



Ryan Barry

DEAR TOWER GROVE HEIGHTS NEIGHBORS,

It is a privilege to represent our neighborhood and our members as the 2020 president of the Tower Grove Heights Neighborhood Association (TGHNA). I am a native St. Louisan and grew up in Ferguson. My wife Melissa; son, Andrew; dog, Lou; and I had the great opportunity to purchase a house on Humphrey Street. We love our neighbors and neighborhood.

If you are anything like me, you love our neighborhood and likely chose to live here for similar reasons – walkability, Tower Grove park, unique restaurants and retail, and of course a vibrant community of wonderful neighbors. I got involved with TGHNA because I want to see our neighborhood maintain what makes it so special, whether through enhancing the things we love or minimizing the things we don’t.

Goals for the year include increasing membership, fundraising, and planning neighborhood events; block parties, Autumn Fest, Heights Nights, just to name a few. The neighborhood association has some exciting guest speakers lined up, so if you haven’t ever attended or, it has been awhile, I recommend coming to a meeting. City living is great, but it comes with challenges. A strong neighborhood association can

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## The City’s Narrow Financial Options

### The *Gazette* talks to the budget director of St. Louis

By Nigel Holloway

**M**AYOR LYDA KREWSON WAS QUOTED BY THE POST-DISPATCH IN 2018 AS SAYING “our tax base is not strong enough to provide the revenue stream for the services that we need to provide.” Since then, Krewson has explored two possible ways of strengthening the city’s finances: a city-county merger and the leasing of the airport. Both have now been dropped, so where does St. Louis go next?

To seek answers, I visited Paul Payne, a slim, dapper gent who has worked in the budget division for 32 years, 13 as the director. After an hour with him, I came away with the strong impression that radical ideas are needed if the city is to grow its way out of its financial impasse. And yet there are precious few, new proposals for fiscal reform. If the merger was Plan A and the airport was Plan B, there’s no C or D.

The first indication that something needs to be done was in Payne’s office on the top floor of City Hall, where he sat at his desk facing his interviewer. Behind him were two large patches of mold, blooming on the wall. Hardly the healthiest environment in which to come up with far-reaching reforms of the city’s finances.

Payne is constrained, in any case, by the practical necessities of the city. “We are limited within our boundaries; the population is disproportionately poor,” he says. Twenty percent of people in the city live below the poverty line. “That requires additional services, such as healthcare, managing trash pickup and the maintenance of empty lots. The services associated with those kind of demographics increases expenditures. On the revenue side, how can we expect it to keep up with the needs, based on that set of circumstances?”

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# Tower Grove Heights Gazette

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# Just Around the Corner

By Barbara Gilchrist

ARTICLES IN THE GAZETTE FOCUSING ON SHOPS OR RESTAURANTS USUALLY refer to a place on South Grand. In this piece, however, I am looking at places "off Grand" with a focus on food and drink. Some are within the boundaries of Tower Grove Heights; some are within walking or a short driving distance for those of us who live in the Heights. I had to put a limit on how many places I included. If I missed one within the boundaries I created, it was inadvertent, and I apologize.

If you are looking for a good pizza and a brew, then Blackthorn Pub and Pizza is the place to go. Located at the corner of Wyoming and Spring, it has been a hangout for neighbors and sports teams for more than 30 years. Recent renovations changed the interior and added outdoor seating, weather permitting. Take your appetite – the pizzas are filling!

Crispy Edge at the corner of Juniata and Bent is another option for food. It specializes in savory and sweet pot stickers and has a full bar. It is open only on Friday, Saturday and Sunday when it offers brunch so you will likely want to make a reservation.

Hartford Coffee, at the corner of Hartford and Roger offers air-roasted coffee, house-made baked goods, sandwiches, and other beverages. It has a play area for kids and a rotating line-up of acoustic musical performances.

Luckily for us, there is a second business/entertainment section besides South Grand within the greater Tower Grove South neighborhood. Morgan Ford, south of Arsenal, has a variety of restaurants and bars to choose from. For example, The London Tea Room at Hartford is open every day until 5:00 p.m. and offers a wide variety of teas and food. Afternoon tea is also available by reservation and tea fans will want to watch for special events.

Heading south on Morgan Ford, we quickly find Three Monkeys and City Park Grill on opposing sides of Juniata. Three Monkeys, recently under new management, offers pub grub that includes pizza as well as beer, wine and spirits. It also has a Sunday brunch buffet. City Park Grill offers American comfort fare, rotating beer taps, sports on TV and a roomy patio.

Closer to Connecticut on the same side of the street, one finds both the Dam and the Amsterdam. The Dam describes itself as a tiny, unassuming counter service making burgers, hot dogs, sandwiches and Belgian-style fries. Customers can take the food home or go next door to the Amsterdam Tavern which is known to probably every soccer fan in St. Louis. The bar area is fairly small, but there is a very large beer garden in the back. Customers can enjoy craft beers and watch soccer on TV.

Across the street from the Amsterdam Tavern is a new coffee shop, Road Crew Coffee and Cycles. It is located on the first floor of the MOFO Urban Residences building and is a combination coffee shop and bike shop.

Across the south side of Connecticut is another new restaurant with a mission, Destination Café. This restaurant offers food from many destinations, but with a local flavor, and provides disabled people with the opportunity to learn vocational and job skills. It is owned by the Center for Head Injury Services and all café profits go back to this not-for-profit organization.

Continuing our pathway south on Morgan Ford reveals two more bars. Tower Pub,



*continued on page 16*

# Paul Payne Interview

By Nigel Holloway

*continued from page 1*

So, where does the city go next? “We continue the effort we have been doing. There is a certain portion of revenues that are fee services and you continue to update those periodically to make sure they match the cost of your service. And then you look for other ways to reorganize your services to try to get efficiencies that way. On the expenditure side, I continue to emphasize [city-employee] pension reform, and that is something we still need to achieve.”

Are there any other plans in the works? “I don’t know what the future of the city and county will be. Everything but the kitchen sink was in the last proposal. But this doesn’t mean there couldn’t be a lesser version of that, such as a situation where the city rejoins the county,” says Payne. “Some of our best collaborations with the county have been pretty successful, such as the zoo-museum district and the sewer district.”

Since the airport is a regional resource and the city has such a narrow tax base, couldn’t the airport be shared with the counties in such a way that gains from its development yield more revenue for the city? “As long as it is fair,” he says. The problem is that “often the city is left holding the bag. If you talk about assets, everybody wants to talk regionalism. When you talk about the challenges, nobody wants to be involved, but when you talk about the benefits, everyone wants to talk about sharing.”

But at least this would be a good basis for discussion with St. Louis and St. Charles counties. “I’m the budget guy and can’t prescribe, from a policy standpoint, what the solution is. But the fact that the previous proposal didn’t go through doesn’t preclude other forms, such as the city rejoining the county, or some form of co-operation on other services that would make sense for both entities,” he says.

It looks as if incremental progress is the best we can hope for. “After the Better Together thing, people are skittish about big-idea plans. Maybe the approach is to take smaller steps in those directions,” he says. “I don’t know what form it will take. I do think people are attuned to it now, which is a good thing.”

In the absence of a major structural change, Payne has to be content to chip away at the city’s fiscal problems. Moody’s, the credit rating agency, downgraded St. Louis’s general obligations four times in three years prior to May 2018, but he believes the trend has since been moving in the opposite direction. The fiscal year 2019 produced a small budget surplus and “we are actually budgeting a certain amount each year to contribute to the reserves. We will get kudos for that [from the rating agencies],” he says. In the downturn, whenever it comes, the city will need those reserves.

The difficult fiscal situation of St. Louis seemed to stand in stark contrast to my own perception as a taxpayer whose residential property tax rose 78 percent in the three years to fiscal 2019. We haven’t noticed a significant improvement of city services since we moved into our house on Hartford Street in June 2017. Could Payne point to any improvements I might have missed? He quickly explained that about 80 percent of those property taxes go towards the city’s schools and the portion received by the city comprises only about 10 percent of its revenues. If I wanted to find out more

about whether schools had improved, I’d have to go to the Board of Education, which is independent of the mayor and the Board of Aldermen.

Fair enough, but I still wanted to know whether he could point to any city services that have been enhanced. “In the past year, we’ve seen initiatives related to building demolition, affordable housing, particularly the recent increase in use tax, an increase in public safety initiatives, which have included increases in police pay and some other public safety initiatives,” he says.

On the negative side, Payne pointed to budgetary changes over the years that narrowed the city’s options of how it spends its money. In the past, the city would vote for an increase in general sales tax; now, an increase in sales tax is earmarked for a specific purpose, which means that the money cannot be spent on general services whose funding needs may be more urgent in a recession. “It doesn’t make sense to say we’re going to be improving the façade of the building if it’s falling apart,” he says.

Does he think that city residents are receiving good value for their money? “I would believe so,” Payne says. “I know that you always hear when things break down, such as refuse trucks, but think about the service we are providing: regular trash pickup twice a week, yard waste once a week, recyclables once a week, and bulky pick up once a month. And we are paying \$15 or less a month per fee. That’s pretty good service. I think you’d be hard pressed to find comparable service in the county.”

Payne had mentioned buildings due for demolition, but what about treating the less visible signs of weakness in our social infrastructure? “The ones you hear about include the constant challenges on health, such as communicable diseases, and that comes with the demographic make-up. That’s why in the budget, a lot of our funding is grant-driven from federal programs.” And public safety? “Over half the general fund budget is spent on public safety, so the aim is to make sure those dollars are allocated to get the biggest bang for the buck, and that includes pension reform and making sure we don’t overextend ourselves on those kinds of costs. Public safety is number one on people’s lists as a service concern.”

It was a pretty sobering experience to learn about the lack of options to make significant changes for the better. Before I left Payne’s office, I omitted to ask him whether any money in the budget was being allocated to clear up the mold on his wall. Perhaps the fungus is a metaphor for the financial problems faced by the city. Alternatively, it may simply signify that Krewson and her advisors have bigger problems to deal with than the office décor.



*“Public safety is #1 on people’s list as a service concern”*



# Oakleaf Hydrangea

By Peggy Hoelting

**F**EW THINGS SIGNIFY SUMMER'S ARRIVAL BETTER than the magnificent, long-blooming, blue and pink mophead flowers of the hydrangea shrub. Hydrangea macrophylla, commonly referred to as bigleaf hydrangea, is one of the most sought-after landscape shrubs.

Although beautiful, this finicky shrub might frustrate those looking for consistent blooms every year. This is due to a number of factors. Incorrect pruning can cause problems as well as inadequate water, too much nitrogen fertilizer, or planting in too much sun or too much shade. Environmental factors such as unusually cold winters, late spring frost, or early summer drought, can also come into play. Let's face it, with St. Louis' inconsistent weather, a bigleaf hydrangea may not be your best bet.



Luckily there are other hydrangea species that are very reliable bloomers and thrive in a wide range of sun and soil conditions. My favorite is the oakleaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*).

Oakleaf hydrangea are native to the United States and are hardy in St. Louis. The large, dark green leaf is similar in shape to the northern red oak from which it gets its common name. Huge cone-shaped flowers appear in abundance in late spring and early summer and can be as big as a 12" long. The blooms are primarily white, gradually developing a pink blush then turning red as the season changes. The magnificent blooms are just the beginning of the oakleaf hydrangea's beauty. During the fall, the leaves turn rich shades of red, orange and maroon. Unlike the bigleaf species, oakleaf hydrangea forms a woody structure that persist throughout the winter, providing good cover for wildlife and birds. The woody branches are covered in cinnamon-colored peeling bark, so even during the cold days of winter, they have something to show off.

Oakleaf hydrangeas will tolerate full sun, but prefer some afternoon shade, and even tolerate deep shade. With more sun exposure, the blooms will be more prolific, and the fall color will be better. This shrub tolerates drier soil than its bigleaf cousins and cannot stand wet feet. It does best in moist, well-drained, acidic soil that has been amended with organic matter. It will also survive in ordinary garden soil.

Pruning is rarely necessary. This shrub is most beautiful when allowed to grow into its natural, informal shape. If it does become too large, cut it back every few years. Prune after blooming and before flower buds are set in late summer. Deadhead old blossoms anytime or leave the flowers on the plant into the winter months. Oakleaf hydrangeas are relatively pest and disease free. Deer and bunnies, however, may nibble at the new foliage and since the branches are somewhat fragile, young plants are best when caged for the first season.

Although the native species of the oakleaf hydrangea is lovely, you can up your game with the cultivated varieties that are bred for

bigger, more profuse, and even more spectacular flowers. One of my favorites, 'Ruby Slippers', only grows 3 to 4 feet tall and wide; this dwarf oakleaf has extra-large blooms that deepen from white to pink to ruby red. 'Snow Queen' is a mid-size variety growing 4 to 5 feet tall and up to 6 feet wide. Fragrant blooms shift from creamy white to rosy pink. If you want something larger, 'Alice' grows up to 15 feet tall and wide. The huge, creamy white flowers turn pink, then mature to bronze.

Dreaming of summer's beautiful eye-catching blooms but don't want the fuss? With so many varieties to choose from, an easy care, four-season oakleaf hydrangea might be option for you.

*Peggy Hoelting is a garden coach and consultant. Check out her garden blog at [www.gardeneditstl.com](http://www.gardeneditstl.com)*

## President's Message

*continued from page 1*

champion causes and communicate with city officials in an effort to produce tangible results. TGHNA has been a model neighborhood association for over 30 years and I hope to continue this tradition.

I encourage you to consider expanding your involvement with TGHNA. We especially need support on the social committee but welcome your participation wherever your interests may lie. If you have questions, suggestions, or comments, please contact me at [president@towergroveheights.com](mailto:president@towergroveheights.com).

Thank you,  
Ryan Barry  
TGHNA President

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## 2019 100 Neediest Cases - Follow Up

By Ellen Wilson

**T**HE NEIGHBORHOOD 100 NEEDIEST CASES ADOPT-A-FAMILY PROGRAM HAD SOME CHANGES IN 2019, BUT ONCE AGAIN NEIGHBORS pulled together to make our 16th year another great success. Since switching to new centers in south city to support, our selection criteria of families changed as well.

This year we selected single parents with one child instead of multi-generational, large families as we have in past years. Part of the reason was the choice selection from the new support centers and another part was to show that small families need help, too. We selected two female- and one male-led households and provided all three with a good jump start on 2020.

This year each family was gifted with just over \$200 in various store and grocery gift certificates as well as \$1,250 each to go toward utilities or rent to be paid directly through the 100 Neediest Cases Program. Gustine Market collected donations from customers again this year and increased their collection substantially.

Family 1 received winter gear including boots, designer perfume, clothing, pajamas, Lego projects, a remote-controlled car, 3-D goggles, and sweaters.

Family 2 received pots and pans, a floor lamp, clothing, kitchen items, Spider Man doll and book, winter jacket, CD of music for kids, puzzles, and footballs.

Family 3 received bath soaps, gloves, a table lamp, paper products, a candle, clothing, doll, a Fortnite game, hair and make-up accessories, and craft projects.

All three families received bath and bedroom linens, family games, books, and a beautiful basket of household goods.

Each year this project is supported by the TGHNA board and each and every neighbor. President Ryan Barry and the board helped to select our families and provided financial support for the flyers. Treasurer Rick Stein kept the money straight and Barbara



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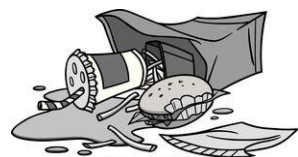
# Trash: We're In It Together

By Katie Wolf Neighborhood Improvement Specialist



**NE CONCERN THAT HAS BEEN BROUGHT TO ME** frequently, of late, is an increase in trash on and around commercial properties surrounding the neighborhood.

The City of St. Louis has an ordinance stating that commercial property owners must clean up the trash on and around the perimeter of their property at least once every 24 hours on days it is open. The ordinance also states that owners of drive-in restaurants should provide one trash receptacle at each entrance or exit to the premises on which the drive-in restaurant is located AND at least one trash receptacle that is accessible from the driver's side window and placed between the drive through window and the street AND



these receptacles and any trash on the ground should be disposed of once every 12-hour period during the restaurant's operation. (City of St. Louis Municipal Code Chapter 11.18.060)

It is a tricky ordinance to enforce. Some commercial properties are very small and have very few employees. The ordinance is supposed to be explained to owners, but sometimes there is so much involved in starting a new business that it gets lost or forgotten. And sometimes, the owners of a commercial property are not in proximity to see that the trash is starting to become a problem. In the big scheme of things, the above often gets overlooked. Until it cannot anymore.

Your Alderpersons, the Department of Zoning and your Neighborhood Stabilization Team are working with neighborhood leaders to encourage compliance with this ordinance. But we can always use your help.

I spoke with a resident of an adjoining neighborhood and he had a great idea for individual action. He said that he has been concerned with trash that accumulates and blows down the road from a nearby business that he frequents. He said that when he visits the business and gets his receipt, the company asked his feedback via a survey on the bottom of the receipt. So, he started to respond. And he continually cited his concern about the trash on the property and blowing down the street.

After a few weeks, he saw workers cleaning up trash on the property. He took the time to get out of the car and thank them. He also went inside and thanked the manager and he continued to fill out the surveys noting that he saw improvement and thanking the company. Then he told his friends to do the same thing.

And you know what? I see a positive difference with loose trash on this property, so I advocate giving this a try. In some fashion – kindly, I hope – let your commercial neighbors know that you appreciate their good neighborliness. Fill out that survey. Heck, you might even get a free meal or the chance to win \$500. You cannot win if you don't play.

And if one of your commercial neighbors states that they cannot afford to follow the trash ordinances – please ask them to call me. I

can connect commercial business owners to individuals and agencies who can brainstorm options for anyone who is having a difficult time managing their properties.

We are all in this together. We need each other and if we work together in a neighborly fashion, we can pave a new road for all involved – one free of litter.

## 2019 100 Neediest Cases

By Ellen Wilson

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Gilchrist and Tricia Heliker helped to keep the deadline of the *Gazette* and provided space for the publicizing the project.

Several Block Captains did double duty this year to get the flyers out. Thanks to all who hit the pavement this year. Suzanne Carron, Andrea Thein, Barb McDonald, Richard Buthod, Sharon Angle, Erin O'Reilly, Barbara Gilchrist, and Debra Knox Deiermann helped get them on your doorstep.

Wrapping the presents has become a highlight of my year and having help is what makes it fun. This year, Debbie Kurowski, Sandy Pritt, Linda Taylor, and Anne Orcutt organized everything and made the gifts look beautiful.

As always, thank you and have a great year!!!

2019 Donors – Whether you dropped off wrapping material, a check, purchased gifts, helped with logistics, or just said thanks, I am so grateful to everyone who contributed in any way.

Anonymous  
Marilyn and Mark Abbott  
Gretchen Arnold  
and James Bohman  
Robert Ashton  
Melissa Beaty-Schraer  
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Bruce and Ruth Brooks  
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The Warren Family  
Margaret Wayne  
Erica and Stephen Westbrooks  
Mora Williams and Mike Miller  
Jason Winfrey



# Free Home Repair Opportunity

By Sean Spencer

**T**OWER GROVE NEIGHBORHOODS COMMUNITY Development Corporation (TGNCD) has invested over \$1M in blight removal, trash pick up, infrastructure improvements, affordable for sale and for rent development projects in Tower Grove South over the last five years. We're proud of our accomplishments and we look forward to reporting on our overall success in the coming months. One community development activity we identified as an area of need was programming around existing homeowners and helping them with home repairs. Home repair programs help our neighbors age in place by helping them stay in place instead of having pressure to move due to roof leaks, no heat, masonry problems, and other deferred maintenance items that decrease quality of life and add a layer of stress. We've heard stories of neighbors living with trash cans in their bedrooms to collect rainwater!

Through our framework and vision plan completed in 2014 and our five-year strategic plan, collaborating with other CDCs to deliver more services to our neighborhoods was a top priority. We're fortunate to have developed a strong relationship with Carondelet Betterment Federation (CBF) who recently received a grant from the Federal Home Loan Bank on Des Moines for \$1.8M to help low-to-moderate income people, disabled and older adults with home repairs. With our request, they included the 63116 zip code (Tower Grove South) in their successful application for funding. TGNCD and CBF are excited to introduce this new program focused on helping existing residents with home repairs. The scope of work is determined by need and program guidelines. CBF estimates many projects to be in the \$15,000 to \$20,000 range and could include work on heating and cooling systems, tuckpointing, roof and gutter replacement and repair, ADA enhancements, etc. Anyone interested in learning more, please contact Kelly at 314-752-6339 with CBF for details on income restrictions, program guidelines and to apply.

## TGHNA Meeting Summary January 2020

The guest speaker at January's meeting was our new St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department District 2 Commander, Christi Marks. Captain Marks stated that she loves the Second District and loves a challenge. She has an MBA and approaches policing from a business perspective. "What can I do to make the business (the police department) better?" She supports and encourages community policing which she describes as listening to members of the community to find the best solutions to problems. When asked about foot patrols, her response was that the police should be visible.



Aldersonperson Megan Green reported on two Board bills: The first would limit gun ownership for people with a conviction or restraining order for domestic abuse. She said the bill is based on federal law and that both Kansas City and St. Louis County are pursuing similar measures. The second is a bill that addresses asbestos abatement. It is being proposed because of all the buildings that are being taken down. The bill would prohibit the same company deconstructing the building from also making the

abatement report as this may be a conflict of interest.

Aldersonperson Green also reported that she has gained permission to have speed humps installed on Gustine even though it is a snow route. The humps will be between Arsenal and Gravois. The 2020 participatory budget process will begin soon. She acknowledged that there is unused money from previous years because the dog park proposed for McDonald Park has not been completed.

She also addressed questions from the floor regarding two recent Missouri Ethics Commission violations and her recent arrest during a demonstration.

Katie Wolf, NIS for the 15th Ward, reminded us to call the Citizens' Service Bureau about potholes and any water collecting on sidewalks or bubbling up because of over-saturation.

Treasurer, Rick Stein, provided his annual financial report for 2019 which will be available to view on the website.

Debra Knox Deiermann, TGS-TGH Block Captain Coordinator, reported that a Block Captain is needed for the 3600-3700 block of Humphrey. Debra is also the chair of the Communications Committee and reminded everyone to check your junk mail folder if you signed up for the TGHNA notification list via MailChimp and are not receiving it.

Ryan Barry, chair of the Safety Committee, reported that the committee's primary initiative for 2020 is working with the Schnucks on South Grand to address the trash level in that vicinity.

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## Michelle Sherod

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# What Makes Your Home Unique?

By Barbara Gilchrist

Each of us who live in a house or apartment in Tower Grove Heights can find something unique about our residence. Perhaps it is the staircase to the basement that is accessed by lifting part of the stairs that go to the second floor. Perhaps it is what the space, or at least the first floor, used to be. Many buildings at the intersections of Spring and Gustine had businesses. Or maybe it is the history of the place like the prostitution that used to exist at one house on our block.



In our house, it is something my Texas-born spouse and I created – a first floor powder room with a cowgirl theme. Over time it has become a museum of cowgirl stuff. The walls are covered with photographs, posters and other things. The inside of the door sports a 1950s kid's vest and chaps along with a tote bag with a cowgirl embossed on it. Above the door is a set of cow horns and a cowgirl hat. Several items adorn the floor. There is even a ceiling light cover that fits the theme.

We either had or have collected most of the items in this bathroom. Many of the pieces, however, were given to us by friends. It seems that once you start collecting something, other people like to participate with you.

I am not going to inventory every cowgirl item packed into this relatively small space, but the following will give you a sense of what is there. There is a photograph of my grandmother with one of the racehorses she and my grandfather owned as well as a photo of my sister and me (I was probably ten) with our grandmother and one of the horses. There is a photo of a friend of



ours at her fifth birthday party on a pony and one of those staged photos of my spouse's sister and parents on a covered wagon prop.



There are Buffalo Bill and Annie Oakley posters; many old pictures of women in cowgirl clothing; themed hand towels; a couple of multi-media collages by St. Louis artist, Linda Solovic; an old etching of the Alamo; a pair of turquoise cowboy boots; spurs; horseshoes; toy horses; a wooden snake; and a set of coasters on display. Even the back of the toilet has a trivet with a cowgirl and the words "Don't fence me in." There are seven colorful cards that have been framed, each with a witty saying such as "If the boot fits,

buy it in every color."

If you need to use the facilities, obviously there is much to look at while in there. At every social event we host, there is always someone who must show the bathroom to someone else who has not seen it before. On any Tuesday morning, one of my knitting group friends will announce that she has to "visit the girls." The room has been and will continue to be a wonderful source of conversation and humor.

Editor's note: We wonder what makes your home unique. Please let us know if you would like to write about it for the *Gazette* or if you want an article about it written by someone else.

## Need Student Volunteers?

Roosevelt High School seniors need to complete 20 hours of community volunteer time in order to graduate. The organizations do not need to be vetted by the school district, but should be established nonprofits or neighborhood organizations. A good example would be a community garden work day. If your organization has an event for which it needs student volunteers, please contact Ms. Enna Dancy, Principal, at Roosevelt High School, 314-534-8965 or [enna.dancy@slps.org](mailto:enna.dancy@slps.org).

Some students at Roosevelt (all grades) also participate in the A-Plus Program. For that program, they need 50 hours of time volunteer tutoring or mentoring a younger student, typically through a school. If you have a volunteer opportunity of that kind, please contact Ms. Rachel Irvin, Counselor, at Roosevelt HS, 314-776-6040 or Rachel.Irvin@slps.org.



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# Beautification Contest Makes A Return

By Tricia Heliker

**T**HERE ARE THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN BROWSING SEED catalogs since January and others who haven't given digging in the dirt a thought since the weeding gloves came off last year. Either way, there's a good reason to direct your attention to your front yards and façades.

Tower Grove Heights Neighborhood Association is bringing back the beautification awards from years ago and adding incentive to implement those ideas that, until now, never made it past the planning stages. A total of five winners will be announced on June 27 and each winner will receive a gift card and a yard sign for bragging rights.

There will be 3 categories. The first category will be for landscaping on any part of the yard that is visible from the street. Corner lots with exposed back yards will be eligible as will wide side yards or large gangways. Another category, the "Curb Appeal Award," includes landscaping the yard, but also anything done to the façade of the house. That means window boxes, hanging and potted plants, door décor, porch furniture, ornamental art, new windows, and fresh paint are all taken into consideration for this award.



There will be a first and second place award for each of these categories. One more category, the "Forget-Me-Not Award," will be presented to the resident who gets creative with the alley side of their residence and gives it some love. In addition to the individual awards, one street will be recognized for best overall appearance. That means each block has a one in fourteen chance of claiming that honor.

The Beautification Committee will serve as judges and every property within the TGH borders will be automatically entered into the competition. That includes any commercial buildings as well. Everyone has a chance here, so don't be intimidated if you live next door to someone who works at the Botanical Garden.

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# Shiny Objects on Hartford St.

By Rich Iezzi

I was looking at the houses across the street recently and I noticed something shiny on Marie Keath and Tom Ganim's roof on the 3800 block of Hartford. It wasn't a skylight. What could it be?

Previously, the *Gazette* did an article on Tom and Marie that covered the rehab work they were doing themselves. The article described the house as having a tower and a concrete lion. Now the

house has a tower, a lion – and solar panels. So that's the shiny object I saw on their roof.

According to Marie, they saw an ad on Facebook that promised solar panels could supply 60 percent of their home's energy needs and requested the company to do an assessment. "They looked at everything – the electrical service panel, the pitch of the roof and our current energy requirements," Tom reported.

When I asked if the driver behind installing the panels was saving money or "saving the planet," Tom came down on the saving-the-planet side. "My parents grew up during the Great Depression and

**"My parents grew up during the Great Depression and always told us to turn out the lights. With the solar panels, we can keep the lights on and not feel bad."**

always told us to turn out the lights. With the solar panels, we can keep the lights on and not feel bad." Along with a reduction in energy costs, it's hard to put a dollar figure on the intrinsic value of getting "free" power from the sun.

There were many incentives to go with solar panels. Marie confirmed, "We got a \$900 credit from Ameren and the entire cost of the project was rolled into a loan."

The solar panels were the main part of the job, but insulation was also added to the third floor and a thermal blanket was wrapped around their water heater for optimal efficiency.

In order to capture solar power, a conversion box was added next to their existing electric meter so the DC (direct current) coming from the panels can be converted to AC (alternating current) used in our homes. As the power from the solar panels supplants the power coming from Ameren, the electric meter can either slow down or run backwards, providing savings as the electric bill is reduced. On the financial end, a 20-year loan was generated to cover 100 percent of the installation cost and the energy savings pays the monthly loan payment. The loan is transferable if the house is sold and the solar panels can be removed to accommodate roof work. The total cost of the project was \$19,000 – much less than I thought. When the loan is paid off, any energy from the panels is truly "free."

Tom and Marie are happy with their solar panel installation and recommend the process to Tower Grove Heights' residents. While the 2019 solar tax deduction was 30 percent, that figure drops to 26 percent in 2020.





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By Tricia Heliker

Enthusiasm, passion, and creativity swarm in Kathleen Witek's aura as she moves about her garden boutique on South Grand tweaking her already artfully curated vignettes. It would take more than one visit to fully appreciate not only the

merchandise, but the interesting and informative dialogue Kathleen provides for every product she displays. But that's the thing, the next visit will delight with new or expanded plants and products, a unique window dressing, and most likely a reimagined way of acquainting visitors with everything from Kokedama to a new tea by August Uncommon. So, frequent visits will continue to enchant and inspire.

Customer service aptitude is a skill Kathleen honed from years of experience in corporate retail while working for a variety of large companies. After 30+ years interacting with the public through sales of books, home décor, make-up, tea, herbs, and coffee, all within mall and big box locations, she realized she longed for a more personal

relationship with her customers. As she put it, "I thrive in a boutique environment." The experience of living in various locations from Atlanta to New Orleans to St. Joe, and various places in between, gave her and her husband enough research to know they longed to return to St. Louis. Although both had been born in cities further south, they had lived in St. Charles, had rehabbed a house in Old North near Crown Candy, and had resided downtown. This time they were looking, not only for a home, but a location for a shop. Kathleen had managed her own consignment shop in St. Joe called Sabado, but enticing job offers pulled them away from that city. As a couple they are strong supporters of urban preservation and had been members of Metropolis during their previous stay in the 90s. So once again they were looking for a home and retail space with historic architecture and located in a neighborhood of diversity. Her friends, the proprietors of Urban Matter, encouraged her to look for a spot on South Grand.

And thus was born Garden District STL at 3203 South Grand Blvd., a space recently vacated by Bali. As you might expect, beautiful greenery is sprinkled throughout the space, but in every possible nook and cranny prepare to be enchanted by unique merchandise be it cards, puzzles, photo albums, scarfs, jewelry, and so much more. A majority of the vendors showcased in the shop are local or within a 500-mile radius of St. Louis. In scouting for merchandise, Kathleen strives for a good balance between quality, variety and price point. Recently three vendors, who have space at the Tower Grove Farmers' Market, were recruited by Garden



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District STL. One vendor from Kansas City, with the clever name of Coasters to Coasters, incorporates scenes from this area onto her product. A fondness for teas has led Kathleen to expand the lines she carries, secure a special shelving unit to display them and make sure every customer who enters the store is offered a sip of tea from her carefully arranged tea table.

Tea can be enjoyed at a small garden table and chairs located in the rear of the store surrounded by a variety of potted plants. This is also the area where classes are held for small groups. Recent classes offered were Poured Acrylic Painting, Marimo Terrariums, and Kokedama. For upcoming classes check Facebook or call 314-261-4577.

This little gem is reminiscent of a tucked away discovery you might find on the streets of New Orleans, a city that is dear to Kathleen's heart. Treat yourself to some time browsing this delightful addition to South Grand. If you are looking for a unique gift for yourself or someone else, this is the place. I picked out a birthday gift and sent it to a friend in Florida. She loved it so much she called and asked me to pick up two more.



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# New Energy

By Rich Iezzi

**IT'S ALWAYS GOOD TO KNOW THAT WHEN OUR neighborhood loses good friends, new buyers can take their place and charge the Heights with new energy and dreams.**

Dave and Sara Langan lived on the 3600 block of Juniata for years and we were sad to see them go. However, Megan Rooney and Jeff Albert bought Dave and Sara's house and we've got a new energy source.

Megan and Jeff met each other through mutual friends and have known each other for 14 years. They traveled a bit before buying in the Heights. Megan mentioned, "I used to live on the 3900 block of Utah, then Jeff bought the house next door." From there, they moved to California and loved it, but it was too pricey. They both had family in the St. Louis area and moved back, realizing what a great value St. Louis' houses are. "When our California friends see what we were able to buy in St. Louis, they are so jealous," reveals Jeff. Like other residents, they enjoy



Tower Grove Park and the convenience of South Grand.

Both Jeff and Megan work downtown. Jeff is with a community development firm, specializing in historic projects while Megan is a social worker. Their Juniata neighbors report seeing a display of plants on their front porch and lawn and when asked, Megan describes her planting style as a "messy gardener." She sticks with flowers, claiming that produce-type gardens require too much maintenance.

I heard a rumor that Megan and Jeff lived next to a B&B so I asked if they wanted to talk about it. Oh my. Suddenly, Megan had fire in her eyes. Sadly, it's a familiar B&B story.

A non-occupant landlord bought the house and converted it to B&B use. It's a fulltime B&B and early on we would see 12 people in the house at a time. "Parking was a major issue," Megan fumes. It's handled by a management company who is mostly responsive but rents to occupants who can be loud and rude. "Sometimes we'll just get the baby down when a ruckus next door wakes her up," continues Megan. "On more than one occasion we've heard our front doorknob jiggling as the renters have the wrong house."

They also have to deal with outdoor smoking and trash, but they still love their home and appreciate that Dave and Sara left them a wonderful house. "Thanks for the new garage!" they both say, imagining Dave and Sara can hear them.

I also heard that both Jeff and Megan are musicians and when I brought it up, Megan smiled sweetly. Megan sings and plays piano while Jeff sings and plays guitar in the band, Spectator (<https://spectatorstl.bandcamp.com/>). They describe their music as "dream rock" or possibly "folk rock." They love writing their own music, being recorded, playing with other musicians and playing live. "Before the baby, we used to get out and play more," Megan explains.

They enjoy making recordings at "Native Sound" on Cherokee and currently have two records that were released in Norway. KDHX often plays their music.

The creativity and closeness they describe is enviable. "We had a horn player sit in on one of our productions and now we've got a horn connection," beams Megan.

They have a lot of music in their heads. Megan tells me, "Jeff is always playing" and occasionally she'll hear something, and they'll work on turning that little idea into a song.

Maybe Megan and Jeff are wearing off on me. Talking with them was music to my ears.

## Update Real Estate News

### REAL ESTATE NEWS

E-Mail your real estate questions to: [jfloridastl@gmail.com](mailto:jfloridastl@gmail.com)

#### Homes Sold in Tower Grove Heights this quarter

Street	Listed At	Days on Market	Sold Price
3618 Arsenal St	\$225,000.00	96	\$205,000.00
3846 Connecticut St	\$239,000.00	12	\$230,000.00
3806 Arsenal St	\$344,900.00	37	\$341,900.00
3833 Humphrey St	\$349,900.00	64	\$347,000.00
3723 Juniata St	\$339,900.00	4	\$347,600.00
3631 Hartford St	\$389,900.00	53	\$360,000.00
3670 Wyoming St	\$374,900.00	233	\$370,000.00
3842 Juniata St	\$442,500.00	7	\$425,000.00
3804 Humphrey St	\$425,000.00	13	\$430,000.00
3700 Connecticut St	\$450,000.00	15	\$440,000.00







At the last meeting of 2019, TGHNA surprised Debra Knox Deiermann and Barbara Gilchrist with the Neighborhood Hero Award for all they do to support and promote the neighborhood. Debra served as Secretary of the association for four years and currently coordinates the TGS-TGH Block Captains, something she has done for many years. She is also the copy editor for the Gazette, serves as the Chair of the Communications Committee and is on the Safety Committee. Barbara served three years on the board as President-Elect, President, and Past-President and is also a member of the Safety Committee. She is now Co-Editor of the Gazette. Both find time to participate and volunteer in some way at every event sponsored by the neighborhood. They excel as champions of Tower Grove Heights.

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## Just Around the Corner Cont.

By Barbara Gilchrist

*continued from page 2*

situated at Morgan Ford and Humphrey, describes itself as a relaxed hangout with a spacious patio, happy-hour specials, TVs, a pool table and darts. Similar, but much older, is Stella Blues at the corner of Morgan Ford and Fyler (Utah to the east) which is known for its reasonable prices and casual atmosphere.

Morgan Ford is not the only place to find neighborhood bars. Ryder's Tavern on Chippewa between Gravois and Oak Hill offers burgers and beer as well as spirits and has an outdoor patio.

Friendly's Sports Bar on Roger near Potomac describes itself as a casual sports bar offering standard pub grub, outdoor seating, arcade games and pool tables. There are plenty of TVs to watch sports and a beer garden.

Just east of Arsenal at Arkansas is Riley's Pub which has been described as a "true tavern" and "old school" because the interior is dark wood with high-backed booths and dim lighting.

The Grey Fox on Spring at Potomac is the only gay bar in our immediate area and features drag shows on the weekend.

The Royale, just south of Arsenal on Kingshighway, offers food and drink for lunch and dinner seven days a week. It has an outdoor courtyard and is the host to political debates during election periods.

Lest you think these watering holes are not enough, we have two microbreweries. Civil Life Brewing Company is on Holt near Beck. They offer a variety of beers on tap that includes seasonal choices as well as a number of sandwiches, soups and other snacks to eat while sipping beer inside or out on the patio. Their motto is "Be Civil."

Alpha Brewing Company, located on Fyler just west of Morgan Ford, moved into the neighborhood in 2018. They also offer a variety of beers with interesting names such as Atheist Ale, Believers Brew and Cherry Funk. Customers can munch on burgers or tacos and other tasty snacks.

We also have two small, independent grocery stores. Gustine Market is on Gustine between Hartford and Juniata and is the perfect place to pick up the one or two items you need or to grab a snack. It also has an amazing offering of wine and beer. Watch for the wine tasting events on every other Friday.

Local Harvest Grocery brings us back to Morgan Ford, between Arsenal and Hartford. It is larger than Gustine Market and offers more items, but still small by comparison to larger chains. Like Destination Café, Local Harvest has a mission: "Our mission is to build a local food community by supplying locally grown and produced foods from our region, 7 days a week."

Tower Grove Heights and the larger Tower Grove South neighborhood provide a rich variety of options for food and drink. I hope you will support all of these businesses.



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