tie into a bus garage and transit hub. But since then the decision was made to swap the site for another location. Finding an alternative to the Snelling garage site hasn't been easy, said Thorstenson. "I think siting a bus garage is like siting a nuclear power plant."

The RK Midway negotiations are ongoing, said Thorstenson, but there is no timeline for completion. "It could take two months, it could take six months. It may happen, it may not happen."

University UNITED Director Brian McMahon urged SHCC to be more proactive in the site redevelopment. He also criticized Metropolitan Council for not doing enough to adhere to its own development principles. "It's hard for me to understand how an agency (Metropolitan Council) which is the regional, planner, the transit agency and the property owner can compartmentalize things." He said it doesn't make sense for Metropolitan Council to not insist that the bus barn site be redeveloped in accordance with the council's own transit-oriented development principles.

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Eclipse Records obtains needed parking variance

By JANE MCCLURE

Eclipse Records' plans to reopen on University Avenue aren't missing a beat as the retail store and live music venue obtained a needed parking variance January 2. The St. Paul Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) unanimously approved a 22-space parking variance for Eclipse's new location at 1922 University Av.

The variance is final unless it is appealed to the St. Paul City Council. As of last week no appeal had been filed.

Eclipse, which operated on Grand Avenue until 2003, still needs St. Paul City Council approval of cabaret (entertainment) and arcade licenses. The licenses are needed to accommodate live musical and theater performances in the store, and to allow an old-fashioned video game arcade. Because one objection to the licenses was filed, a legislative hearing will be scheduled in the days ahead. That in turn will affect when the business can obtain its needed licenses and open its doors.

Eclipse co-owners Joe Furth and Jason Brazil said that even with the parking variance, they will continue to seek a parking lease agreement with Goodwill Industries. Goodwill has a large parking lot on the north side of University Avenue. But because Goodwill is more than 300 feet from Eclipse, a variance would still be needed to have that parking count in Eclipse's total.

City staff recommended approval of the 22-space parking variance, noting that most area businesses and offices have daytime parking demands. Most of Eclipse's parking demand would be in the evening. The only condition the city placed on the variance is that it expire when Eclipse closes or moves from the University Avenue location.

Eclipse originally operated on Grand Avenue from 1999-2003. The business was popular with young people but drew some neighborhood complaints due to noise and crowds. There were also lengthy battles between Furth and city officials over live musical performances at the store. Such performances are common in other cities and are used by artists to sell records and other merchandise, such as T-shirts. But Furth had to seek a city ordinance change so that his store and others could host musical performances.

Eclipse was popular with young people because it was a place where they could hear music. Many parents also supported the business because it was alcohol and tobacco-free. Firth and Brazil will continue many of the same policies that were in place on Grand.

The building has only a few spaces on the site. Eclipse and Kuk Sool Woon, a martial arts studio in part of the building, require a total of 73 off-street parking spaces. That total gets ratcheted up in large part due to Eclipse's performance space. But because the number of spaces for previous manufacturing and retail uses are factored in and grandfathered on, the actual variance needed is for 22 spaces.

Furth said many Eclipse customers don't drive and would use public transit or be dropped off. Eclipse would be one of the few places in St. Paul where persons

younger than age 21 could gather and listen to live music.

"Kids can't go to bars to hear these acts," said Furth. "This offers young people a place to hear music, or a poetry reading." Eclipse will work with McNally School of Music, a charter school, and other groups to offer live entertainment.

Merriam Park Community Council (MPCC) voted unanimously in December to recommend approval of the parking variance and business licenses.

"This space, in the opinion of the community council, is ideal for this business," said MPCC Land Use Committee Chairperson Scott Banas. He lived near the original Eclipse, which was right across the alley from Lincoln Avenue homes. Banas said he didn't see any "untoward behavior" and praised Furth for how the business was run. But Banas said there were complaints from other neighbors. The University Avenue location is in a commercial area.

"There is no venue for young people to go and listen to, and play music, and this would meet that need," Banas said.

The Midway Transportation Management Organization, which offices on the same block, sup-



The St. Paul Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) unanimously approved a 22-space parking variance for Eclipse Record's new location at 1922 University Av. Eclipse still needs St. Paul City Council approval of cabaret and arcade licenses.

ports the variance and cited its own studies which show there is usually a surplus of parking spaces along much of University Avenue.

Owners of two area businesses, Laughlin Pest Control and Twin City Saw and Service, object to the variance and say the area lacks parking for the new businesses. Roger Fuerstenberg owns and operates Twin City Saw and Service at 1932 University Av. His

business has 15 off-street parking spots, which he and his staff must watch constantly.

"It's already a nightmare to accommodate the parking needs we have now," he said. He questioned where Eclipse customers would parking. "Whose lot would be used? It would be mine," he said.

Eclipse will open in a one-story brick building that was erected in 1914. The building was an early home for the Murphy Trucking firm and since then has had a variety of industrial and retail uses.

Most recently the building housed a uniform store and manufacturing business. It has been vacant since 2000 and was extensively renovated by landlord Thomas Dunn.

The building is ell-shaped with one part set back from University. A martial arts studio, Kuk Sool Woon, recently opened in the set-back portion of the building. Kuk Sool Woon had operated at the University of St. Thomas for several years before moving to University.

Eclipse will open in the space directly fronting on University. Eclipse will have 2,400 square feet of retail space, a performance space of 900 square feet and a video arcade of 900 square feet. There will also be an art gallery along a hall way extended from the front of the store to the rear office and storage areas.

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In Our Community

Exercise classes for seniors held in Midway

A series of Arthritis-Friendly Exercise Classes for Seniors will be held early afternoons for one hour twice each week on Tuesdays and Thursdays from February 6 through March 29 at 1514 Englewood Avenue. The classes will emphasize gentle exercises that have been specially designed to ease joint pain and improve range of motion. They will be taught by a Registered Nurse and a Physical Therapist who have each been trained by the MN Arthritis Foundation.

Please call the office of Hamline Midway Elders, 651-209-6542, for more information including the exact time. Transportation to and from classes may be available. Hamline Midway Elders is a Living at Home/Block Nurse Program the helps seniors stay independent in their own homes.

History Corps begins new 2007 Speaker Series

In January the Hamline Midway History Corps begins its new Speaker Series at the Hamline Midway Branch Library, 1558 West Minnehaha Avenue, on the following Thursdays from 7 to 8:30 p.m. in the auditorium. Join us for engaging discussions on the history of our streets and environs, baseball, and architecture in the Midway and St. Paul. All programs are free and everyone is welcome! For additional information see the History Corps website: www.HamlineMidway-History.org

On Thurs., Jan. 11, Don Empson, author of the totally revised and much-anticipated *The Street Where You Live: A Guide to the Place Names of St. Paul* begins our series with stories of our neighborhood's streets, parks, and landmarks.

On Thurs., Mar. 8, Stew Thornley, author of *Baseball in Minnesota: The Definitive History* will help us kick off the baseball season and the Midway's rich role in the game.

On Thurs., May 10, Paul Clifford Larson, noted architectural historian and author of numerous books including his most recent: *St. Paul's Architecture: A History*, co-written with Jeffrey A. Hess. Larson's other titles include: *Minnesota Architect*; *The Life and Work of Clarence H. Johnston*; *Icy Pleasures: Minnesota Celebrates Winter*; and *A Place at the Lake*.

Specialist will present evidence on faith Jan. 18

Pastor Dennis McKeever, a 30-year veteran and student of inter-

Kasling plays Jehovah's Van Daalen Organ

Kim Kasling, nationally known church musician and organ recitalist, recently was appointed as principal organist for Jehovah Lutheran Church. Kasling joins a new music leadership team including Elizabeth Wegner (choir director), Fran Harris (associate organist), two instrumental bands, and Rev. Robert Benke (pastor).

According to Charles Avoles, Jehovah's Executive Director, Kasling's exciting leadership of hymns is a perfect match for Jehovah's tradition of musical excellence, something to be shared with both the congregation and the wider community.

Dr. Kasling heads the liturgical music studies program as well as holding the professorship for organ at Saint John's University, Collegeville. Twin Citians know him for his 25 years as the principal organist at the Basilica of Saint Mary in Minneapolis. While still affiliated with the Basilica and teaching at the University, Kasling sees the Jehovah organ position as an opportunity to provide music leadership to yet another Christian community.

Kasling praises Jehovah's Van Daalen organ, which boasts 2,446 pipes, three keyboards, and a full pedal board, seeing it as an instrument capable of both grandeur and warmth in all types of music.

For more information about Jehovah Lutheran Church visit www.jehovahlutheran.org or call 651-644-1421. The church is located at the corner of Thomas and Snelling in the Midway.



Dr. Kim Kasling at the Van Daalen organ of Jehovah Lutheran Church.

national communications, will be presenting compelling evidence for the Christian faith in St. Paul on Thursday, January 18. McKeever's revealing presentation of FaithSearch will be held at St. Stephanus Lutheran Church, 729 Lafond Ave, from 6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. A soup and salad dinner will be provided starting at 5:45 p.m., total cost for the dinner and the event: \$3. The event is being sponsored by St. Stephanus Lutheran Church.

McKeever said the presentation includes eye-opening discoveries that demonstrate the historical validity and value of Christianity that is relevant to people all over the globe. Recently he said that, wherever he goes, people are asking about [Dan Brown's novel] *The Da Vinci Code*. "I'm amazed that people are willing to dismiss the Bible after reading this work of fiction," he said.

FaithSearch has been presented for 25 years to thousands of people throughout the United States and internationally. McKeever said, "The truth claims of Christianity are unique among the religions of the world. I want to give everyone an opportunity to examine the eyewitness evidence firsthand." A long-time resident of Taiwan and of Russia, McKeever is now Director of International Ministry at FaithSearch International in Minneapolis. He recently returned from a speaking tour of India.

Kindergarten Round-Up at Central Lutheran Jan. 25

Kindergarten Round-up at Central Lutheran School will be held on Thursday, January 25, at 7 p.m. Central focuses on Christ centered, success oriented, full day kindergarten. There is reading and writing readiness, hands on math and science, Jesus time, social studies, music, and gym. They also offer before and after school care from 6:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m.

You and your prospective kindergartner are invited to join us at Central Lutheran School, 775 N. Lexington Pkwy. for our kindergarten round-up. Please call us at 651-645-8649 to let us know you are coming or to ask any questions you may have.

Zion starts craft group at Zion Lutheran Church

Zion Lutheran church at Lafond and Aldine, phone 651-645-0851 is offering a free opportunity to the community for learning different crafts such as knitting, crocheting, embroidery and cross-stitching etc. The group will meet from 6 to 8 p.m. on Thursdays starting January 11th. Come and enjoy crafting with us.

MMSA Church addition dedicated January 6

The Maternity of Mary Church addition and connection to MMSA School was dedicated and blessed on Saturday, January 6, 2007. The new addition includes a gathering area to seat 200, full kitchen, elevator, parish library, new bathrooms, conference room for the school and a new 100 seat chapel.

Catholic School Week begins on January 27 with special masses and activities including student performances and open house on Sunday, January 28, roller skating, bumper bowling and our traditional BINGO!

Corrie speaks on immigration policy at Jehovah

Dr. Bruce Corrie, professor of economics at Concordia University, St. Paul, will speak to the Adult Bible Class at Jehovah Lutheran Church on January 21 on the topic: "Framework for Immigrant Policy in Minnesota."

He serves on the World Cultural Heritage Steering Committee which envisions the development of ethnic business and organizations into global communities in St. Paul, and he follows ethnic trends closely.

The community is invited to join the discussion beginning at

9:00 a.m. with coffee in the lounge of Jehovah Lutheran Church, 1655 Thomas Avenue. Call Dawn for further information at 651-644-1421.

Storytelling for Families set for February 1

Storyteller Bill Eisenmann will delight us with stories around the theme "You Are Special." A retired pastor who grew up listening to and telling stories, Eisenmann believes in the power of story to affirm the value of each child and celebrate his or her gifts.

Some puppets will assist in the telling of the stories. Families can make story sticks to take home. Hope to see you there, Thursday, February 1 from 6:30-7:30 at the Coffee Grounds Coffee Shop, 1579 Hamline Avenue. Recommended for children K-3rd grade.

Everyone is welcome. Cost: Free family event. For Further Information contact: Pam Schweitzer at: 651-487-3376 or The Coffee Grounds at: 651-644-9959. Event sponsored by the Northstar Storytelling League and The Coffee Grounds Coffee Shop.

New facades coming for Snelling Avenue shoppers

Shoppers walking down Snelling Avenue this summer will find that several commercial buildings are being restored to their historical beauty and that many independent businesses are sporting a fresh look.

Snelling Avenue business owners, working as the Snelling Avenue Business Initiative (SABI), along with non-profit community development corporation Sparc, have come together over the past few years to plan for a more vibrant commercial corridor that is inviting to shoppers and that increases the success of our independent businesses.

Out of this work came the recent announcement that the City of St. Paul has awarded \$150,000 to Sparc for grants to area business and property owners to improve building facades along Snelling Avenue.

Improvements will include new windows, brickwork, signage, and awnings. Changes will reflect the ideas put forward in the newly released Snelling Avenue Guidelines, which area merchants and the architectural firm Hay Dobbs put together to showcase the architectural traditions of the Snelling Avenue buildings such as large windows that allow people to see activity and products inside.

To apply for funds, business and property owners are invited to call Allison Sharkey, Business Development Program Manager for Sparc at 651-488-1039.

Benanav

Continued from page 1

erupt in the neighborhoods. While resolving a dispute can be satisfying, "it does take a lot out of you," he said.

Benanav, who works as an elections and immigration attorney, said he hasn't decided what he'll do after leaving the City Council. He won't rule out future public service and says no matter what he does, he'll be involved with the community.

"I'm 55," Benanav said. "I've got at least one or two more careers in front of me."

During his first eight years on the council, Benanav and other progressives regularly butted heads with Mayors Norm Coleman and Randy Kelly. He lost to Kelly by just 402 votes in the 2001 mayoral election, which added to the tension during Kelly's term.

"It was not fun," Benanav added. He said it has been much

ning work for neighborhoods along the Central Corridor light rail line.

Accomplishments Benanav cites during his nine years in office include:

*Bringing long-awaited improvements to the Griggs Recreation Center, and working with neighbors to keep Griggs from closing during a city budget crisis in 2003.

*Helping promote the construction of new housing units along University Avenue, including Episcopal Home campus expansion, Carleton Lofts, Emerald Gardens and 808 Berry Place. "I'm really proud to have played a role in that," he said. "When you look at what's happening on University Avenue, it's pretty amazing."

*Work on economic development issues and work with small businesses, as well as chairing the city's Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA).

*Work on Compete St. Paul,

"It's a great job, it really is. But 10 years is a long time."

- Jay Benanav



easier for the council to work with Mayor Chris Coleman's administration.

Benanav said he's going to make sure his last year of City Council service is productive. He'll continue to work on issues including equal access to city contracts and development opportunities for women, minorities and people with disabilities.

He'll also continue to address concerns about equitable city services for Ward Four. Residents pay high taxes, Benanav said, yet their services are often the first cut. Nor does the neighborhood have a large recreation center like those existing or under construction in every other ward.

Other goals are to restore lost Sunday library hours in Ward Four and to keep arguing for increased service at Fire Station 20 at Vandalia and University avenues. "It's going to be an active year," said Benanav.

One of the biggest challenges ahead in 2007 is changing the way the city regulates single-family and duplex rental housing. Benanav and Ward Six Council Member Dan Bostrom introduced measures to require regular inspections and certificates of occupancy for these dwellings. Later this month the City Council will consider the needed ordinance changes for the program.

Another project Benanav would like to see wrapped up is the ongoing renovation of the historic building at 1956 Feronia. He'd also like to continue promoting the land use plan-

at a time where there was intense debate over the contracting out of city service. Benanav felt strongly that it was important to maintain city jobs as well as the quality of services.

*Traffic calming initiatives throughout the ward, including bringing in international traffic calming expert David Engwicht for two seminars. Benanav said the workshops and projects have helped area residents take back their streets.

*Getting the city's first two skateboard parks built, at Front and Merriam Park recreation centers, and helping neighborhood residents replace aging playground equipment at many area playgrounds. One unique aspect of the skate park planning was involving a youth task force.

*Work on numerous small neighborhood projects including noise mitigation near the BNSF hub, saving the St. Anthony Park community garden, Tibetan Community Center, College Park tennis courts, fencing for the new Meeker Island Park, University Avenue public art, support of Dickerman Park and the new Eclipse Records store.

*Negotiating a compromise on campus expansion for the University of St. Thomas. This resulted in the formation of a university-community advisory committee, which discusses issues ranging from campus construction projects to student behavior. Benanav said the committee is a model that could be used to improve communications in other college neighborhoods.

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Java train requests beer and wine license

By JANE MCCLURE

A Como Park restaurant's quest to sell beer and wine with meals is on its way to the state capitol. Java Train, 1341 N. Pascal St., needs a state law change during the 2007 session of the Minnesota Legislature. The session began January 2 but it's not clear when state lawmakers will take up the request.

A 1960s state law meant to protect and regulate liquor sales at and around the Minnesota State Fair restricts the location of liquor stores and wine shops around the fairgrounds. It also prevents restaurants in neighborhoods around the fairgrounds from obtaining beer and wine, as well as full liquor licenses.

Java Train is not the first area business to try to change the law. A St. Anthony Park wine shop's owners recently had to seek a state law change before their business could open.

In late December Java Train won a recommendation of approval for the licenses from Como Community Council. That was despite objections from some neighbors, who worry

about late-night hours, noise and other potential problems. Some have questioned whether allowing beer and wine would be the first step in turning the popular neighborhood restaurant into a bar.

But Java Train co-owner Christine Finnegan said the intent is simply to serve beer and wine with meals, as required by the city. St. Paul doesn't allow the sale of beer and wine without food sales, and checks the ratio of food and beer/wine sales on a regular basis. The city can also put other conditions on the beer and wine licenses.

A full liquor license would not be sought, said Finnegan. Hours would not extend past 11 p.m. at the latest.

"Customers have been asking for beer and wine for a year," Finnegan said. "We'd like to be able to meet those requests."

Passage of a state law change for the Como business is anticipated. After state lawmakers act to allow the beer and wine sales, the Java Train request goes back to the City Council. Finnegan, who operates the business with

her husband Steve, said Java Train will also seek permission at that time to expand into some of the floral shop space. Since the restaurant patio closed this fall, the restaurant has been very crowded at times.

"We really need more space," she said.

The Java Train license request has been discussed by the St. Paul City Council's legislative committee. Council members Jay Benanav and Lee Helgen are interested in supporting Java Train. They have also discussed trying to determine if the law can be changed in a way that doesn't require every single fairgrounds area business seeking a liquor license to have to go to state lawmakers.

It's not entirely known why the state law is so restrictive. Some news accounts indicate the state law was changed when there was a move to limit where alcohol sales took place at the fairgrounds. But why that had to take in surrounding neighborhoods, especially when the fair only operates for two weeks each year, isn't clear.



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Continued from page 4

This explains why he had to fabricate a cover story involving the unsavory emporium next door, to stop himself from using words like "exquisite" and "excruciatingly good" to describe the food at BonXai.

More evidence: We were back two days later with two skeptical friends. "What's the name again? In the old Best Steak House? French, Italian AND Thai? Are you sure we want to go there?"

Two hours later, as they debated who had the better cr me br lee—Caf  BonXai or the Saint Paul Grill—they had only one remaining question: "Is this place open for dinner?"

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January is the month that I look back on the year just past and the many years I've lived in the Como neighborhood. One thing I'm sure of—it's warmer.

With so many mild winter days and hot summer nights, I have no doubt that global warming is a reality. I can see that the growing season in my own backyard is longer. I can also see that once uncommon visitors from warmer climes, like Virginia opossums, have become more common. And there was only a hint of snow on the ground through most of December.

Como Lake froze and thawed several times before the ice got thick enough for ice fishing and skating. The smooth, snowless lake was like a groomed rink with ice so clear that it was unsettling to stand and look through to the dark water below. After the winter rains, the ice turned opaque.

On December 19, three of us went down to Como Lake to catch a flightless Canada goose that had been left behind by the migrating flocks. I can only guess how it injured its wing—a collision with power lines perhaps. Millions of birds die each year from such mishaps, but hearing a statistic is not as heartrending as watching one wild bird die a slow death.

Every time I walked around the lake I saw the unfortunate goose. When our little rescue team finally arrived prepared with blankets to throw over our quarry and a huge plastic tub for transporting the goose to the Minnesota Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, we figured the goose would be standing in the



Neighborhood Naturalist

By DEB ROBINSON

Ending the year with a wild goose chase

parking lot or on the ice like always. We knew the goose was beyond rehabilitation, but we didn't want it to suffer any longer. However, the injured goose was nowhere to be found on that day.

For another week, we kept the tub and blankets in the car, but I never saw the goose again. Maybe I should have tried to capture it sooner. When the goose was in better health at the beginning of its ordeal, I wasn't eager to grab hold of 15 pounds of hissing fury.

Canada geese (*Branta canadensis*) are formidable creatures, but they have many qualities that humans admire. Canada geese are devoted to their young, faithful to their mates, and they form lasting family attachments.

The species was nearly wiped out in Minnesota due to over hunting in the 1930s.

With stricter hunting laws and goose reintroduction efforts, the goose population recovered and grew . . . and grew. Now there are so many urban geese, they

can be a nuisance around Como Golf Course, Como Lake, and other city parks.

Yet, I still have a soft spot for Canada geese.

I remember back to the 1970s when

I saw the Canada geese in Rochester, Minnesota. A flock of non-migrating geese survived there because there was no hunting allowed within city limits and there was year-round open water on Silver Lake. But even then, I noticed damage to the nearby lawns where the geese grazed and defecated. I didn't yet know about the related water quality issues.

When I moved to the Como neighborhood in the 1980s, I enjoyed the raucously honking flocks of Canada geese as they dropped down to visit Como Lake on their fall migration. I would shake the limbs of the shoreline crabapple trees to dislodge their fruits, and the geese would gather round to feed on the apples.

By the late 1990s, hordes of geese had denuded that same eastside shore near Compass Point.

The geese were attracted by the piles of corn and breadcrumbs left my

well-meaning humans. Along with the feeding, a lake aerator kept a portion of the lake ice-free, enticing some of the geese to stay all winter. The Canada geese had worn out their welcome.

Currently, tall native shoreline plantings discourages geese from walking out of the lake, and signs discourage people from feeding the geese. The lake is allowed to freeze over, so geese don't stay the winter at Como anymore.

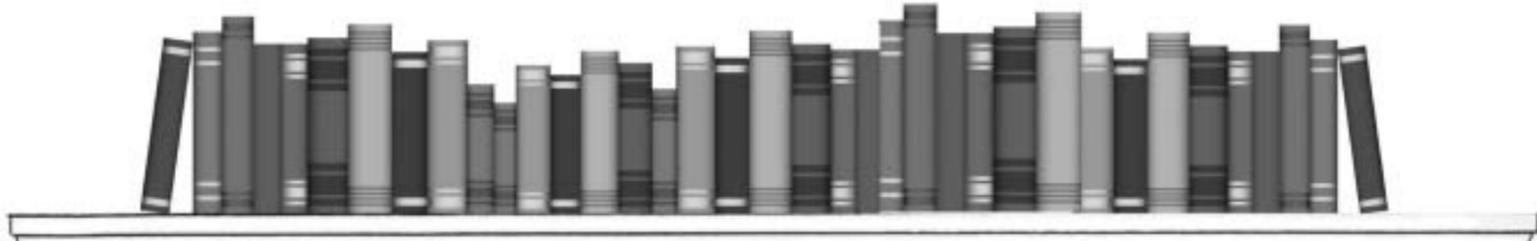
Conservationist and author, Aldo Leopold, wrote about the thrill of hearing "goose music" in the 1940s when wild goose populations were still low. Even though Canada geese are more numerous now than ever before, I still love to hear goose music in autumn—it reminds me that not all environmental losses have to be permanent.

Although one injured Canada goose didn't make it south this fall, many thousands did. If we could just get that kind of miraculous turnaround on the global warming problem, we Minnesotans would be bragging about our winters' sub-zero temperatures again in no time.

Endnotes: The Wildlife Rehabilitation Center of Minnesota, located at 2530 Dale Street in Roseville, has their annual Open House, February 18, noon to 4 p.m. Check out the center, volunteer, and make a donation. More info: 651-486-9453. *The Como Woodland Restoration project's Advisory Committee will meet at the Streetcar Station (at Lexington Pkwy. and Como Ave.) Jan. 20, at 9 a.m. More info: dmrobinson@bitstream.net



Illustration by Deb Robinson



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