

CityPULSE

August 17-23, 2016

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A newspaper for the rest of us

15th

ANNIVERSARY

ISSUE

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2013

2012

2011

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Beginnings

It started with a phone call.

My seven-year gig as general manager of The State News had ended — a parting of the ways — and now what? “Maybe I should start a newspaper,” I said facetiously to a friend on the phone. A light went on.

“That’s exactly what I should do,” I told him.

And I did.

That winter of 2000-’01, I hired grad students from the Eli Broad College of Business at Michigan State University for a market research study. They allowed that “perhaps” my idea for an alternative weekly in the Lansing market was feasible. That was enough for me.

The name came first. I half stole it from the Metro Pulse, the alternative weekly in Knoxville, Tenn. I’d been managing editor there of the daily newspaper owned by the media conglomerate E.W. Scripps Co. in the late 1980s. In 2007, Scripps bought the Metro Pulse — an odd arrangement, I thought, given that an alternative newspaper is an alternative to the mainstream newspaper. In 2014, as newspaper profits declined, Scripps closed the Metro Pulse. And, in the ever-shrinking world of mainstream newspapers, Scripps has since sold all its publications.

The name City Pulse was an instant hit, appealing to those who saw the potential for Lansing to be more sophisticated, a community of people with a culturally and politically progressive outlook that City Pulse could help unite into a shared vision. Those people, in ever growing numbers, remain our niche.

The motto “A newspaper for the rest of us” came next, and it drew mixed reviews. Some people thought it projected exclusion, but I stuck with it. I wanted people to know that City Pulse was a newspaper and all that implied to me as a career newspaperman: that it would be independent, that its coverage would have immediacy, and that we’d “comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.” And perhaps most important, the still-powerful Lansing daily represented the Establishment, and I wanted to say clearly that we did not.

Before we’d even published our first issue, some folks saw another difference: City Pulse was labeled a gay newspaper because, I presume, I am gay. The president of the Lansing City Council, Lou Adado Jr., got caught up in a sexual harassment scandal with a staffer. Amid emails between them pertaining to, among other things, undies in her desk drawer, was an exchange that went something like this:

“She: ‘What is this newspaper starting in Old Town?’”

“He: ‘Oh, that’s a gay newspaper.’”

After we launched, a bar owner signed on as an early advertiser because he despised the State Journal. Then after a month or two, he pulled out. Years later, his son came on City Pulse’s radio show to promote a music series his dad’s bar was staging. I asked him if his father had stopped advertising because I am gay, and the son said yes. Soon after, the bar advertised with us again. Things change.

After settling on a name and a motto, we needed a look, and once again I turned to MSU. I’d gotten to know Randy Yeip in my State News days when he as an undergraduate wrote harshly homo-

phobic views as a guest columnist one semester. I shared with him my disappointment in his beliefs. The next year, Randy dropped out of school. When he returned, he got in touch to let me know he was gay. We became passing friends.

Randy stayed on at the journalism school

we have today. Free publicity also played a role, such as a WKAR radio interview that Scott Pohl was kind enough to do, the weekly appearances that Tim Barron generously afforded me on his market-leading FM radio show year after year, and a TV piece by Dave Akerly when he took over as anchor at WLNS. I thank them and others for their support. I especially thank those businesses and organizations that were early distribution points. They took a chance on City Pulse based on nothing more than a prototype. Because of you, we heard early on from many people, “You’re everywhere.”

Being everywhere is part of the reason we are still here, but of course the content is the bigger reason. We know from our surveys why people pick us up — some for news, some the arts and many for unarguably the best events listings in the area. But there’s something more intangible, and it results from the sum of the people who have contributed their efforts over the years. Our writers know that City Pulse is a writer’s newspaper. They are given considerable latitude and space to express themselves, largely unfettered. Our cover artists know we let them take risks and have fun. Our ad salespeople know that we place honesty and service above all else.

These values helped us through a challenging time 18 months into our existence when Gannett, which owns the Lansing State Journal, started a competitor called Noise. It launched with billboards, including one placed around the corner from our office in Old Town, a clear shot across our bow. It had 48 pages and more when we often were still just 16. I lost sleep over Noise for a time. But our readers knew better. Noise had no soul; it reeked of plasticity. It was a faux alternative newspaper. After years of forced ad buys and an inflated page count, Gannett pulled the plug. We’ve never had a billboard, but we’re still here.

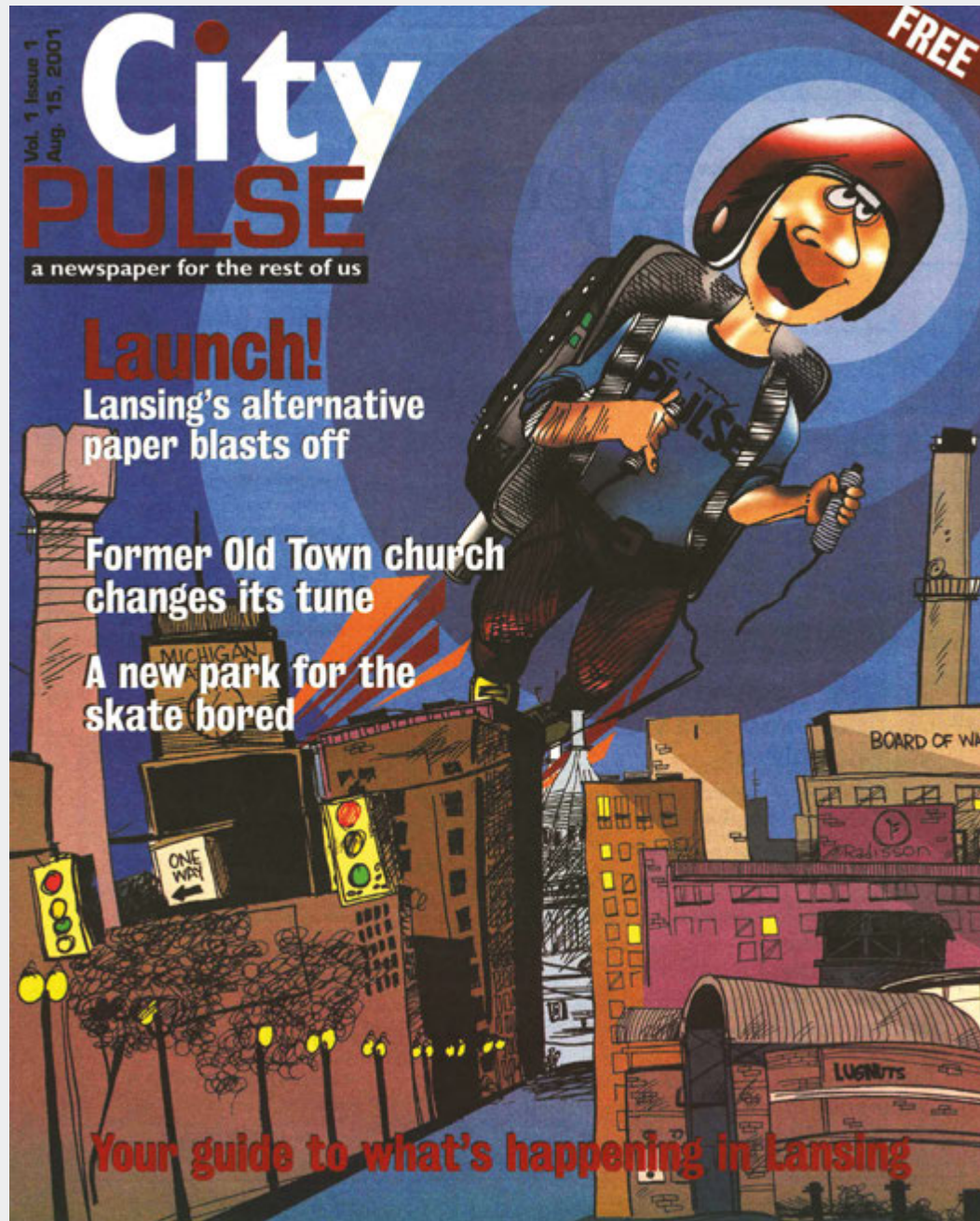
I could fill pages with the names of people to thank for their role in City Pulse, both directly and indirectly. Space doesn’t allow it, but I’d be remiss not to thank Larry Cosentino, who has had more bylines than anyone in our first 15 years. When I decided on a retrospective issue to mark

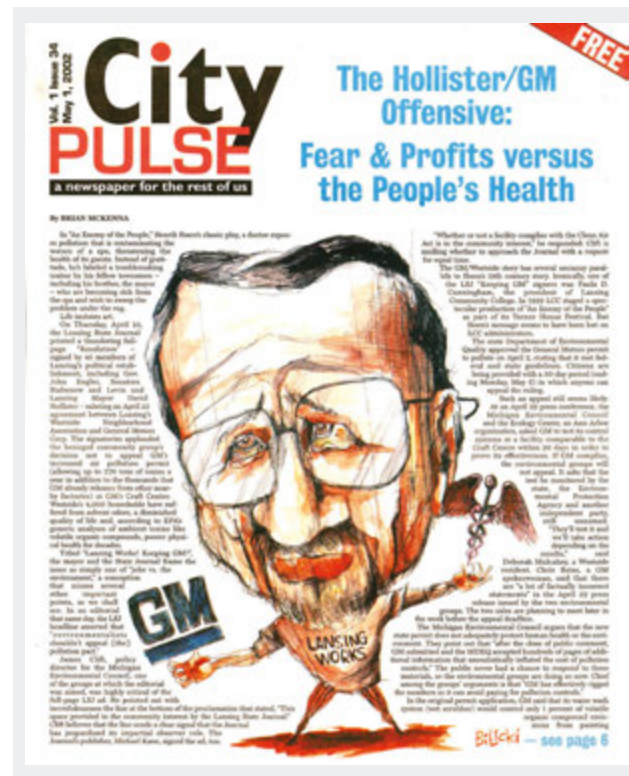
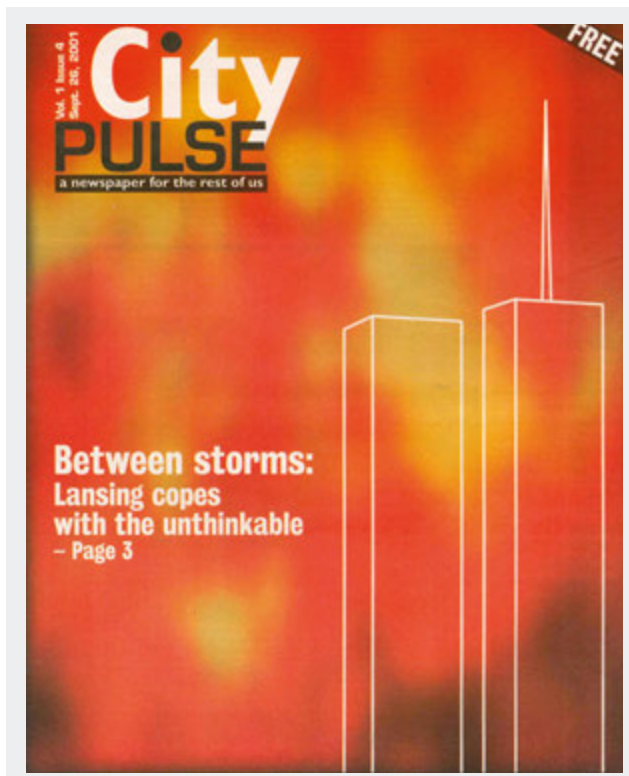
this anniversary, I turned to Larry to shape it. He went through our bound volumes and found the stories and images you are about to see. Another stellar contributor to City Pulse is our recently retired design editor Jonathan Griffith, who suited up again to assemble this special issue. And thanks as well to Peter Berg and his crew at Special Collections at the MSU Library for helping us fill in some gaps resulting from a digital meltdown in our early years.

What follows are story excerpts and covers from the first 15 years.

I’ll shut up now and let you get to it.

— Berl Schwartz





Nothing is more frustrating to a journalist than standing by when a big story is breaking — and few stories have been bigger than 9/11. That was a Tuesday, and City Pulse was well into production for its third issue the next day. Eerily, we worked on what we had planned — our cover headline was “As East Lansing’s new downtown rises, it’s time to ask: IS THIS PROGRESS?” Two weeks later, though, we devoted our cover, designed by Steve Kovar, and five inside pages to local reaction to 9/11 — and in the process began to discover one of our strengths: a more in-depth look at stories.

Sept. 26, 2001

Between Storms: Lansing copes with the unthinkable

For a few eerie days, Lansing seemed united in horror, disbelief, fear and patriotism by the tragic events of Sept. 11. Merchants ran out of flags, which appeared everywhere - on homes, on cars, in the windows of businesses, in galleries (Todd Mack draped a large flag with black crepe and a mourner’s ribbon in his window in Old Town. A sign below it said: “September 11, 2001”), a lawn statue of Christ on East Saginaw Avenue. Citizens gathered in churches, at the Islamic Center, at Oldsmobile Park. The Midwestern disdain for New York City disappeared, replaced by expressions of sympathy, such as “Our hearts are with you N.Y.” on Su Casa’s sign on South Cedar Street.

But as President Bush engaged in the most hawkish language America has heard since his father’s administration, divisions

began to appear locally. Several hundred marched for peace from the MSU campus to the Capitol.

An even deeper rift, though, presented itself: A few citizens dared to say that while the thousands who died in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania may have been innocent victims, America, through its foreign and economic policies, was not quite so innocent a victim.

...
Tim Barron , radio personality, WMMQ-FM:

“We stayed on the air for a while, giving out the information when it came to us, right up until after the second plane. When that hit, we went to the national feed, and then we heard about the Pentagon, and that was it, we didn’t cut in anymore. On Wednesday, I opened the show with ‘Ladies and gentlemen of America, welcome to the rest of the world.’ Things have been blowing up in other countries for many, many years, and we’ve never had to deal with it. In a way, we in America are becoming world citizens by this. The average Joe Six-Pack American can no longer be an ignorant American. How much have we learned in the past week about Afghanistan and Islam? The average American is going to learn more about the world, and the net result of this, as horrible as it was, is that we are all going to be better citizens and better citizens of the world, I really believe that. That can be a positive thing that came out of this.”

City Pulse: “Have you taken some calls from people on this?”

Barron: “Oh yeah, hundreds of calls. We get everything from ‘Shoot everybody in the head’ to ‘Round everyone up and send them

back to their country.’ That kind of stuff is more widespread than you’d think.”

CP: “Anybody against retaliating?”

Barron: “One person.”

To say City Pulse hit a nerve with its May 1, 2002, cover is an understatement. In Goliath fashion, The Keep GM movement was in full throttle in 2002. City Pulse’s David was Brian McKenna, an environmental journalist with time on his hands. When an Ann Arbor environmental group proposed that GM offset the higher pollution standards it was seeking for its new Delta Township plant by lowering pollution at its paint plant on Verlinden Street in Lansing, the Establishment went nuts, and McKenna went to work in a column on March 8, 2002. He returned to the subject at length on May 1, and we turned to Justin Bilicki, who had been an editorial cartoonist at The State News, to portray then Mayor David Hollister as a human scale of justice that favored GM over the public’s health.

March 6, 2002

GM is not thy brother’s keeper

by BRIAN MCKENNA

You might think Lansing Mayor David Hollister’s office is the PR arm of General Motors.

Last week the mayor reconvened the “Keep GM Blue Ribbon Committee” in an emergency attempt to convince Westside

Cover

from page 4

Lansing residents to keep silent when the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality offers them the chance to appeal GM's request for a permit to increase its federally monitored toxic gas emissions on the already over-gassed community.

At stake is the health, well-being and quality of life of residents of about 1,800 households, including schoolchildren in four schools, who suffer headaches, watery eyes and asthma attacks after decades of frustration over poor air quality.

Or is it?

From the Keep GM committee's perspective, the stakes are elsewhere. "We've gotten signals from Detroit. They've threatened to back out of the Delta plant if there is an appeal," said David Weiner, Hollister's chief aide. "At risk are 18,000 jobs and \$10 billion by 2020. GM has opened new plants in Mississippi and Alabama, and the trend is to go South. Everything we've worked for during the past five years can go up in smoke," he said.

"Please don't appeal," a Delta supervisor pleaded to Westside citizens at Thursday's meeting.

The Lansing State Journal reinforces this view with misleading headlines ("Residents Reject GM Proposal," Feb. 28, when in fact most residents have not rejected it and are still actively negotiating with GM), erroneous statistics (claiming that GM proposed reducing Craft Centre emissions by 28 percent when in fact GM proposed increasing them by 270 tons, Feb. 28), glaring factual omissions (e.g., no coverage of the Michigan Public Health Institute's "Framework for Assessing Environmental Health" report, which asserts that toxic gases, like those released from GM, may contribute to heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, congestive heart failure and death), and toothless editorials (e.g., "GM Makes Good Faith Efforts to Lower Emissions," Feb. 27).

The meta-message: GM is being reasonable and its Westside neighbors are selfish spoilers.

Hogwash!

Indeed, the opposite is true. Westside citizens have long endured unreasonable assaults on their quality of life from federally recognized toxins that GM, for many years, denied even existed.

...

For decades GM has broken toxic permit levels and suffered little or no fines. The mainstream press has refused to publish asthma statistics produced by Joanne G. Hogan, a statistics specialist with the Department of Community Health, which show that youths in zip code 48915 - the Westside area - have an asthma

hospitalization rate of is 50.3 per 10,000, the highest in Lansing.

...

If you put aside fine-tuned debates about what constitutes a "legitimate health" effect, the plain fact is GM has already ruined the quality of life for thousands of Westside residents. Rather than raising the federally recognized toxic load, they should be paying compensation. In Coburg, Ore., last year, residents sued Monaco Coach Corp. for similar problems and won.

Several months into the crisis, one essential fact remains the same: GM doesn't care about the health and well-being of Westside citizens, just like it didn't care about the people of Flint. GM has yet to offer to spend a thin dime on pollution abatement equipment to help resolve the matter. Instead, the world's most profitable corporation wraps itself in the American flag, makes threats to leave and offers a few crumbs to its neighbors.

"Without the hurdle of the public participation permitting process, nobody would be listening to us," said Mulcahey.

It's called democracy, something the auto giant views as an impediment to conducting business.

City and state officials have demonstrated that they will continue to appease GM rather than make them clean up their act. Westside citizens are pondering a response.

Follow-up

May 8, 2002

City Pulse hits nerve at City Hall

We got word Monday that Lansing Mayor David Hollister has ordered city employees not to speak to anyone from City Pulse...Is it just a coincidence that it came during a week in which the mayor was featured on the cover of City Pulse under the headline "The Hollister/GM Offensive: Fear & Profits versus the People's Health"? A story for which the mayor was unavailable for comment. Or that inside the paper, City Pulse raised questions about the mayor's handpicked public relations firm, Kolt & Serkaian? A story for which the mayor was also unavailable for comment.

(In both cases, he was unavailable before he decided he just wasn't talking to us anymore. Being unavailable for comment makes it difficult to be fair to him.)

This too shall pass. Meanwhile, City Pulse will have to work a little harder to get information. That's not necessarily a bad thing. The media are too reliant on the usual sources anyway.

Hollister's censorship stood until the ACLU intervened, pointing out he was violating city employees' First Amendment rights to free speech. In a memo to them, Hollister said they could speak to City Pulse but didn't have to. "Second Shift," a just-published book on the Keep GM Movement, Hollister and his co-authors write about the challenges of "controlling the media." "Most, if not all, media came around." It's safe to say City Pulse did not come around to being controlled.

New eyes often tell a new story, and that was the case with this one. Daniel Sturm showed up one day at our original office in

Old Town and introduced himself as a German journalist in our midst because his American wife was studying at Michigan State University. We took him on, and for the next couple of years, City Pulse looked at the world through his European eyes. Here he tells an unsettling story about one of Michigan's icons.

Aug. 21, 2002

Inside Sparty's Third Reich Roots

By DANIEL STURM

He is without question the most popular figure on Michigan State University's campus: the Spartan, better known as "Sparty," a three-ton, 11-foot-high colossus. You can find his face on cups, sweatshirts and jackets, and meet him in person as a full-bodied mascot at MSU celebrations and football games. Since he was erected in 1945, university officials proudly call him the largest freestanding ceramic figure in the world. Today, green-and-white clad students guard Sparty through the night on the eve of the MSU-UM game, and devoted alumni praise him with religious fervor.

At first glance, the stone-faced MSU symbol impressed me as a Rambo-like warrior, with oversized muscles and a shocking emptiness of expression. Hadn't ancient Sparta been a state system, which intentionally raised children as war machines? And weren't the Spartans reputed as intellectually and artistically barren, since they limited reading and writing to an absolute minimum? Strangely, Sparty reminded me of the artwork of Nazi Germany, back when "Aryan" race body aesthetics were celebrated. Where did this guy come from?

...

In the middle of the World War II, sculptor Leonard D. Jungwirth, an MSU assistant professor, decided to create a statue of "The Spartan." Jungwirth was born in Detroit in 1903, the son of an Austrian wood-carver and modeler who had immigrated to America in 1882. His mother was born in Germany. And he studied in Germany during the rise of Adolf Hitler.

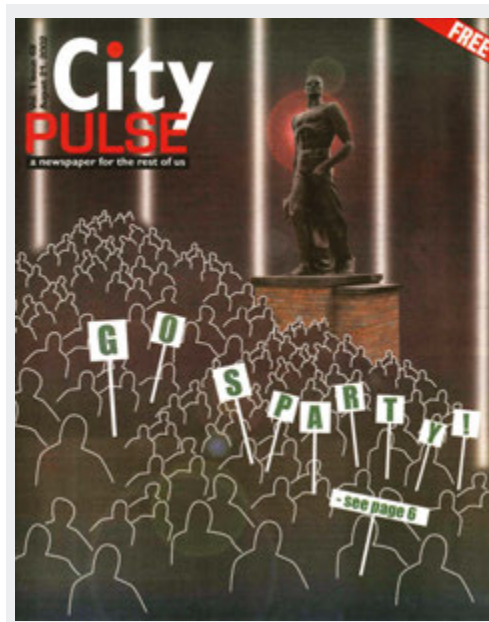
It remains unclear why Jungwirth sacrificed three years of his spare time to create Sparty without receiving any apparent compensation. Jungwirth's oldest daughter, Sandra Ayers, who lives in DeWitt, said that her father hadn't been a big sports fan. She also remembers that he didn't believe the statue was his greatest work of art. He often told her, "I hope I don't get to be known as the creator of Sparty when I die." But when he died in 1963, that is exactly what happened. Ayers believes her father's stay in Germany from 1929 to 1933 had an influence on his artwork. He'd told her about running into SA troops and about the Nazi leader Adolf Hitler, whom he'd seen on two occasions. She told City Pulse about a Nazi knife he'd brought back from Germany. "He told me it had dried blood on it, but I don't know if it did. I guess it was rusty."

In 1929, Jungwirth attended the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich. As Jungwirth arrived, [Nazis] had just started to rally in the city, which they would later call "Capital of the Movement." A 1996 MSU exhibition about Sparty and the Figurative Tradition in Sculpture acknowledges that "Jungwirth's Munich years may have been significant in the development of his idea of 'The Spartan.'"

...

The Nazis considered certain kinds of nakedness, including people with war injuries, physical handicaps, or in the process of lovemaking, "degenerate" and banned from exhibitions. The skin had to be hairless, smooth, and bronzed. The body had become an abstract symbol of Aryan beauty, as it was in Leni Riefenstahl's film of the 1936 Olympic Games.

Jungwirth might have been at least unwittingly influenced by this style. Sparty stands, invincible, at the intersection of



Cover

from page 5

Kalamazoo Street and Red Cedar and Chestnut roads, a figure to be worshipped, but neither desired nor loved.



Every year in December, City Pulse faces the challenge of coming up with a fresh holiday story. This one, which begins, "I took a Jew to Frankenmuth," is definitely not a cliché.

Dec. 22, 2004

Journey to the heart of brightness

By LAWRENCE COSENTINO

I took a Jew to Frankenmuth, Mich., to find out what Christmas in America is all about.

Some say consumerism and spirituality are incompatible, but that's an anti-capitalist crock. At Bronner's CHRISTmas Wonderland, the world's biggest Christmas-themed store, Yuletide pilgrims find themselves invoking the Lord more often and fervently than at any time in their lives. Cohen and I certainly did.

So soulful, so spiritual is this five-acre banquet of consumer goods that people are sometimes inspired to testify right in the aisles. "Thirty-five dollars?" I saw a woman exclaim while holding a tiny ceramic angel blowing a trumpet. "Holy Christ!"

I saw another man get religion in front of a 3-foot-tall, boot-shaped tankard elaborately decorated in the Austrian style.

"We're getting this for Lou," said the man's wife. "Today."

"Jesus," said the man, looking at the \$600 tag.

The Bronner's compound sprawls across 45 tinsel-wired acres on the outskirts of Tyrolean-themed Frankenmuth, drawing tourists from all over the world. I thought my friend — I call him Cohen, because that's his name — would be an anchor, a bulwark, a commonsense reality check on what promised to be a trying journey.

He held up bravely, poor man, but in the end it almost killed him.

"This looks like the German camp they blew up at the end of 'The Dirty Dozen,'" Cohen said as we drove along the perimeter of the grounds, past alpine rooftops, sentry-like Santas and overhead archways of lights.

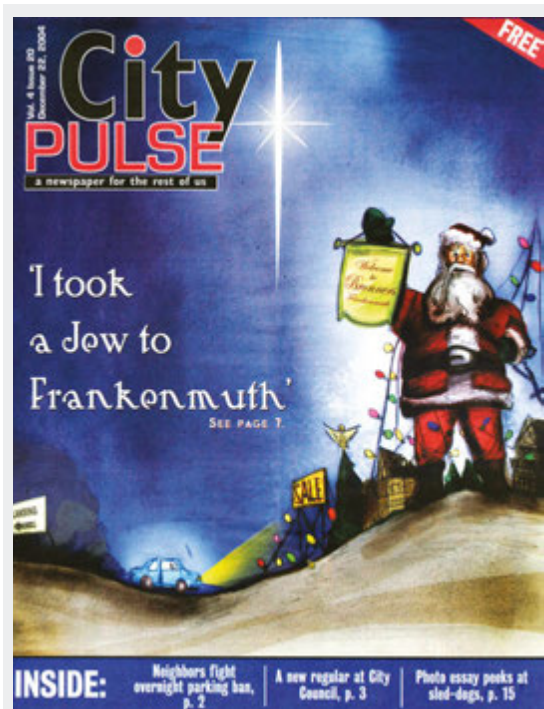
I knew he was just trying to keep our spirits up. It made me glad I brought him, but worried about whether he'd stick with the mission to the end.

...

As Cohen and I explored this labyrinth of graven images large and small, the line between the secular and the sacred didn't just blur — it did a screaming, strobe-lit can-can. The off-the-scale excess of Bronner's gives new meaning to the phrase "seeing the light." The store's electric bill, boasts its Web site, averages \$900 a day. There are 350 fully decorated Christmas trees inside. Each year, 2 million people buy 530 miles of lighting cord there.

...

Whenever Cohen disappeared, I knew to look for the nearest secular display. Sure enough, he was standing by a showcase of Swiss Army knives, wiping his brow. "I've



gotta bail out," he said. "I'll wait for you at the West Exit. Just write, 'As my friend lay mortally wounded, he urged me to press on.'"

But it was no fun without him. I tried to observe more, but all I heard was grouching from people who had been breathing stale tinsel too long with too many other people.

"You have to get into single file, dear."

"Shit, honey! This is where we came in."

"No, Colin, Batman's not here."

"Move around them, dammit" (this last from a man in a wheelchair to his wife).

I grabbed a tiny ice-cube-with-a-face ornament (for my sister) from a rack marked "real acrylic ice cubes" and headed to the nearest checkout, the South Exit. I figured I'd walk around the building from the south to the west doors, enjoying some air in the process.

Twenty-five minutes later, I found Cohen. "You walked all the way around?" he snorted. "That's like Magellan saying 'I'll just pop around the Cape.'" He could tell I was exhausted. "You better wait here while I get the car."

"What's the speed limit here?" Cohen asked as we hit I-75. "I'm gonna kiss the Genesee County line." I had never seen him quite like this, and began to wonder whether I'd asked too much of our friendship.

It was a quiet decompression dinner at the Peanut Barrel. Things between us really didn't get back to normal until I told Cohen what happened to me on the way from the south to the west door. It's a huge building, I explained, and every time you turn a corner there's another corner, and I'd had a lot of coffee that morning, and there was no way to get back in the building...

"Let's go back," said Cohen, rubbing his eyes with laughter. "I wanna see that tree."

since his last phone communiqué in July letting us know his 15-day leave had been postponed due to others in his unit requiring emergency leaves.

When the phone call came last Sunday, left for us to discover on our phone answering machine, it was from the Baghdad International Airport. His voice, deeper now, with a chuckle announcing he was on his way home for that long-awaited 15-day leave. Four days later, in a jaunt that included stopovers in Kuwait, Germany, Atlanta and Detroit, he was finally here at the airport in Lansing. It was difficult to keep the family Jeep under the speed limit as we hurtled across town.

Four days later now, I am breathing easier than I'd been breathing for a long time. Conversations with him these last few days - there have been many - seem to suggest that, despite difficult, painful, challenging, traumatic situations, he is essentially emotionally and psychologically intact, a whole lot more mature, sobered by his experience, ready for it to be over.

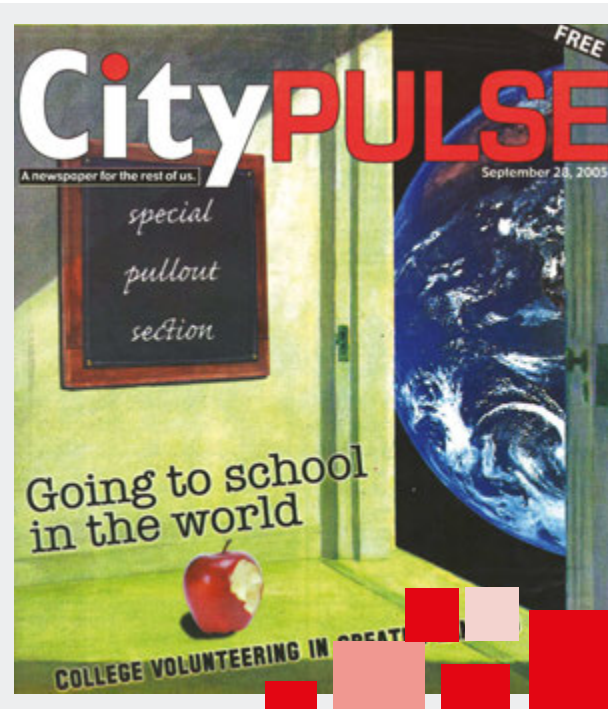
Just before he left Iraq, there had been a car bombing. Four people in his unit, three soldiers and an Iraqi interpreter, had been seriously wounded by a suicide bomber whose car had sneaked by a checkpoint, just outside the base compound, because the driver had a young child strapped in beside him. The blast was strong enough to knock the interpreter completely out of the Humvee.

When the car bomb exploded, he says he felt the blast vibrate in his chest. There are several such explosions

every day. They cause windows to ripple like water on a pond, then the windows crack and explode into tiny pieces. The other day, he awoke to thunder and rain outside his bedroom window here in Lansing and thought at first it was mortar fire, but then he smiled. It was the first precipitation he'd seen since February.

He is more talkative now than ever before. He has something to talk about, something of which he is proud. He reports that he is the first person to arrive at work in the morning, the last to leave at night, that he puts in a 12-hour workday, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., because the time goes by faster that way. He sits with me on the front porch watching the rain and says that this is the first feeling of relaxation he's felt in 10 months. Whew!

These 15 days will go by way too fast. We will have a party with family and friends on Sunday and then he will be gone again on Oct. 6. His deployment will last, we think, until at least December. There is the journey back into Baghdad to be troubled about, and those last 60 days.



"Really?"

"Oh, Jesus, no."



The first person to sign on as a contributor to City Pulse was Tom Helma, then a psychotherapist at MSU and actor who wanted to review theater, which he still does. In a departure, Tom captured the anxiety of many parents at the time in a series of pieces about his soldier son during the Iraqi War.

Sept. 28, 2005

A son at home: Breathing easier for a short 15 days

By TOM HELMA

(Tom Helma's son, Gabe, is on duty in Iraq.)

It had been 265 days since I'd seen his face, the cold night of Dec. 26, when the buses left the Marshall Street Armory heading out to Fort Dix, N.J., for deployment to Iraq. It had been 11 weeks

15



Cover

from page 6

On the way out of Iraq, he'd videotaped out the front window of a Humvee the trip through Baghdad to the airport. Burned-out buildings were everywhere, and the Humvee convoy, protective of the soldiers on board, barreled its way through city streets at 70 miles per hour, never stopping and occasionally nudging Iraqi civilian vehicles not too gently out of the way.

The war continues. For those of us who have a loved one in Iraq, it is a whole lot more than a "news-at-11" kind of an experience, more than a channel to change on the TV. At the local gym where I work out, people tune in to the 24-hour sports channel, and when I change the channel to watch the news of the war, they glare at me. People, some people, do not want to even think about the war. Others of us can not afford not to think about it for even a day.

He sleeps. It is 6:12 a.m. He has been out and about with his 18-year-old sister and her boyfriend, hanging out in the "hood," watching the movie "Napoleon Dynamite" at a friend's house, waking me up as he comes in noisily at 4 a.m. I am smiling. He is safe. I can breathe easy. I can go back to sleep.



What would the media do without Virg, a force of nature endlessly good for a story? Here Thomas Morgan reports on deadline how Bernero captured City Hall the first time. Given his colorful character, it seemed only fitting to put him on a tabloid cover that in another city he might have shared with the likes of LaGuardia and Koch.

Nov. 9, 2005

How Virg landed a landslide

By THOMAS MORGAN

When Virg Bernero walks into his new office on the 9th floor of City Hall in January, he will have completed a 32-month quest to become mayor of Lansing.

Bernero, 41, went from finishing 18 points down to Mayor Tony Benavides in the 2003 primary to winning in a landslide Tuesday night.

A senior adviser for the Bernero campaign said the campaign's strategy didn't change much from two years ago. What did change, however, are the issues and the state of the city.

"The biggest shift we saw was a sea change in the issue environment, from a positive look about Lansing to a much more pessimistic outlook by voters," the adviser said.

A poll commissioned by Bernero in February of this year showed Benavides with a 41-35 lead over Bernero. At about the same time that poll was conducted, the Lansing School District closed five schools due to high costs and declining enrollment. A few weeks later, General Motors announced it would shut down its Verlinde plant. At the same time, the city struggled to shore up a \$6.8 million budget deficit, with Benavides and the City Council battling every step of the way.

Also in the spring, the sour contract

negotiations between the administration and the UAW Local 2256, which represents 300 city workers, became public after Benavides' budget called for \$2.5 million in labor concessions. On April 18, a crowd of 100 city workers and their families descended upon City Hall to protest the labor cuts.

Two days later, with a gray cloud hanging over Lansing, Bernero formally announced his candidacy.

"To a degree, we didn't have to do anything to capitalize on it," the Bernero adviser said of the city's condition. "We really didn't have to say much to take advantage of that."

But take advantage they did. Within months of declaring his candidacy, Bernero landed all of the major endorsements, including every labor union, the Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce and the Michigan Education Association.

With those endorsements came big money. According to the latest campaign finance reports released at the end of last month, Bernero raised \$266,785 while Benavides raised \$203,940. The actual fundraising gap was even wider; Benavides and his wife, Carmen, were the mayor's biggest contributors, pumping in nearly \$80,000 of their own money this year alone.

The negative chain of events within the city combined with Bernero's groundswell of support appeared to inflict tremendous political damage to Benavides: By June, a poll showed Bernero with a 41-27 lead over Benavides. That lead widened even further by the Aug. 2 primary, in which Bernero outpaced Benavides 46 percent to 27

percent. Former state Rep. Lynne Martinez and city worker Dale Abronowitz were eliminated.

"Two years ago, Virg was perceived as too aggressive and with too much energy to the point of making people nervous," the Bernero adviser said. "Two years later, those perceived liabilities became assets."



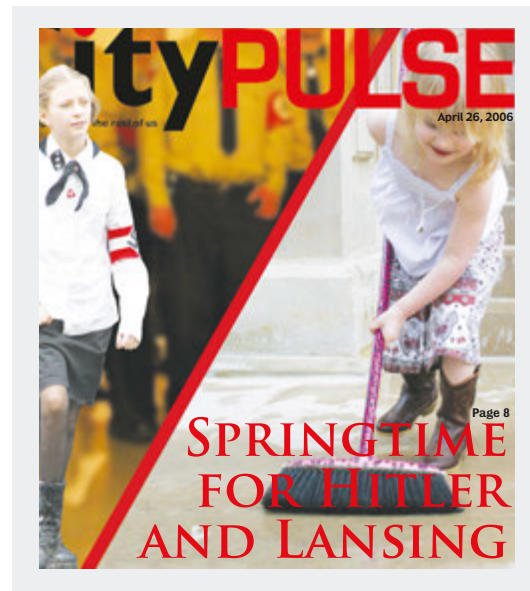
Our newsroom is usually empty on a weekend, but that was not the case when the neo-Nazis came to town on a Saturday in Spring 2006. After covering the rally at the Capitol, our reporters wrote what they saw and Thomas Morgan out it together into a classic example of team journalism as well as the advantage of perspective that being a weekly can afford. Our cover, featuring the children of Neo-Nazis, speaks to the banality of evil.

April 25, 2006

As neo-Nazis rally, Lansing takes action

(This story was written by Thomas P. Morgan based on reporting by him and Gretchen Cochran, Lawrence Cosentino, Laleah Fernandez, Kyle Melinn, Joseph Neller, Stephen Patterson and Emily Sorger.)

Lansing City Council President Harold Leeman Jr. lifted up the brim of his



15 covers for 15 years

Covers matter, for obvious reasons, but they came to matter more when Gannett Co. launched the free weekly Noise in our market 18 months after City Pulse started. It always ran photos, so we became more dedicated than ever to original art and digital illustrations. Over the years, we've been blessed with staff members who themselves were artists, such as Steve Kovar, Vince Joy and Jonathan Griffith, and with wonderful freelancers, such as Dennis Preston and Justin Bilicki. On these two pages are a few examples.



Oct. 10, 2001

Justin Bilicki, an MSU grad who had been the cartoonist at The State News, offers his take on 9/11.



Nov. 7, 2001

Local artist Dennis Preston, famous for his rock posters back in the day, makes his debut in City Pulse with this cover the day after David Hollister is easily elected to this third term as mayor of Lansing.



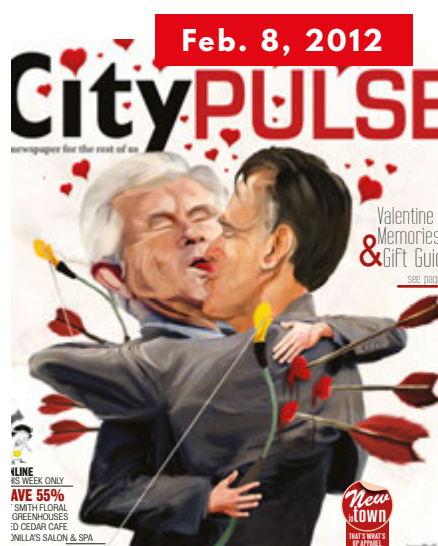
Feb. 20, 2002

Steve Kovar bailed out City Pulse our first week when he took over as production manager at the last minute, working through the night after his day job. He painted several covers for us in the early days.



Dec. 7, 2011

Vince Joy's cover for a story on arts patron Selma Hollander.



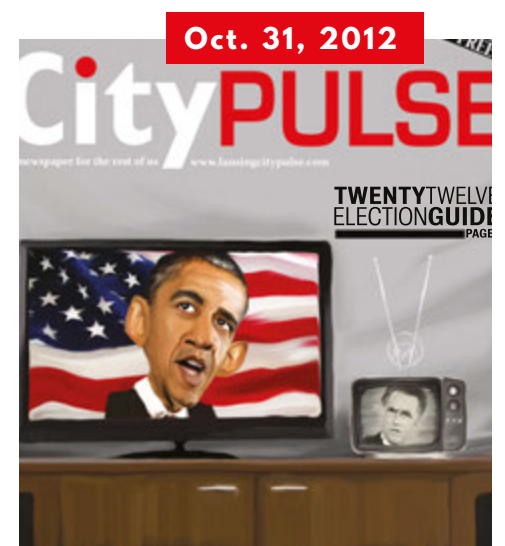
Feb. 8, 2012

We asked Justin Bilicki to produce a Valentine's cover with the leading candidates for the GOP nomination for president, Newt Gingrich and Mitt Romney.



Feb. 15, 2012

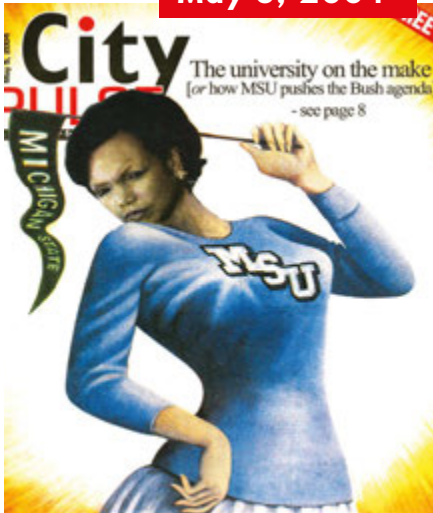
Vince Joy on the local debate over Zaha Hadid's design of the Broad Museum taking shape at MSU.



Oct. 31, 2012

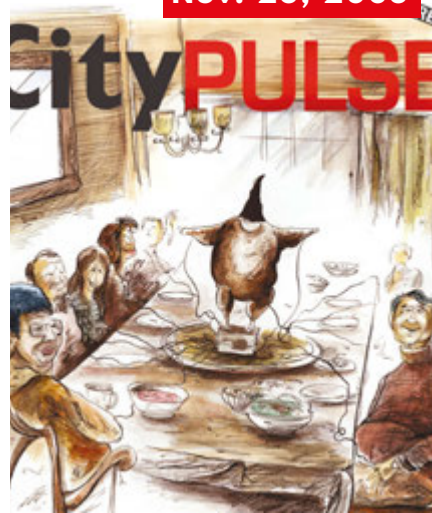
Bilicki again, this time for our 2012 General Election preview issue.

May 5, 2004



Justin Bilicki's adaptation of the famous Ramparts magazine cover depicting the connection between MSU and the First Lady of South Vietnam, Madame Nhu. In our version, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, MSU's commencement speaker, replaced Nhu.

Nov. 23, 2005



Bilicki's take on an American Thanksgiving in the time of American torture as revealed in Abu Graib.

Feb. 6, 2008



A look at Gov. Jennifer Granholm's mixed record on the environment led to this cover by freelancer Ben Corr.

Jan. 26, 2011



Vince Joy on gun control.

June 3, 2015



Jonathan Griffith turns the Capitol upside down for our annual wine issue.

July 1, 2015



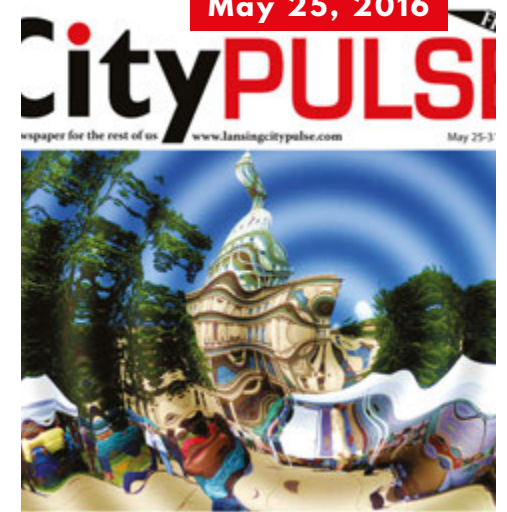
Dennis Preston celebrates July 4.

May 11, 2016



Jonathan Griffith again, this time for a story on the Lansing Symphony's new season.

May 25, 2016

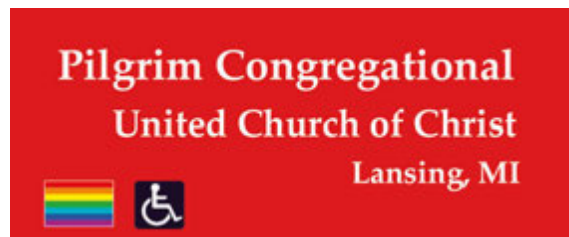


City Pulse kicks off its first "Summer of Art" with original art by local artists who agreed to donate their pieces to the Arts Council of Greater Lansing. They will be auctioned at Holiday Glitter in December.

Congratulations CityPULSE



on your first 15 years!



Cover

from page 7

floppy gardener's hat to get a better look at a Michigan State Police helicopter circling overhead.

"We'll be hearing that all day," he said, bending over to pick up another piece of trash.

A few blocks south, downtown Lansing was quieter than usual for a late Saturday morning. Almost all businesses were closed. The area was cordoned off by more than 500 police officers from 10 different agencies. Several dozen officers in riot gear segregated in groups of three or four along the sidewalk on Washington Square. Two more officers stood on the roof of the Lansing Police Department's headquarters, scanning the scene with binoculars. About 20 onlookers sat on benches facing the Capitol and spoke in hushed tones.

In two hours, the National Socialist Movement, a Minneapolis-based neo-Nazi organization, was set to rally on the Capitol steps. All was quiet except for the chop-chop-chop of the helicopter.

"We are preparing for the worst," state police Lt. Jim Shaw said. "We expect high emotional tension, and we are fully staffed in order to deal with it."

Officials feared that counter-protests, led by the Lansing Coalition Against Nazis, could lead to violent confrontations with police and neo-Nazi supporters.

...
To the east, on Michigan Avenue, baseball fans trickled toward Oldsmobile Park for the 2 p.m. Lansing Lugnugs game. A lone woman, Crystal Bradford of Las Vegas, picked her way toward the park over the construction debris on Michigan Avenue. "My boyfriend is a hitting coach," she explained.

From the vantage point of the ballpark, the activity at the Capitol looked like a swarm of ants at the bottom of an overturned jar, with the dome a lump of sugar. "It's a little scary," Bradford said. "Things like this don't happen in Vegas."

As the still-growing crowd stepped around large piles of horse manure spattered in the middle of Capitol Avenue, three buses transporting 73 neo-Nazis and their supporters arrived shortly before 2 p.m., about 30 minutes late, at the Capitol's west parking lot, visible only to media and police.

One of the last people to step off the second bus, which was driven by a black woman, was a preteen blond girl donning a full Nazi schoolgirl uniform.

"I'm not allowed to say nothin'," said the African-American bus driver when asked for comment.

The neo-Nazi rally was scheduled to start at 2 p.m. A large group of drum-

beating counter-protesters marched in a circle at the corner of Michigan Avenue and Washington Square. The crowd around the Capitol had swelled to about 600. No one in the public had seen the Nazis yet, who were still inside the Capitol speaking to some 60 members of the press.

"They're wasting their time," National Socialist Movement commander Jeff Schoep said of the throng of counter-protesters waiting to greet the Nazis outside. "Americans want change, and we're going to give them that change."

"We're growing everywhere all over the country," Schoep said. "Every time we do rallies we get bigger."

As the neo-Nazis spoke to the media, Lansing police chief Mark Alley relaxed on a flower pot in front of City Hall, casually chatting with several bystanders.

"It's going fantastic," he said.

That wouldn't last long. Fifteen minutes later, a few people had gathered in the fenced-off area designated for neo-Nazi supporters. That included one black man wearing Adidas basketball shorts, who casually spoke to a man in military fatigues while standing next to a tree.

"Let's go in!" shouted several people outside of the supporters' area, which was not protected by police. Scores of people rushed into the zone to confront the man in military fatigues, who was quickly swarmed by a fury of fists and rage. Somebody ripped the swastika band from his arm, drawing loud cheers of "No Nazis, no KKK, no fascist USA!"

After what seemed like an eternity, but really just a matter of minutes, police on horseback rushed in to break up the melee.

Four minutes later, around 2:30 p.m., the neo-Nazis finally walked out onto the Capitol steps, a half-hour later than planned. They carried with them the Israeli flag, which they made a point of laying on the concrete behind the podium and stepping on. Boos and chants of "go home" erupted in the crowd. The neo-Nazis extended the straight-armed salute. Many in the crowd extended middle fingers in response. Horse feces began flying through the crowd.

At the podium, National Socialist

Movement Chairman Clifford Harrington said the neo-Nazis would continue their rallies until they "get the attention" they need. "White power, we salute, you," he said. And once again, the crowd saluted back.

"This is a scene from 'Planet of the Apes,' and you gotta love it," Hal Turner said from the podium. "It proves what animals you all are."

"Those short, squat, chain-smoking little dwarves — go back to Mexico," another neo-Nazi shouted during his turn to speak.

"They've erected these fences to protect us," screamed another. "We are not afraid of these Negro beasts."

Janet Okagbue stood at the fence enclosing the opposing viewers with her

15-year-old daughter, Sasha. Okagbue said she brought Sasha to the rally with education in mind. "I think it's an aspect of life that a lot of kids are sheltered from," Okagbue said. "I wanted my child to be exposed to evil in a safe environment." She said they discussed safety issues beforehand, but as a young black

woman it was important for Sasha to know what groups like the National Socialist Movement are about.

"I can't really hear what they're saying," Sasha said, "but they look ridiculous, and I know that what they're saying is stupid."

Eight boys, all students of Eastern High School, raced from one fracas to another along Capitol Avenue. "We're here to take care of things," said one of the boys, unable to explain what kind of things.

The boys' attention temporarily shifted to a brown steed carrying a sheriff's deputy. The horse stiffened its legs, preparing to relieve itself. Several people backed away as the horse's penis grew in size, but the boys stayed put. With jaws agape, the boys watched as the horse urinated onto the street into what quickly became a small lake. The boys continued to watch in awe until the horse finished its business. They composed themselves and sped off to the next mini-event.

At about 4 p.m., the neo-Nazis left the Capitol steps and lined up at the west side of the Capitol to get back on the buses. While the Nazis moved west, police quickly directed the crowd to move east along

Michigan Avenue.

...
By 6 p.m., just like any early Saturday evening in downtown Lansing, all was quiet. Workers had already removed all but a few sections of the fence around the Capitol. The only real sign that anything out of the ordinary had happened was the yellow police tape that still blocked some streets and the piles of horse manure.

Gentle laughter could be heard from the Capitol steps, where about 20 high school and college students armed with rags and jugs of water were perched to symbolically — and literally — clean the rally site. Joining them were two little blond girls with toilet brushes.

"We should have people bring toilet brushes next time," somebody said to MSU student Corey Kriebel, who organized the scrubbing.

"Hopefully there won't be a next time," Kriebel responded with a wince.



Can it be more than nine years since we lost Robert Busby? The "mayor of Old Town" embraced City Pulse even before Volume I No. 1 by lending us large pieces of art to decorate our first office, on Turner Street. Here Larry Cosentino captures his gentle but determined nature, which made his murder all the more shocking.

March 7, 2007

A love supreme, a loss supreme

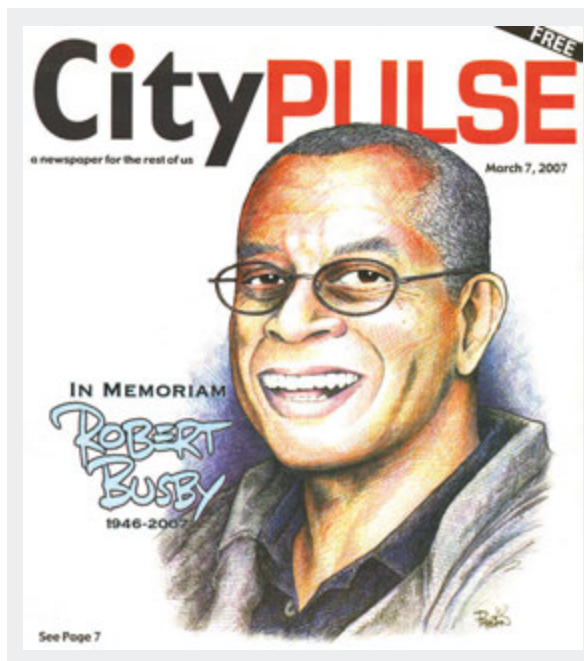
By LAWRENCE COSENTINO

In the basement of the Creole Gallery, where owner Robert Busby, 60, was found dead Feb. 27, a few of Busby's own creations gathered dust for years. In one haunting tableau, Busby re-created his boyhood in the sleepy town of Martin, Tenn., by nailing a miniature wooden railing to a board-mounted photo of a vacant yard. He dusted the construction with his own hair, inserted a plunging plastic airplane between the symbolic porch rails and glued a tiny photograph of himself, as a child, in the corner.

Among the last pieces Busby made, in 2006, was a stark wooden crate with two plastic warplanes poised for a dogfight, each painted with the word "God." Busby affixed his Air Force service photo below the toy planes, behind a 2-inch-high fence of razor wire.

A passionate fusion of politics, aesthetics and personal biography in Busby's work goes a long way toward explaining his astounding success as the guiding spirit of the Lansing arts scene and visionary of Old Town.

Busby connected with artists as an



Cover

from page 12

insider, not an exploiter.

By virtue of his gentle and firm character, he became perhaps the most beloved man in the city. He stood his ground like an oak, expanding his influence ring by ring for more than 30 years, and the neighborhood later known as Old Town took its present form under his shade.

...

More than 10 years ago, Busby was asked - for the umpteenth time, surely - about his "dream" for Old Town.

"Actually, I came here to get away from everybody," he explained with a smile. "Then I just got caught up in the spirit of renovation."

Even then, Busby was trying to cut through a yellowish buildup of legend as the George Washington of Old Town. But the public memorial service held Tuesday afternoon at LCC's Dart Auditorium proved that Busby, the master rehabber, never got far with that strip job.

As for "getting away from everybody" - forget it.

LCC officials estimated 1,100 people filled the auditorium, a cafeteria and six overflow rooms. The Professors of Jazz, almost a house band at the Creole Gallery, played some of Busby's favorite music. Family members reminisced about him. [Mayor Virg] Bernero spoke on behalf of the city.

Bernero looked sick to his guts, as he had all week.

"We were at a loss, not just for words, but for hope itself," he said, describing the city's deep shock at Busby's murder, which police believe was committed by Elio Ramon Garcia, a handyman Busby had befriended. Garcia killed himself the next day as police closed in on him in Clinton County.

As Bernero spoke, rose petals from decaying floral tributes swirled against brittle ice on the sidewalk in front of the Creole Gallery a few blocks away. March was in, but winter showed no sign of letting go.

Bernero pushed on, like a schoolboy reciting a poem in a blizzard. "In time, we will feel the glimmer of hope return, like the first flowers of spring pushing up to the sun," he said.

In an echo of Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass," the mayor urged the mourners to find Robert Busby where they could: in the embrace of young lovers walking down Turner Street, in the cacophony of horns and drums during Jazz Fest or Blues Fest.

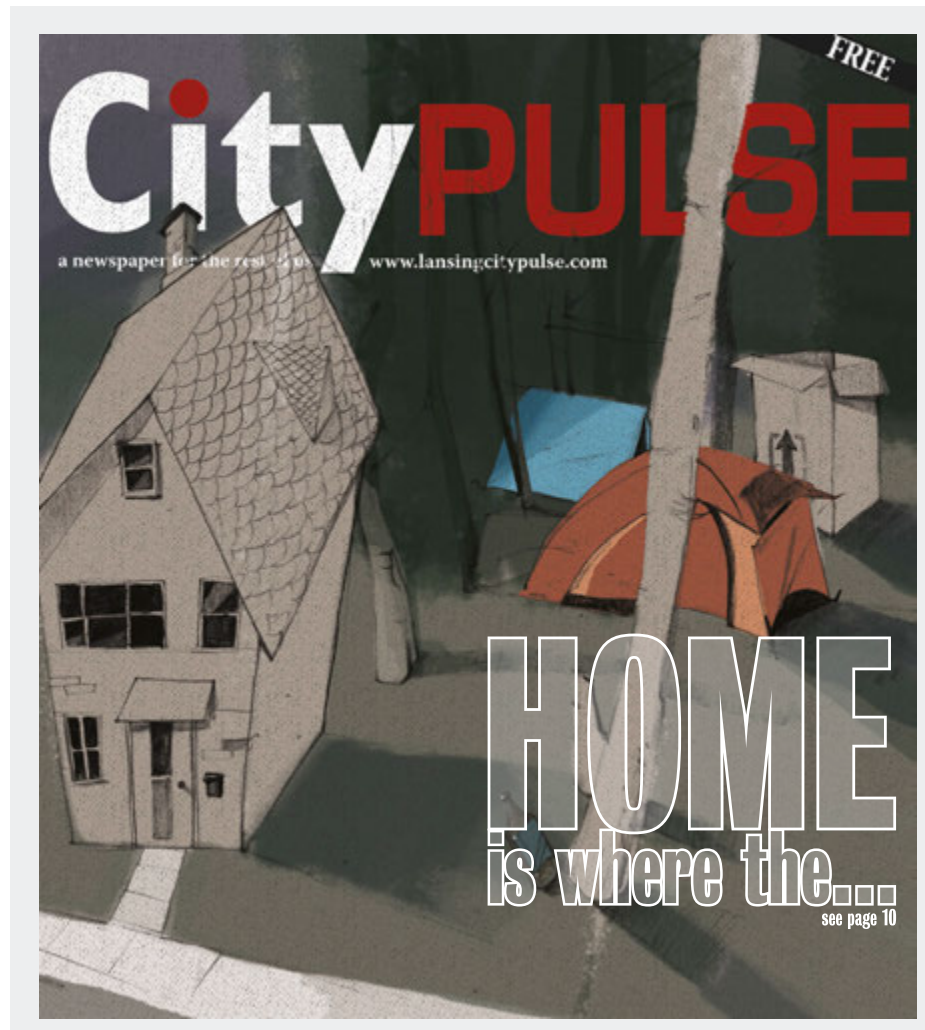
Busby's oldest brother, Vercie, conjured up the delicious image of God asking Robert to build a second Creole Gallery in Heaven. Such a place would

feature departed legends like Miles Davis, Elvis Presley, Peggy Lee and the newly arrived James Brown.

"I'll get right on it," Vercie said, perfectly pitching his voice to Robert's gentle lilt.

Jamie Schriener-Hooper, executive director of the Old Town Commercial Association, asked the crowd to look at itself.

In the seats were city officials,



factory workers, musicians, artists, gays, straights, men, women, young, old, black and white. The auditorium was a big, sloping tapestry of human hair - lush, curly, slicked-down, nappy, platinum, white and absent. Babies cried and sick people coughed.

It wasn't a still life in oils or a box of dolls and broken glass, but Busby was a multimedia artist. This diverse crowd, full of grief and swelling with a will to keep him alive any way they could, was his final creation.

It was perhaps his most lasting.



Andy Balaskovitz gave us a glimpse into a way of life in our midst but seen by few of us in this account of a homeless camp. That winter, the camp burned, killing Mama Bear.

September 22, 2010

'Can-dogging,' alcohol and family: Life among Lansing's homeless camps

By ANDY BALASKOVITZ

Every night at about 9:30, Vivian "Mama Bear" Thomas waits excitedly for her friends to come by for

turning the woods near the Whiskey Barrel into her home. Roxy is a raccoon; Oliver is a stray cat (Thomas thought she was a male at first, but the name stuck). But their devotion to Thomas' food is no weaker than her wantonness to live outside among the critters, permanently, in Lansing.

"I came out here to find my peace, quiet and serenity and get away from the riff-raff," Thomas said Sunday night with a headlamp bound around her head. "We do pretty good out here."

Thomas is one of about 4,200 homeless people in the greater Lansing area. In the 1960s, her doctor told her she had an upside-down chromosome, which today is called a bipolar disorder. She says the woods help her stabilize mentally, and it is only when rowdy neighbors set up camp in the woods that she is liable to "go on the nuts," she said.

Thomas believes she is doing the city a service by staying out of trouble, minding her own business and keeping the woods clean. (Bags of garbage she has picked up line her camp.) She says she lives no differently than her grandparents, who raised their children in a three-room shack with nothing but a wood-fired stove.

She is 52 and chooses to not have an apartment, even though she gets a \$698 Social Security check at the beginning of the month. She supplements her income by "can-dogging," or collecting returnable aluminum cans, for cigarettes and food. She does not drink or do drugs, unlike many of the homeless.

With fall upon us, Thomas shrugs off the thought of below-freezing nights this coming winter. Her main concern is the "riff-raff" that has moved into her woods, staying up late, drinking and generally being rowdy.

"I'm just a simple person and don't like a lot of confusion in my life," Thomas said. "But with them over there - being loud, stealing stuff - I go on the nuts. They're trying to take over the camp, and I'm very defensive."

There are two types of homeless camps in the Lansing area, oftentimes close to the River Trail. Some are permanent and constructed in the woods, like Thomas'. Others are more transient that change locations daily from, say, beneath a bridge or in a parking ramp. Attitudes of residents at these camps vary from proud to ashamed, peaceful to afflicted.

...

Around the time Thomas moved into the Kalamazoo Street woods, the Lansing Human Relations and Community Services Department issued its annual homelessness study. The exact count of those who received city services in 2009 was 4,185, down 65 people from 2008. However, the trend since 2006 continues to climb. Almost 1,000 more people received assistance such as food, shelter and

dinner. She sits beneath a deck umbrella and blue plastic tarps, held together by dead tree branches. Over her shoulder are three small bedrooms and a kitchen area.

There are three pathways that lead to Thomas' camp from Kalamazoo Street, the River Trail and the Whiskey Barrel Saloon parking lot on Lansing's east side. Clothes and rugs hang out to dry after Thursday's heavy rainfall, while shelves full of pots and pans sit stacked on a wobbly metal stand.

Her friends are Roxy and Oliver, both females, and Thomas makes sure to have food ready for them each night.

On Sunday night, a pot of fish stew sits on Thomas' cast-iron stove as three men stand around sharing stories, smoking the cheapest cigarettes they can buy or whatever is given to them. Thomas favors JWs, a brand of mini-cigars that cost \$1.50 per pack.

Thomas has spent the past five months

Cover

from page 13

counseling in 2009 compared to 2006. The report said 670 beds were available on a nightly basis in the greater Lansing area in 2009.

Department director Joan Jackson Johnson said the city works with local shelters to divert people from setting up camps.

Johnson said the foreclosure problem has only exacerbated homelessness, sometimes putting whole families on the streets. The city has received federal and state money to purchase foreclosed properties, renovate them and place families.

"We are proud of our efforts, but foreclosures have not helped at all," she said.

Together with fledgling mental health budgets, the rise in unemployment and substance abuse, Johnson said homelessness is not a choice, but more of a societal imposition, no matter what they say. If it comes off as a choice, they are probably not in the best mental shape, she said.

Patrick Patterson, vice president of operations for Volunteers of America, agrees.

"In my 12 years' experience (at Volunteers of America), I never thought being homeless is a choice," he said. "These are people with very precarious circumstances. If that's a rational choice, I don't know what rationality is."

...

When I first met 47-year-old Janice Dugger on a Sunday night, she was joyously playing spades with three other men in Adado Riverfront Park near the Shiawassee Street bridge. She has been homeless off and on for seven years and welcomed me warmly into her circle.

"This is my wilderness. This is my life," she said pointing at the river. Dugger is of Native American descent and said she ran away from her home in Saskatchewan at 19.

"These are my friends," she said while dealing a hand. "We drink, camp and get along."

Dugger is preparing for her fourth winter outdoors, and she concedes that she goes inside when the weather is too rough.

Todd Weaver is sitting behind Dugger, facing the river and a small campfire that was used for cooking fish before my visit. He is hardened and rarely smiles; he misses his family. Weaver moved to Lansing from Jackson and has lived outside for the past two months. Nightfall is the hardest part about being homeless for Weaver.

"I dread it all day long," he said staring at the river. "I never thought I'd be here."

Weaver said he lost his marriage, two kids and a good job in Jackson because

of crack and alcohol addiction. His fellow homeless is the only family he has now.

Suddenly, a wobbly, drunken man named Frank sitting near me gets his pant leg caught in the campfire. I'm the only one to notice and put it out before it ruins the bottom of his jeans.

"This is why I hate the fires," Weaver said, disgruntled.

...

At 9:30 p.m., I prepare to leave the camp in Adado Park in search of more camps. This crew has scraped together enough money for a couple of 40-ounce beers, perhaps a pint of liquor. Now they face the dilemma of who will actually buy it. The consensus is that each of them is already too drunk, have been banned from all of the local stores or don't have an identification card. I wish them luck in their pursuit to maintain their high.



One day in 2007, we rattled City Hall when we asked for comment for a story on plans to save the old Ottawa Power Station. We had stumbled upon a well-kept secret, and to keep us from spilling it, the powers-that-be offered us a behind-the-scenes look at how the deal had been assembled to save a landmark building. From then on, we "owned" this major redevelopment saga, culminating in a special issue led by this account and associating us with the better angels of preservation. The cover shined a light on one of the most creative staffers to grace City Pulse, a young Lansing artist named Vince Joy, who took his paints and canvas to Grand Avenue and did it the old-fashioned way.

March 30, 2011

Phoenix Risen — How 'the dominoes fell up' to revive a great building and a determined city

By LAWRENCE COSENTINO

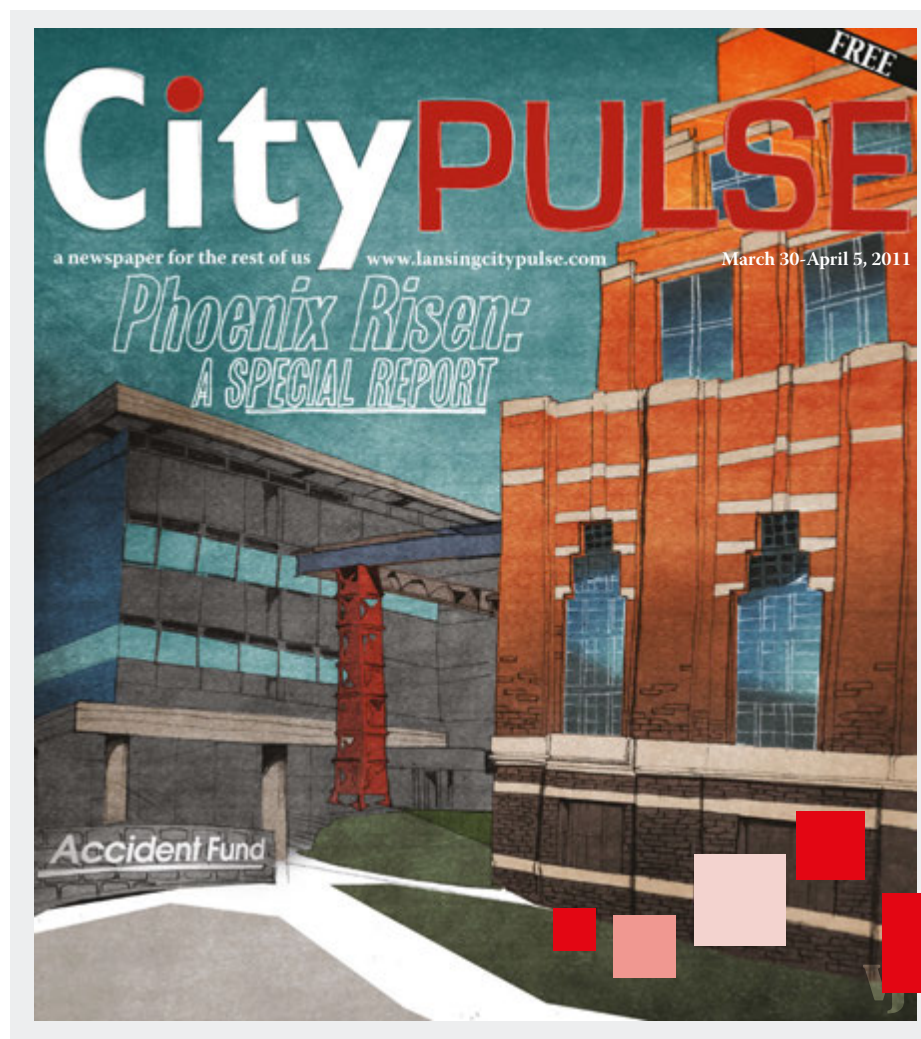
In early autumn of 2006, two anonymous visitors asked for a tour of Lansing's derelict Ottawa Power Station. It was an unusual request.

The city usually had to coax people into venturing inside the once-splendid landmark on the Grand River, by then an intractable and embarrassing symbol of decay.

The visitors were strangers to Bob Trezise, president and CEO of the Lansing Economic Development Corp. and their contact with the city. When Trezise met them at the power plant gates, they didn't hand him a business card. Instead, they introduced themselves as Homer and Marge Simpson.

Trezise played along, sensing something big.

They circled the grounds, rattled to the



top of the building in a service elevator and picked their way through the pigeon droppings, lingering for an hour and a half.

Many times before, Trezise led quixotic tours of the crumbling, 185,000-square-foot monolith, desperately hoping to interest a deep-pocketed developer. He would point out spectacular views of the Grand River 172.2 feet below, say things like "imagine your office right here," and sigh as his guests smiled politely and ran away.

But this time felt different. "I'll never forget when Homer said, 'This could work for us.'" Trezise recalled. "It was the first time anyone said that."

Flash forward to spring 2011.

The people of Lansing are stumbling out of their winter dens, rubbing their eyes, and finding that the transformation of the Ottawa Power Station isn't a dream.

Pinch yourself as hard as you please. It will still be there. The once-rusting hulk, now etched into the postal rolls as 200 N. Grand Ave., really is a sexy, spiffy national landmark, a giant corporate headquarters, and potential anchor of downtown renewal.

The project is more than a high-concept corporate aerie. It's a national model of private-public partnership and adaptive re-use on a colossal sale, destined to star in hundreds of Power Point lectures at architecture and urban design conferences around the world for decades to come.

The only building in the world that

compares to Lansing's 1939 masterpiece is London's Tate Modern art gallery, a former power station that can't hold a candlepower to the Ottawa Station's dynamic forms and colors. No wonder 1,550 workers spent two and a half years carefully restoring and scooping out the building's precious shell, tapered like a 170-foot-high flame and colored to match, with masonry that appears to burn from black to orange to yellow as it thrusts upward.

As a result, a 20th-century wonder — a power plant disguised as a downtown office building — has become a genuine office complex and downtown anchor in the 21st.

How could such an un-disaster happen?

The short answer is that a lot of people badly wanted it to happen.

The long answer is longer.

There were so many moving parts to the project that even one of its prime movers, Dan Loepp, president and CEO of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, the Accident Fund's parent company, called it "highly unlikely."

"The dominoes fell up," Loepp said.

Idle since 1992 except for a chilled water plant in the basement, the power station shrugged off several attempts to fill it, ranging from technology center to entertainment complex.

All of them fell short for lack of a big enough anchor tenant.

See cover, Page 15

Cover

from page 14

The station's Art Deco charms faded, year by year, until it began to stink like a beached whale.

"This was the tough nut to crack," Lansing Mayor Virg Bernero said. "That was the symbol, either of stagnation or success, and we knew it."

In summer 2006, six months after Bernero became mayor, Trezise urged him to solicit bids from potential developers across the country. In the development world, a "request for proposal" is like the courtship dance of a bird of paradise. Bernero dreaded public rejection.

"What if nobody wants it?" he asked Trezise.

"Then we'll know," Trezise responded. "And we won't waste any more time on it."

As the mayor feared, out of 1,600 developers, none came back with financing or a major tenant. There were no bites, but two nibbles — brief letters of interest, one of them from Lansing developer Chuck Abraham.

Abraham didn't have financing or a tenant, but he had a friend in a high place, Blue Cross' Loepp. Loepp knew Lansing well. He came to Lansing in 1984 to work for the state of Michigan. Abraham was an old family friend.

By 2006, the Accident Fund, the nation's 15th largest workers' compensation company, was growing fast and contemplated a doubled staff of about 1,200 employees by 2021. It was quickly blowing out the seams of its old headquarters on Capitol Avenue in downtown Lansing.

The company was considering a move out of the city, or out of the state, to accommodate its growing workforce. Bernero recalled a retention meeting with noncommittal Accident Fund execs early in his term as mayor.

"I came out of the meeting pretty depressed," Bernero said.

Once Loepp had the power station on his radar screen, things began to change.

Loepp credits Abraham with buttonholing him about the building. "I probably blew him off two or three times," Loepp said. "It was just sitting there, pretty much an eyesore, but it intrigued me intellectually because of what we had done in Grand Rapids."

In 2004, the Blues moved their West Michigan operations from the suburbs of Grand Rapids to downtown into the historic eight-story Steketee's department store building, part of which dates back to the 1860s. The development helped reanimate a moribund section of downtown Grand Rapids, drawing coffee shops, Schuler Books and other businesses.

Loepp asked Jim Cash, vice president for marketing of the Christman Co., a Lansing-based developer working with the Accident Fund, if he had looked at the Ottawa plant.

Christman was looking around the country for a place to put the Accident Fund but hadn't seriously considered the site, only a five-minute stroll from the Christman building on Capitol Avenue.

"Like everybody else in Lansing, we were a little jaded about the building," he said. "So many efforts had preceded us."

But Christman Co. had prestigious restoration projects to its credit, including the 1990s restoration of Lansing's

Capitol building, the Virginia Capitol in Richmond and Christman's own corporate headquarters in downtown Lansing.

To tighten the feeling that a great circle was closing, Christman's construction division laid the foundation for the Ottawa Power Station in 1937.

The dominoes started falling up.

Trezise alerted Abraham to the layers of federal and state credits available for the site, including a \$26 million Michigan Economic Growth Authority, or MEGA, grant. Offsetting the building's many burdens were city, state and federal historic credits and brownfield credits.

Abraham admitted he was more intrigued by the stack of credits than he was by the faded glories of the building. Loepp thought of both when he and Abraham looked at the building together.

Enter the Simpsons.

Over Thanksgiving weekend of 2006, a month after the anonymous Ottawa visit, Loepp called Bernero at home and told him that Homer and Marge were Blue Cross facility managers from Detroit.

"That was us," Loepp told Bernero. "Better sharpen your pencil."



From the beginning, arts coverage has been an important part of our mission, and never more so than when we learned that billionaire MSU grad Eli Broad was donating the bulk of the funding to construct a modern art museum in a building like no other at his alma mater. We stuck to the story like glue, and it paid off with a special issue led by this story.

Nov. 7, 2012

Perfection on the Diagonal — Broad Museum's builders left comfort zones behind

By LAWRENCE COSENTINO

Look closely at the vertical fins on the north wall of the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum and you'll spot a light fixture with a removable panel. The tiniest departure from perfection, such as an exposed screw, is anathema to the pristine surfaces favored by architect Zaha Hadid, but project architect Kevin Marshall snuck in a few "discreet fasteners."

"That's so you can change the light bulb without disassembling the whole building," he said with a straight face. "You can get the light bulb at Lowe's," he added.

Hadid's winning design for the Broad Museum wove a weightless web of lines, vectors, fields and planes. Now builders had to re-weave the web in heavy concrete, steel and glass.

Perfection, not production, is an unusual priority in the construction business. This project demanded perfection on the diagonal.

...

Hadid's office took an especially keen interest in the architectural concrete, or the concrete that's exposed as a wall or floor rather than hidden structural support. Hadid was tracking the color, surface, texture, even the placement of the tie-holes where the forms attach.

See cover, Page 16

For our Nov. 7, 2012, special issue on the opening of the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at MSU, the museum and City Pulse jointly commissioned artist Kristin Cammermeyer. The result was our cover and the museum's official poster.



Cover

from page 15

It fell to Granger Construction Co. in south Lansing to bear the heaviest burden of the project. Granger vice president Darryl Massa gets a hard look in his eye when you mention Hadid.

"I don't think anybody knew what we were getting into," Massa said. "Zaha Hadid is so creative, they weren't sure what they wanted. If the designer says, 'we'll know it when we see it,' the contractor wants to pull chunks of hair out of his head and walk away."

Red-haired, self-effacing Rob Lange looks young enough to card at the liquor store, but he was Granger's project manager on its most demanding, high-profile job.

"At one point, Lou Anna Simon was in the basement, talking concrete," Lange said. "The president of the university was looking at our walls, asking questions. That was mind-boggling."

With each new demand, Massa grumbled while Lange rolled with the flow.

"We live in an engineering, nuts and bolts type of environment," Lange shrugged. "Touchy-feely artistic is foreign to the way we do things every day."

The Granger team researched touchy-feely concrete jobs in Winnipeg, St. Louis, New York (the United Nations building) and Atlanta. Nothing looked touchy or feely enough.

"The concrete at the United Nations looked great — from 40 stories up," Massa said.

For months, the yard at Granger turned into a strange cemetery with more than 60 four-foot-high test slabs. Each slab contained a different formula of cement, aggregate, fly ash and water to get the pristine surface Hadid's office demanded.

"She wasn't willing to accept that concrete is a natural product and there's going to be slight variations in color and finish," Massa said. "She was trying to create this perfect finish."

As the job dragged on through 2010, Granger marketing director Ed Gillespie sent out a newsletter with the names of a Granger employee on each "tombstone."

The team achieved super smoothness by adding a chemical that made the concrete watery. (For the record, the magic spice was polycarboxylate.)

"It maintains a full liquid head," Hadid's project manager, Craig Kiner, explained, as if he were talking about beer. "It's not stiff when it comes out of the mixer. So the formwork has to be incredibly tight and well built."

A pinhole leak in the form would show up as a rash on the surface and blot the building forever. "They wouldn't let us touch the concrete after we were done,"

Massa said.

Normally, concrete forms are made of throwaway plywood. Here they were built like cabinets, put together as tightly as aquariums and coated with a special oil so no marks would be left.

Grueling tests climaxed with the erection of "the monolith" — a giant test slab of concrete, complete with Broad Museum slant, that still towers over the Granger yard on Aurelius Road in south Lansing and can be seen from nearby I-96. The first pour, the bottom half, had too many pits. (Also, a worker dropped a measuring tape into the form and it left an imprint.)

They tweaked the formula one more time. The top half came out perfect.

"Now you're screwed," an industry observer told Massa. "You have to go to the site and do this 18 times."

...

When the agony of the concrete was over, the building began to take shape around its hard-won bones.

Steelworkers secured the museum's gravity-defying west overhang to a truss tucked in the north and south walls. An absurdly tall support beam, like a crutch in a Salvador Dali painting, supported the vast cliff of structural steel and plywood. Several months later, the beam was kicked away and the overhang kept on floating, having divorced gravity and married Zaha Hadid.

■ ■ ■

As with economics, there are those in journalism who believe in trickle-down news and those who see the world from the ground up. Here staffer Sam Inglot delivers a fine example of the latter.

July 11, 2012

A life they don't want — Kalamazoo Street sex workers tell their stories

By SAM INGLOT

Somewhere in the night along the dimly lit Kalamazoo Street corridor a woman walks with no destination in mind. She's looking for a ride, a round trip that will bring her back to the same street, hopefully with a few dollars in her pocket.

When a man finally offers a ride, she knows it's not out of chivalry or kindness — it's for sex. With only seconds to profile him, she knows the ride can land her one of several places: back on the streets, a jail cell, clinging to life in the hospital or dead in a ditch.

...

Although their paths to Lansing were different and they were raised in opposite parts of the state, Grace and Mary have shared many of the same tragic experiences common among women and men in prostitution: Both were sexually abused as

children, both have drug problems, both have experienced homelessness and both have narrowly escaped being murdered on several occasions.

They are also both sex workers on Kalamazoo, a life they don't want.

Grace, who is in her 30s, has been working the Lansing streets for roughly two years. She has a college degree, had held good jobs and prefers to do "honest work."

She was on methadone pain treatment for over a decade. She had recreationally experimented with crack. When she lost her job and her Medicaid she could no longer afford methadone treatments.

"I thought I was going to make it through going cold turkey, but then I started having seizures," she said. "Then someone introduced me to heroin."

Now, she's addicted to both crack and heroin.

Mary, who is in her 40s, has been "hoein" on "the stroll" and using crack since she was 15. She ran away from an abusive home as a teenager and found herself drawn to the fast cash that prostitution provided. She's worked the streets of cities all over the country and doesn't know anything but the life of a sex worker.

"I don't know what it's going to take for me (to get out of the life), but I do know that there's a calling on my life and there's something for me to do; that's why God is keeping me alive," she said. "I just don't know what yet. Anytime somebody been getting high as long as I been getting high — they're dead."

Among the women who get "dates" on Kalamazoo, "not many people are not on drugs," Grace said. She and Mary said drug addiction keeps them, and most other women, on the streets turning tricks with regular customers and occasional random customers or "johns."

The drug environment in which they live is, as Grace put it, "an evil force working against you." Homeless, Grace says she "couch surfs" and lives out of drug houses in which she is surrounded by crack users who are always pushing the drug on her, even if she's trying to stay clean.

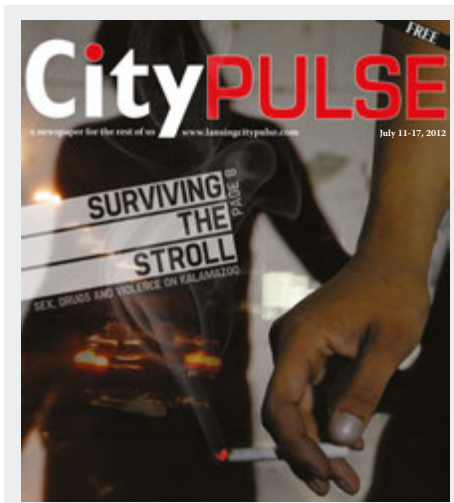
"I need safe housing where no one is smoking crack," she said. "That's the big problem with it: Once I get out of treatment, I'm put right back in the mix because I don't have a place to live."

Both women have been in and out of drug treatment centers with little success.

Mary "would have died" had she not found a place to live, with the financial assist of a disability check.

"You know, I have not had a roof over my head in a long time," she said. "This place has made me a lot cleaner than when I was using 24 hours a day, seven days a week."

Aside from battling addiction and homelessness, violence is another regular part of the life, both said. Grace has nearly had her throat cut, almost been choked to



Cover

from page 16

death and has been stalked and raped while working Kalamazoo. She recounts each event in a flat tone of voice, as if describing a boring day at work.

“It happens frequently. It’s not normal, but after it happens so many times, it’s like ...,” Grace said, pausing as she tried to recollect the number of times she’d been raped. “You don’t have any feelings anymore. It’s not something that’s normal, it’s just something that happened again, you know what I mean?”

She said the first man that raped her still cruises the block for girls.

Mary has kept a low profile since coming to Lansing. Her lengthy time on the streets left her wise to the dos and don’ts of turning tricks. She usually sticks with a handful of regular customers. She said she’s been in “the Grim Reaper’s” car twice in her life. As for Lansing, she said, “I hear about girls getting fucked up and killed all the time. Stuff that doesn’t make the paper.”



Whatever we had planned for the first issue of 2014 went out the window with the great ice storm of December 2013. We provided more than dozen pages of coverage, starting with an editorial that suggested perhaps the time had come to swallow local pride and move from a publicly owned utility to a private one like Consumers Energy, whose customers had fared much better than those of the Lansing Board of Water & Light.

Jan. 2, 2014

A week later, still no power

By LAWRENCE COSENTINO

The big freeze of 2013 began with a cannonade of falling limbs and orange flashes. A softer music filled the streets the following Saturday, as bits of melting ice tinkled from tree limbs to the ground. Power was back in many neighborhoods, but many single houses and

pockets of houses were still out.

At about 3 p.m., Tim Terry took advantage of the slight thaw to check in on his house at 1227 Climax St., at the east edge of a patch of about a dozen houses that were still in the cold. He was sure his short stretch of Climax would be the last to get power back.

“They’re fixing the power on the main streets,” Terry said, pointing to Holmes Road a block away. “Their power went on all along there today. They’re going to neglect us every kind of way.”

Terry was staying with relatives, but he checked the house a few times a day for signs of break-ins.

“I’m a survivor,” he said. “I can go to the North Pole and make it happen, but my sister, Natalie, can’t take it. She’s 70 years old and needs a machine to breathe.”

His sister was staying with a niece, but he was still worried about her. Her breathing device was hooked up at the niece’s house, but every day away from her home medical alert system was a risk.

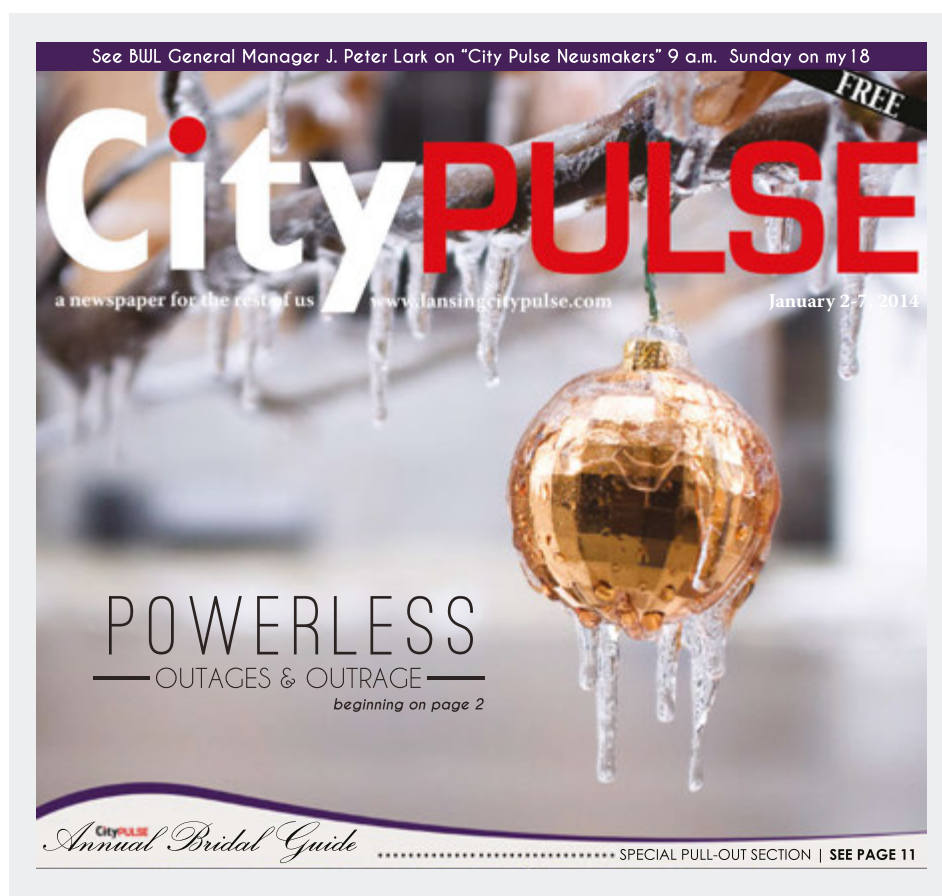
The streets and yards along Climax and Malcolm X Street, a block north, were strewn with downed wires and splintered branches. There were no signs of BWL trucks.

“I’ve been driving all over and I didn’t see any trucks nowhere,” Terry said. “Are they on vacation?” But private contractors were out in force. Dodging a 60-foot mass of tree brush, two trucks almost ran into each other on icy Malcolm X Street. One crew was fixing a power stack that that ripped away from a house. Across the street, another crew hooked up a generator for a homeowner who was at the hospital with a sick child.

Holding an icepack to her jaw — she had just been to the dentist — Amber Esser of Home Pros ran a cord through the plastic sheeting covering an unfinished porch on the north side of Climax. She and her father, Albert, were almost finished rehabbing the house and had started on the porch when the storm hit.

Albert Esser said the power had only just come back to his own home in Mason that day.

“It’s shocking that we’ve been out of power seven days,” Esser said. “It’s just unheard of. It’s Amish.”



He watched the generator as it shuddered to life.

“It costs 20 dollars a day to run these things,” Albert said. “Low-income people can’t afford that, or eating out every day.”

January 2, 2014

‘Goddamn hero’ - Out in the field with BWL linemen on day six

By ANDY BALASKOVITZ

Austen Helvey started working for the Lansing Board of Water and Light as a journeyman lineman three weeks ago. Six days after the ice storm hit Lansing, he and three other crew members had “turned” four major circuits in the area, restoring power to approximately 4,000 people.

The 16-hour shifts were piling up, and

he couldn’t help comparing his experience with other disaster-stricken areas where he’s worked. That includes cleanup after hurricanes Sandy of 2012 and Ike and Gustav of 2008.

“It’s comparable, if not more damage,” Helvey, 27, said in comparison to Sandy, the devastating superstorm that wreaked havoc on the East Coast. “Ice is probably the worst for power lines.”

Helvey was near the intersection of West Willow Highway and Elmwood Road early Friday afternoon restoring power with fellow BWL employees. BWL General Manager J. Peter Lark was giving interviews nearby with local media, explaining how the restoration process works.

Helvey said the crews’ biggest challenge are downed lines in residents’ backyards. Sometimes they visit the same site three or four times, depending on the damage.

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Helvey said he lost power at his Magnolia Avenue home for two days.

Helvey, was working Friday with fellow BWL lineman Archie Emmons, who still didn't have power at his home near Mt. Hope Avenue and Aurelius Road. Emmons, 40, was lamenting missing his son's 6th birthday that day, as well as Christmas.

"You wake up cold, work 16 hours, go back to sleep, do it over again," said Emmons, who has been with the utility since 2000. The crews refer to each other as "goddamn hero," which Emmons and Helvey smile is an inside joke based off a YouTube video.

"We're upbeat, happy we're getting everyone back on," Emmons said when asked about his attitude. "At the beginning it was a little daunting."

Helvey said that by day six, the line crews had set into a routine: "We see the light at the end of the tunnel."

The line crews, unlike city and utility officials, have been unanimously praised for their efforts to restore power back to 40 percent of BWL's customers. Some have reported rounds of applause when they enter restaurants. But they are also not tone deaf to the chorus of complaints about BWL's response to the storm, which fall largely on BWL and city administrators.

"I understand people are frustrated," Helvey said. "We are doing everything we can."

Our motto says City Pulse is a "newspaper for the rest of us," and here former editor Belinda Thurston shows us what that meant to her.



October 1, 2014

Finding a home — Diversity and our differences

By BELINDA THURSTON

Rita Flanagan's father left Yazoo, Miss., after his family collected enough money to get him a bus ticket out of town. He "did something," she said, that could have gotten him killed — a glance at a white woman, or not crossing the street to clear a path for white people — she guesses.

Dixya Acharya left Nepal five years ago after spending 17 years in a Bhutanese refugee camp in squalid and cramped living conditions. She was 4 when her parents abandoned their 30-plus acres of land fleeing violence in their homeland to keep their 10 children safe.

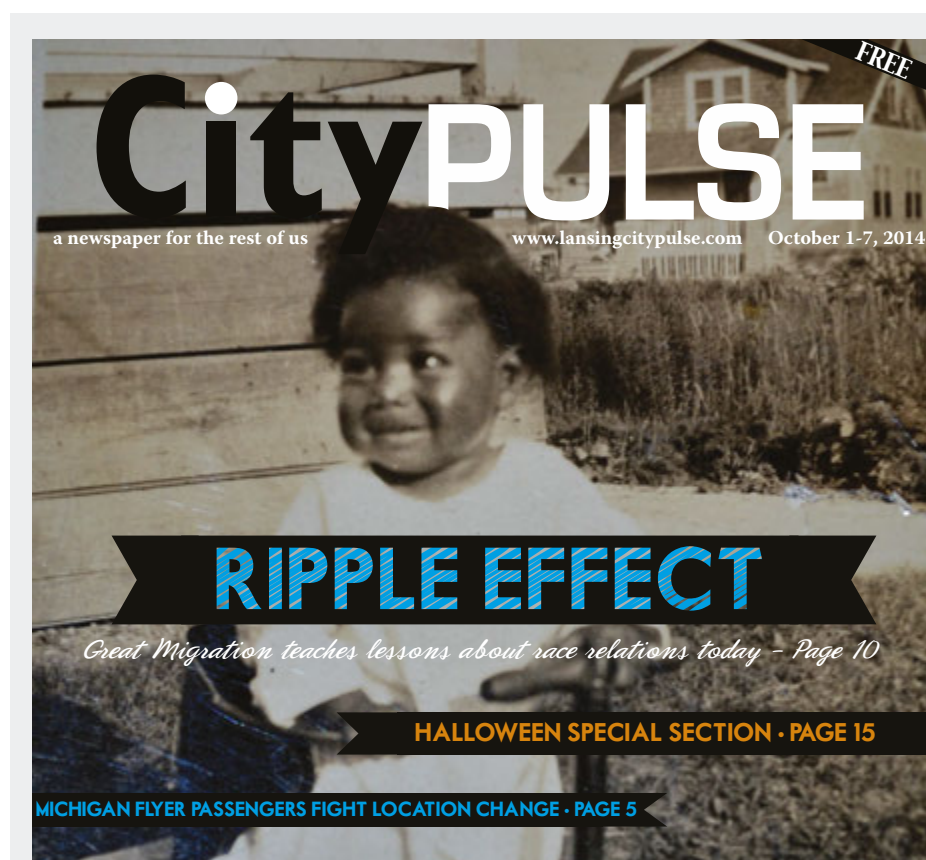
Both their journeys brought them to Lansing, an unlikely destination given their histories but where safe haven and

prosperity was possible.

Migration, resettlement, immigration: these are terms that carry stories of strife and survival. They are weighted with politics and prejudice. They are the

that was not prime but affordable and was being sold to blacks. It was on that land that Gordy began his business that hired and promoted black music, giving birth to a genre and opportunity for countless artists.

But the impact goes deeper than music.



foundation of our country, yet the source of so much fear and resistance.

Today we can see the dynamics of migration being played out in the reaction to the arrival of the Central American child migrants, and even in the racial tension in Ferguson, Mo., according to Isabel Wilkerson, author of "The Warmth of Other Suns," which chronicles the Great Migration of African Americans from the South.

Wilkerson won the Pulitzer Prize in 1994 as the Chicago bureau chief for The New York Times for a series of stories about survivors of Midwest flooding. Her journalism career began at the Detroit Free Press, which she says makes returning to Michigan special.

"Michigan is so critical in talking about the Great Migration," she said in a telephone interview from her home in Atlanta. "It's one of the suns people fled to."

It's fair to say had the Great Migration not occurred, Motown, a rich part of Americana and the fabric of music for the nation, would have never been born.

"Where ever I go, Motown is one of the revered touch points throughout the world," Wilkerson said. "It's almost incomprehensible that it would not have existed."

Berry Gordy Jr.'s parents were from Georgia, she said. His father migrated to Detroit and the family came into some land

Urban neighborhoods and language as we know them sprang forth. Dearborn, Mich., was born of white flight in the 1950s. Idlewild, the black resort town near Baldwin, would not have thrived.

The Great Migration was "one of the largest internal migrations in our nation's history," Wilkerson said. "It was the complete redistribution of an entire population."

More than 6 million African Americans fled the South from World War I to the 1970s, according to her research.

"It's hard to talk about the migration without talking about the reason for their desire to flee," Wilkerson said.

African Americans were "defecting from a caste system that was so extreme, so repressive."

It was against the law to play checkers together in Birmingham, she said as part of a long list of "could nots."

"Anything you could imagine was separate. It was all encompassing and suffocating."

There were "so many rules to memorize with penalties that would mean your life."

"Every couple days an African American was lynched for some perceived breach of this caste system," she said. "It's a nerve dangling experience to live under the repression that was the caste system."

The Great Migration "began because people had always wanted to flee the South

but there was not the catalyst for a mass migration until World War I."

The North recruited in the South to fill "the lowest-paying, least wanted jobs in the harshest industries — iron and steel foundries and slaughtering and meatpacking," Wilkerson details in her book.

That fueled a dream that prosperity and peace would be found.

Rita Flanagan's voice takes on hushed tones in her own dining room as she describes why her father, Charles Tucker, left the South.

"His family raised up enough money to put that young man on the bus to take him as far as the money would go," she said. "He ended up in Hampton, Va."

Tucker was rushed out town because "he did something," she said.

Flanagan said she believes his family was protecting him from being lynched.

That's what sent her father from his home. He would go to school in Virginia. He became a Pullman porter to raise money in order to attend Hampton Institute (now Hampton University). He served in World War I. He eventually moved to Detroit after getting married and held two jobs, one a secretary for Ford and the other as a postal clerk.

He bought a home in the Conant Gardens subdivision.

Flanagan said the development was a source of pride for black people. They owned nice homes. Their children could get a good education. They were a part of a growing, vibrant city.

But they were not welcome. Flanagan can remember holding her brother's hand as she walked a mile to school and back in the time leading up to the Detroit race riot in the 1940s. She can remember the police on their horses.

She remembers the fear and knowing it was because of the color of her skin.

She flips to a page in a history book about her neighborhood bearing a poster: "Help the white people to keep this district white. Men needed to keep our lines solid. We need help. Don't be yellow. Come out. We need every white man. We want our girls to walk on the streets not raped."

...

In Lansing, the neighborhoods were on the west side, according to Jesse LaSorda, a trustee with the Historical Society of Greater Lansing and past president of the Lansing Area African American Genealogical Society.

The black neighborhood was from West St. Joe and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard going south to the river. He said it was a part of the Oldsmobile factory space at the time.

"It was a four or five block area south to the river," he said. "They would not have them in any other blocks in any direction in Lansing."

The auto industry and state

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government were employment attractions in Lansing for African Americans, he said.

But the environment was less than warm.

William Thompson was the first African American to graduate from Michigan State University in 1904, LaSorda said. Thompson could only get a job as a janitor at the Durant Motors plant.

When Thompson got pneumonia in the early 1920s, LaSorda said “no physicians would treat him. His son said the only person who would treat him was a veterinarian.”

In 1924 the Ku Klux Klan marched in the Labor Day parade down Michigan Avenue sending a clear message against having African Americans working in the auto plants, LaSorda said.

“Mysteriously, the microfilm copy of the Lansing State Journal of that march disappeared,” he said.

When there’s a “large influx of people who may look different there’s a resistance to their arrival,” Wilkerson said. “It happens in every migration.”

There are always newer newcomers. Lansing is growing a reputation as sanctuary and a safe place to settle for a growing refugee community. According to Erika Brown Binion, director of the Refugee Development Center, there are 70 countries and 51 languages represented in the Lansing School District.

Acharya works for the RDC as a family liaison. She moved to Lansing a year and a half ago with her husband. They recently bought a house and have her in-laws living with them.

She loves Lansing and the community, often calling it “awesome.”

But there are bittersweet moments.

“I feel welcome and not welcome,” she said. “I was over in a store with my family, the K-mart. We put the stuff in the car and a homeless man came over asking for cans. He started shouting, ‘you Indian people go back to your country.’” Even though the man spoke from ignorance – they are not Indian – the assault stung.

“But a man came out from the store and yelled at him to leave us alone, he said these people are legally here and contributing. What are you contributing?”



Few journalists know the LGBT beat as well as Todd Heywood, as shown here in this localization of one of the driving stories of our times.

April 29, 2015

The cost of waiting — While Lansing, nation await ruling on same-sex marriage, for one couple it’s already too late

By TODD A. HEYWOOD

In 1977, the world for the LGBT community was a different place. No presidents spoke of equality. A measure to ensure equal treatment under the law had been introduced in the U.S. House but died. East Lansing was one of a handful of local governments that barred discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. A guy named Harvey Milk had just become the first openly gay man in office in American history when he was elected to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.

In fact, gay liberation was less than a decade old. Only eight years before, drag queens and patrons of the Stonewall Inn in New York ushered in a militant brand of political activism when they rioted to protest police harassment at gay bars. Marching in a pride parade and talking openly about being gay was an act of resistance. People often were fired from jobs, evicted.

Against this backdrop, a 27-year-old Mykul Johnson of Lansing met Henry David Thomas, 33. Everyone knew him as D.

D, a dancer who choreographed many local productions, was friendly and outgoing, Johnson recalled. The attraction was immediate.

“When I first came over, it was like late in the afternoon,” Johnson said. “He said, at some point early on, ‘I think you’re going to be spending the night.’ I had no objection whatsoever to that. So I did, and I’ve been here ever since.”

The two lived together in a two-story home on the east side. It’s filled with an eclectic mix of masks and pottery, artwork and photo mementos. For 37 years, it was Mykul and D’s home.

On March 21, one year to the day after a federal district court judge in Detroit struck down Michigan’s constitutional marriage ban, D Thomas passed away at age 69. He died of congestive heart failure and COPD. The couple could not tie the knot on March 22, 2014, when a federal court ruling created a short window during which same-sex marriage was legal in Michigan. D was tethered to an oxygen machine in the couple’s living room.

Johnson’s life now consists of phone calls, emails and errands for a local attorney handling D’s estate. By law, he is a legal stranger to D and his belongings. Those all belong to the estate, which is being liquidated.

And despite having spent money to have legal documents drawn up to assure that Johnson would have title to the couple’s

home in the event of D’s death, he’s fighting for that too. The Ingham County Register of Deeds Office rejected a quit-claim deed because of legal errors on it.

The result? Five weeks after his partner’s death, Johnson, 63, has no idea, whether he will be able to keep their home.

“Mykul and D’s story is the perfect example of why we cannot delay justice any longer,” said Gina Calcagno, public education campaign director for Michigan for Marriage. “They pledged their lives to one another, they took on all of the responsibilities of marriage and never received the rights they deserved. Couples across Michigan and across the country, like Mykul and D, deserve to have the lives they have built together recognized.”

That’s an important part of what is at stake at the U.S. Supreme Court, which heard arguments Tuesday by defendants from four states, including Michigan. Too late for Mykul Johnson.

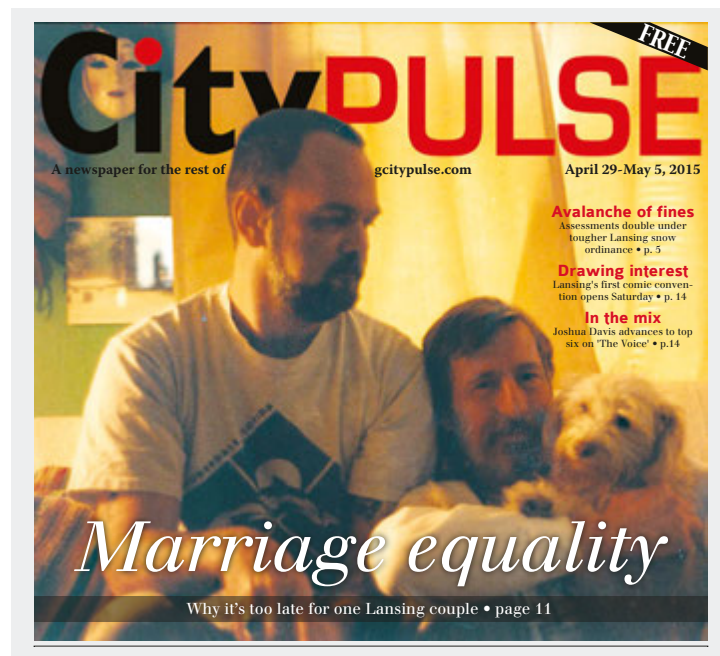
Marriage opens the doorway to over 1,000 tangible benefits, from Social Security survivor payments to inheritance protections. It is much more than a promise made in a church, it’s a secular contract recognized by law and creating a unique partnership under law.

“If the couple had been able to legally wed, if D had died, as his surviving spouse, Mykul would have inherited the home (absent any directive in D’s will leaving title to the home to someone else),” said Jay Kaplan of the ACLU of Michigan LGBT Project. “And if D had died without leaving a will, Mykul as his legal spouse also would have inherited the marital home. That is one of the many important legal benefits of civil marriage.”

Michigan is one of 14 states where same-sex marriage remains illegal. It ended up as part of the case before the Supreme Court after U.S. District Judge Bernard Friedman declared unconstitutional the 2004 ban on same-sex marriage and civil unions approved by Michigan voters. The U.S. Appeals Court in Cincinnati reversed his ruling.

A decision in the cases will be handed down by the high court by the end of June, when the court’s annual session ends.

Michigan’s Marriage Amendment was approved by voters in 2004, 59 percent to 41 percent. Ingham County was one of only two counties to reject the measure. But times have changed. Polling shows that the majority of Michiganders support marriage equality now, Calcagno said. And national



polls show that six in 10 Americans support the right to marry.

A Gallup poll released last week found that nearly 2 million Americans are in same-sex partnerships, 780,000 of those a marriage.

...

The fight for full LGBT equality doesn’t end when and if the Supreme Court rules that marriage is a constitutional right. For instance, in Michigan, unless a person lives in one of 38 municipalities that has a local ordinance prohibiting discrimination, a person can still be fired for being gay or perceived to be. They can also be denied housing. State lawmakers are also working on the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which would allow business owners to refuse to provide services based on “sincerely held religious beliefs.” The state Senate is posed to pass a three-bill package, already approved by the House, that would allow adoption agencies to provide services based on “sincerely held religious beliefs” as well — code for banning same-sex couples from adopting.

For Mykul Johnson, the chance for nuptials is past, something not lost on leading marriage equality voices.

“Because Mykul and D, are both men, they were denied the right to marry and, since D has passed, they never will,” said Ingham County Clerk Barb Byrum, who performed Michigan’s first same-sex marriage on March 22 last year, before the Appeals Court blocked Friedman’s order. She was prepared, if the Supreme Court had ruled sooner, or the Appeals court had ruled differently, to wed Johnson and Thomas at their home.

“This is a horrifying reality many same-sex couples have faced and continue to face. That is why this ruling is so important. — to allow all people, to allow all love, to be treated equally.”





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