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# South St. Paul Voice



Winter Fun  
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Your Community News & Information Source

February 2025

## Economic development projects ramp up

Jake Spitzack  
Staff Writer

A handful of economic development and road projects are in the works for this year. A few others, such as the Wakota Crossing redevelopment and the replacement of the public works facility, are on hold for now but not out of mind by city councilmembers. Expect details for the following projects to be ironed out in the coming months.

### Hardman Triangle

The City recently signed a preliminary agreement with Zavi Development and TE Miller Development for the redevelopment of a 5.6-acre site at Grand Avenue East and Concord Street North, within the area dubbed the Hardman Triangle. Zavi is proposing a development that includes an independent restaurant, a destination retail site such as an indoor pickleball center, and a 200-unit market-rate apartment building. The project aligns with the mixed-use, walkable vision for the area the City identified in its 2020 Hardman Triangle Redevelopment Plan and 2040 Comprehensive Plan. The City also recently hired Tushie Montgomery Architects and Barr Engineering to develop a master plan to parcel out the entire 20-acre Hardman Triangle site and

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## D&G Jamaican restaurant brings a taste of the tropics



Owners Delroy and Gerald Keane

Jake Spitzack  
Staff Writer

Tastes of the Caribbean have surfaced in South St. Paul. Jamaican natives Gerald and Delroy Keane opened D&G Jamaican Restaurant in early December in the former Wellness Café at 1025 Southview Blvd. The menu boasts staples of their homeland as well as “fusion” options inspired by other countries, and the brothers are continuing to fire up new items to add.

Co-owner and head chef Gerald Keane has done just about everything in the

restaurant industry, from waiting to bartending and sales, and even owned his own restaurant for two years in Jamaica. He immigrated from Jamaica to the United States in 2009, settling in New York, where he worked at an array of restaurants including Korean, Chinese, American, Italian and Jamaican. He moved to Minnesota last spring to be closer to family.

“Immediately when I arrived in Minnesota, I searched for Jamaican restaurants, and the ones that were popping up were few and far between,” he said. “With my menu, I’m able to combine different flavors

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## Task force seeks input on landfill containing PFAS

Jake Spitzack  
Staff Writer

A Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) task force has been formed to address contamination at the former Pig’s Eye landfill in St. Paul, which may be contributing to the high levels of PFAS in South St. Paul’s municipal water supply. The task force is charged with developing a restoration plan for the site by February 2026. This winter, it will issue a survey seeking public feedback on future uses of the site.

The landfill is located just north of Pig’s Eye Lake, within the Mississippi River floodplain. Owned by the city of St. Paul, the 200-acre landfill collected more than 8 million cubic yards of unregulated municipal, commercial and industrial waste between 1956-1972. In 1989, it was placed on the state’s list of Superfund sites, which required cleanup expenses to be covered by those responsible for contamination. In the early 2000s, nearly \$6 million was used for initial cleanup efforts but the site still has significant levels of PFAS, methane gas, and metals, including cadmium, copper, lead and zinc. If you go there today, it may appear to be a healthy

**Pig’s Eye / Page 3**

## Leadership changes on South St. Paul School Board

Jake Spitzack  
Staff Writer

On Jan. 13, two newly elected members officially took their seats on the South St. Paul Public Schools (SSPPS) school board: Ryan Duffy and Paul Cumings. They succeed Nikki Laliberte, who served for eight years, and board chair John Raasch, who served for four. Each

was at the end of their term and chose not to run for reelection.

At the swearing-in ceremony, board member of two years Kim Humann was named the new chair. Anne Clafin is now vice chair, Paul Cumings, treasurer, and Wendy Felton, clerk. Incumbent Monica Weber was elected to serve another term on the board, and Superintendent Brian

Zambreno was recently approved to serve another three years, through June 2028.

Raasch reflected on his time with the board, including two years as chair. He’s a teacher in a district outside of South St. Paul and originally ran for the board because his kids were in high school, and he wanted to bring a fresh perspective to challenges facing the district. “We were facing a real

fiscal cliff that could have really adversely affected our schools and in turn our kids,” he said. “I’m very, very proud of the work that we accomplished [over the past four years]. Passing the learning levy to stabilize the funding in our schools has been really pivotal for our success.... We have also seen significant improvement to the academic outcomes and the graduation rates for our

kids. We still have a long way to go but we are tackling that with a level of focus and rigor that I’m really proud of.”

Raasch noted that he decided not to run for another term because he’s pursuing higher education to become a principal. He said being on the school board is hard work and as chair he commonly had about 30 hours of weekly responsibilities on top of his fulltime job. It

didn’t help that he was elected during the thick of the pandemic – being sworn in over Zoom – when learning models began shifting and health concerns skyrocketed.

“We’re in a community filled with a very diverse set of opinions and divided ideas about what should be happening inside of our school system, and trying to

**School board / Page 3**



# Developments

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ensure future developments to the northern portion don't interfere with development in the southern portion, such as this one. The property is vacant but has previously been home to Dakota County Technical College's meat cutting school and yard space for Twin City Pallet Co.

## Holiday gas station

A new Holiday gas station capable of serving semi-trucks may be built at the corner of Concord Street and Villaume Avenue. The

property is owned by Bremer Bank, which demolished its old office building there and built a new one on the end of the lot. City staff received a concept plan for the gas station last fall that asked for flexibility from city zoning requirements to build canopies along Villaume Avenue. They voiced that a fourth gas station in the area wouldn't likely be found to be "of public benefit" and therefore the chances of getting flexibility were low. In December, they were notified

that the developer will not be seeking flexibility should the project move forward.

## Marie Avenue reconstruction

In early December, the City Council approved about \$124,000 in consulting fees for Bolton & Menk to assist city engineers with creating the final design for the Marie Avenue Reconstruction Project. Work is slated along Marie from 3rd Avenue to 9th Avenue, and includes making sidewalk connections, bike lanes and accessibility improvements. The intersection at 9th and Marie will also be reconfigured to improve sightlines, and flashing beacons will be added to crosswalks at 7th and 9th. The project is being federally funded through a

Safe Routes to School Grant. Work is expected to begin this year.

## Southview Boulevard

Dakota County recently completed a study evaluating traffic conditions on Southview Boulevard at the 12th and 13th Avenue intersections. The study stemmed from public complaints following the removal of a traffic signal at Southview Boulevard and 12th Avenue during the 2018 reconstruction of Southview Boulevard (County Road 14) project. The study found that traffic in the corridor has increased about 24% – in part due to the construction of a Holiday gas station at Southview and 12th – but pedestrian and driver safety has

strengthened, as evidenced by fewer crashes and better traffic flow. The study provided several options for improvements and recommended ongoing monitoring of traffic and crashes to inform which are necessary. They include creating a mini roundabout at the 12th Avenue intersection, restricting parking along the north side of Southview at 13th Ave., adding "cross traffic does not stop" signs under stop signs at both intersections, and installing flashing beacons at crosswalks of both intersections.

## South Concord

The City is studying the South Concord Corridor to help guide future redevelopment plans there. This is called for in its 2040 comprehensive plan, adopted in 2020. The Corridor refers to the land in the southeastern corner of the city, between Interstate 494 and the community's southern border with Inver Grove Heights. Swanson Haskamp Consulting, LLC was hired for the project last summer, with Michael Lamb Consulting, LLC as a subcontractor. The same consultants assisted the City with the North Concord Mixed Use District

Update project in 2021. The study consists of completing a market study of the corridor, developing an overall corridor vision, and implementing the corridor vision by updating zoning codes and other measures.

## American Legion Library

The City has been working with the consulting firm New History since August 2024 to determine options for the reuse of the American Legion library building (former city library), which dates to 1927 and needs about \$1.82 million in critical maintenance items. New History wrapped up its assessment of the building in November and is now drawing up options for what the building could become, whether private- or city-owned. The study team garnered community feedback about possible uses for the building at the On the Road Again festival and through an online survey. More opportunities to provide feedback will be available in the coming months and the firm's final recommendation for the building is set to go before the city council in May.

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# D&G

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and create new tastes.”

Popular Jamaican dishes include ox tail, jerk chicken and curry chicken. On the fusion side, big hits are rasta pasta, jerk chicken tacos

and a jerk chicken sandwich that’s made with soft cocoa bread and other atypical sandwich ingredients such as cabbage.

“One of the plans that I have is to create a new menu just for Valentine’s Day that’s completely different from what we’re serving now,”

said Keane. “I hope to do a jerk steak. I don’t know if that has been done anywhere near here before.” He also noted he will seek a liquor license in the coming months.

The restaurant can seat about 25. It also has a 30-seat private event space avail-

able for rent. Additionally, there’s room for outdoor dining on the patio. Other than revamping the food prep area and a few other minor additions, the space was relatively turn-key for the new owners.

Keane said he has enjoyed having the chance to interact

a bit more with customers than he did in New York.

“The response has been good,” he said. “People from the community come in and tell us, ‘You’re welcome here. We need you here. We want you here.’ and that’s very encouraging... The most satisfying thing for me is when

I prepare a plate and see the satisfaction that people have.”

D&G is open 11 a.m.-9 p.m., Monday through Saturday. This spring, be on the lookout for a weekend brunch menu. For more information, call 651-666-3346.

# Pig’s Eye

from page 1

environment but that’s only because a two-foot soil cap was installed over the dump. The situation below the surface is very different.

The Pig’s Eye Dump Task Force was formed last spring using \$800,000 in state funding to address PFAS

contamination of Battle Creek, Pig’s Eye Lake and nearby groundwater. South St. Paul Mayor Jimmy Francis is a member of the group as well as representatives from the MPCA, Metropolitan Council, City of St. Paul, City of Newport, Ramsey

County, Dakota County, Washington County, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Department of Health and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Last spring, it was estimated that seven of South St. Paul’s eight wells fail new federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) drinking water standards regarding per- and polyfluoro-

alkyl substances (PFAS), also known as “forever chemicals” – the limit is no more than 4 parts per trillion. While alarming, there is no need to seek an alternative water source or boil water. The city of South St. Paul has already hired the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency for \$1.2 million to complete well monitoring and create a corrective action plan within three years.

PFAS are prevalent in the environment and have been used since the 1940s in products such as nonstick cookware, stain-resistant clothing and firefighting foam. Exposure to certain PFAS over a long period of time can cause cancer and other illnesses, and exposure during pregnancy or early childhood can result in adverse health effects. For more information on PFAS

and the new drinking water standard, visit [epa.gov](http://epa.gov) and search “PFAS.”

The task force meets every other month. The meetings are open to the public, and the next one is slated for 9-11 a.m., Thursday, Feb. 13, at the MPCA office, 520 Lafayette Rd. N., St. Paul. For more information on the site and survey, visit [pca.state.mn.us](http://pca.state.mn.us).

# School board

from page 1

be a leader that represents our community as a whole is a challenging task for any board member to do,” he said.

Raasch said the board is eyeing renovations for aging infrastructure, such as the South St. Paul Community Learning Center, which is slated to get a new roof this summer. A final facilities plan

is expected to be completed this spring. He also said to expect continued partnerships between the District and the City of South St.

Paul. Last summer, the two entities jointly adopted a set of core values: respect, pride, collaboration, integrity, resilience and equity.

The board meets twice a month. A meeting schedule and feedback form can be found at [sspps.org/about/](http://sspps.org/about/)

school-board/meetings. Public comments can be

submitted electronically for each meeting, or in person

at the first meeting of each month.

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**Student notes**

**The University of Central Arkansas graduate:** Kelly Dodge, master of science in education

**South Dakota State University dean's list:** Conlan Ahern

**Library**

The following events are held at Kaposia Library, 115 7th Ave. N., South St. Paul. For more information, visit [www.co.dakota.mn.us/libraries](http://www.co.dakota.mn.us/libraries) or call 651-480-0900.

**Storytime for ages 2-6,** 10:30-11 a.m. each Thursday in February. Includes books, songs and activities that help develop early literacy skills.

**Storytime for babies,** 10:30-11 a.m. each Friday in February.

**Kaposia Book Club,** 7-8 p.m., Monday, Feb. 10. The title is "The Island of Sea Women" by Lisa See. For adults.

**Astrological Weaving,** 3-5 p.m., Tuesday, Feb. 11. Make a tapestry based on your astrological sign. Ages 12-18.

**Researching and Writing Historical Fiction,** 6:30-8

p.m., Tuesday, Feb. 25. Discover tools for researching and understanding past eras, historical archives and artifacts, and how to embed them into your story. Presented by The Loft. Registration required. For adults.

**Homework Help,** 3:30-6:30 p.m. each Wednesday. Volunteer tutors are available to help K-12 students with any subject.

**Fitness programs at Woog arena**

South St. Paul Parks and Recreation is offering two fitness programs in February in the fitness studio at Doug Woog Arena, 141 6th St. S.

**Yoga Sculpt,** a modern style of yoga that incorporates elements of strength training and cardiovascular exercise, is held 12-12:45 p.m. each Monday and Wednesday. Cost is \$25; drop-in fee is \$5 per class.

**Strength Training for Women** is offered 9-9:45 a.m. each Tuesday and Thursday. The class focuses on building muscular strength, endurance, and overall fitness. Cost is \$25; drop-in fee is \$5 per class.

**Central Square**

The following events are held at Central Square Community Center, 100 7th Ave. N., South St. Paul. For more information, visit [communityed.sspps.org](http://communityed.sspps.org) or call 651-306-3632.

**Free Take & Bake Meals** - Free meals (single serve or to feed a family of four) are available to all South St. Paul residents on Mondays after 3 p.m. through Saturday at 2 p.m., while supplies last.

**The Fare For All food program** offers affordable groceries and packages of produce and meat at up to 40% off retail prices. The next date is 4-6 p.m., Tuesday, Feb. 25. Credit, debit, EBT or cash payments only, no checks. For more information, visit [fareforall.org](http://fareforall.org).

**Open swim,** 9-10:30 a.m. each Saturday in February. All ages. Ages six and under must have an adult in the water with them. \$5 per person or \$15 per family.

**Senior Center activities for ages 55 and older**  
**Happy Feet Walk the Square,** 7:30 a.m.-3 p.m., Monday-Friday. Get some exercise by walking inside Central Square.

**South St. Paul Buzz,** 8:30-11 a.m., Monday-Friday. Enjoy a cup of community and conversation of what's happening around the community.

**Cribbage,** noon-2:30 p.m. each Monday

**Penny Bingo,** 1-2:30 p.m. each Monday

**Woodcarvers Group,** 9-11 a.m. each Tuesday. Bring your own tools and supplies.

**Line Dancing,** 10:30-11:30 a.m. each Tuesday. Dance to a variety of music genres.

**Craft Day,** 1-3 p.m. each Tuesday. Socialize with other crafters or learn a new hobby.

**500 card games,** 11:30 a.m.-2 p.m. each Wednesday and Friday.

**Hand and Foot card games,** 1-2:30 p.m. each Thursday.

**Free lap swimming for Senior Center members** ages 65 and older, 7:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m., Monday-Friday; and 7:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. Saturday. Senior center membership is \$12 a year.

**Meeting dates**

The **South St. Paul City Council** meets at 7 p.m. the first and third Monday of each month in the council chambers at City Hall, 125 3rd Ave. N. For agendas and city council member contact information, visit [southstpaul.org](http://southstpaul.org) or call 651-554-3284.

The **Special School District 6 School Board** meets at 6 p.m. the second and fourth Monday of each month.

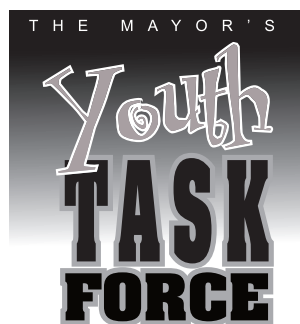
For agendas and school board member contact in-

formation, visit [sspps.org](http://sspps.org) or call 651-457-9400.

The **South St. Paul Lions Club** meets at 7:15 p.m. the first and third Thursday of the month (September-May). Locations vary. For more information, visit [ssplions.org](http://ssplions.org).

**South St. Paul Southwest Lioness-Lions Club** meets the second Thursday of the month at 6 p.m. at Angelo's Italian Restaurant, 1203 Southview Blvd., South St. Paul. This group of women serves the community through fundraising and volunteering.

The **South St. Paul Garden Club** will hold its annual plant sale 8 a.m.-4 p.m., Saturday, May 17 at 1900 Burma Lane, South St. Paul. The sale features perennials, heritage vegetables, herbs and garden accessories.



Happy Valentine's Day! The South St. Paul Mayor's Youth Task Force will be delivering CommUNITY Grams for Valentine's Day again this year. This will be the fifth Valentine's Day that task force members have helped spread joy throughout the community. Valagrams can be sent to friends, family members, coworkers, an elderly neighbor down the block or anyone else living in South St. Paul. The message

of encouragement can be up to 100 words.

Valagrams are a great way to share good news or to wish someone a great day or a Happy Valentine's Day. The form is available at [southstpaul.org](http://southstpaul.org) (on the event calendar page), at South St. Paul City Hall, 125 3rd Ave. N., or by contacting Deb Griffith at 651-554-3230 or [deb.griffith@southstpaul.org](mailto:deb.griffith@southstpaul.org). Once the form is completed and returned to City Hall, task force members will create a Valagram for you and place it in a Valentine's bag with some fun and tasty treats. On Saturday, Feb. 8, task force members will deliver the Valagrams to the recipients' doors. Cost is \$6 each or two for \$10. The deadline is Wednesday, Feb. 5. Proceeds support community activities hosted by the task force,

including the Kaposia Days Children's parade, Disco BINGO, Fill the Backpack campaign, the Great Halloween Get Together and the SSP Annual Food Drive for Neighbors, Inc.

Valagrams have been the most popular CommUNITY gram. During the year, task force members also deliver Boo Grams for Halloween and Jingle Grams at Christmas. CommUNITY Grams can also be sent throughout the year for birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, or to anyone who needs cheering up or recognition for an accomplishment. For more information on the SSP CommUNITY Gram program or the South St. Paul Mayor's Youth Task Force, contact Deb Griffith, community affairs, at 651-554-3230 or [deb.griffith@southstpaul.org](mailto:deb.griffith@southstpaul.org).

2 KAPOSIA DAYS 1

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**Community Love**

Love in a community is about choosing connection, compassion and shared purpose. It's the quiet decision to look out for one another, celebrate each other's strengths, and support those who need it most. While it can be easy to get caught up in daily routines, February offers a unique opportunity to pause and intentionally embrace love – not just in a romantic sense, but in how we treat and uplift those around us.

Valentine's Day invites us to appreciate the relationships that matter: family, friends, neighbors and even the strangers who cross our paths. It's a chance to reflect on how we show care and kindness. Love doesn't need grand displays; it's in the small gestures – a kind word, a smile, or the gift of time. These choices, though simple, can profoundly impact the connections we build in our communities.

Black History Month deepens this call to love by encouraging us to acknowledge and celebrate the diversity that strengthens our



**Jimmy Francis**  
South St. Paul Mayor

shared spaces. It's an opportunity to honor the contributions of Black leaders, thinkers and trailblazers who have shaped history and continue to shape our future. By choosing to listen, learn and amplify these voices, we not only show respect but actively create a community where everyone feels valued, seen and loved.

Ultimately, love in a community isn't just a feeling, it's an action. It's in the conscious choices we make every day to create positivity, celebrate diversity and strengthen the bonds between us. February, though short, reminds us that love

grows when we choose to nurture it.

**Five ways to show love in February**

**Support local businesses or initiatives** - Take the time to shop at small businesses, particularly those owned by members of underrepresented groups. Many local entrepreneurs contribute to the fabric of the community and your support can make a difference.

**Reach out to someone you haven't spoken to in a while** - Whether it's a neighbor, a family member or an old friend, reaching out to reconnect can brighten someone's day. A phone call, handwritten note or a thoughtful text can go a long way in showing someone they are valued.

**Volunteer or donate** - Choose a cause that aligns with your values and dedicate some time to it. Whether it's a food shelf, a youth mentorship program or a cultural organization celebrating Black History Month, your efforts can have a ripple effect of positivity.

**Celebrate Black History**

**Month** - Attend events, read books by Black authors or explore the stories of local Black leaders in your community. Sharing what you learn with others can spark meaningful conversations and build deeper connections.

**Perform random acts of kindness** - Small, unexpected acts of kindness can lift someone's spirits. Pay for a stranger's coffee, clear a neighbor's driveway or leave an encouraging note for someone. These little moments remind others that they're part of a community that cares.

In a month that celebrates love in so many forms, the most powerful way to honor it is through action. Whether it's showing gratitude to those around us, amplifying underrepresented voices or simply being kind, February invites us to choose love – and to create a stronger, more connected community because of it. To listen to more conversations like this, visit <https://www.southstpaul.org/With-Love-From-South-St-Paul>.

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# Arts & Entertainment

**Children's Museum**  
10 7th St. W.  
St. Paul  
651-225-6000  
mcm.org

**Dinosaurs: Land of Fire and Ice**, through May 11. Travel back in time and discover what life was like when dinosaurs roamed the earth. Dig for fossils, explore a swampy bog and oozing volcano, climb through icy terrain and more.

**Exhibits and activities** include "The Scramble," "The Studio," "Creativity Jam," "Sprouts," "Our World," "Forces at Play," "Shipwreck Adventures" and "Imaginopolis." Tickets are \$17 on weekdays and \$19 on weekends. Admission is free the first Sunday of each month; reservations are required. The next free date is February 2.

**History Center**  
345 W. Kellogg Blvd.  
St. Paul  
651-259-3000  
mnhs.org

**"Girlhood (It's complicated),"** through June 1, 2025. This exhibit from the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History features more than 100 objects that explore how young women have influenced politics, education, work, health and fashion.

**"Reframing our Stories"** is featured through October 2025. The exhibit was created from a decades-old box of photographs simply labeled "Indians." Inside the box were dozens of pictures of Native community members, organizations, activities, and events that are relevant today.

**"Our Home: Native Minnesota"** features historic

and contemporary photographs, maps and artifacts that show how Minnesota's native communities have retained cultural practices, teachings and values.

**Other exhibits** include "Minnesota's Greatest Generation," "Then Now Wow," "Grainland" and "Weather Permitting." Tickets are \$15 for adults, \$12 for seniors and college students, and \$8 for children ages five to 17. Admission and parking are free on Thursdays, 4-8 p.m.

**History Theatre**  
30 E. 10th St.  
St. Paul  
651-292-4323  
historytheatre.com

**"The Root Beer Lady,"** through Feb. 23. Discover the story of the indomitable Dorothy Molter, the last legal non-indigenous

**DRUMLine Live** comes to the Ordway Center Feb. 21. Experience high-energy choreographed routines and tributes to some of the greatest musical artists.



resident of the Boundary Waters. The story reflects the beauty and hardships of Molter's solitary yet satisfying life. From \$25.

**Landmark Center**  
75 5th St. W.  
St. Paul  
651-292-3225  
landmarkcenter.org

**Courtroom 317 Concerts**, all are free and held noon-1 p.m. Thousand Tongues-Music from the Philippines, Thursday, Feb. 13; Donna Stoering and Friends, Thursday, Feb. 20; Artaria String Quartet, Thursday, Feb. 27.

**Mosaic Festival: Dance and Music of World Cultures**, 11 a.m.-3 p.m., Sunday, Feb. 16. Experience cultural customs from nations across the globe: music, dance, language, foods,

traditional clothing, and arts and crafts. \$6 adults; \$4 kids; free for ages 6 and under.

**HORA: Dragobete**, 1-3 p.m. each Sunday in February. Learn about the Romanian version of Valentine's Day. Free.

**Ballet Tuesdays**, noon-1 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 11. Ballet performances and demonstrations by BalletCo. Laboratory. Free.

**Urban Expedition: Czech Republic and Slovakia**, 1-3 p.m., Sunday, Feb. 23. Authentic music, food, dance performances and crafts. Free.

**Woodturning demonstration**, 1-4 p.m., Sunday, Feb. 16 in the AAW Gallery of Wood Art. Free.

**Public Building Tour**, 12:30 p.m.-1:15 p.m., every Sunday. Learn about the

building's history, gangster connections and restoration.

**MN Museum of American Art**  
350 Robert St. N.  
St. Paul  
651-797-2571  
mmaa.org

**"Here, Now,"** through May 2027. Discover 150 artworks across media from historically significant and notable new artists. All are in the M's permanent collection. The museum is open 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Thursday-Sunday. Admission is free.

**Ordway Center**  
345 Washington St.  
St. Paul  
651-224-4222  
ordway.org

**The St. Paul Chamber Orchestra concerts:** Haydn's Fire Symphony, Jan.

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31-Feb. 1. Four Spirits with Abel Selaocoe, Feb. 14-15. All concerts from \$16.

**Minnesota Opera** presents "The Snowy Day," Feb. 8-16. A young boy wakes to find that the first snow of winter has fallen overnight – an exciting day of adventure awaits. From \$37.

**DRUMLine Live**, 7:30 p.m., Friday, Feb. 21. A musical roller coaster full of hip-hop, pop, American soul, gospel, jazz and more with choreographed routines and tributes to some of the greatest artists of our time, including Prince. From \$34.

**Fire Shut Up in My Bones**, 2 p.m., Sunday, Feb. 23. Based on the 2014 memoir by Charles M. Blow, with music by Terence Blanchard, and libretto by Kasi Lemmons. From \$15.

**Park Square Theatre**

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**parksquaretheatre.org**  
"The Gin Game," Feb. 5-23. In the quiet confines of a retirement home, two elderly residents form an unexpected bond over games of gin rummy. The play poignantly examines the complexities of aging, loneliness, and the search for human connection, questioning whether life's unpredictable "hands" bring victory or defeat. From \$25.

"Broadway in Love," 7 p.m., Friday, Feb. 14 and 5 p.m., Saturday, Feb. 15. A performance of Broadway's greatest loves songs. From \$20.

**RiverCentre**  
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651-265-4800  
rivercentre.org

**Minnesota Roller Derby**, 6 p.m., Saturday, Feb. 8. From \$22.

**Minnesota Wedding Show**, noon, Sunday, Feb. 23. Connect with wedding professionals.

**Science Museum of Minnesota**  
120 W. Kellogg Blvd.  
St. Paul  
651-221-9444  
smm.org

"Mental Health: Mind Matters," through Feb. 2. Unravel the layers of mental health, using empathy and understanding to analyze the specific challenges and triumphs associated with mental well-being.

**Virtual Reality Transporter** - Use the VRT to hurtle through the cosmos at fantastic speeds, scuba dive into prehistoric seas, and join the astronauts of Apollo 11 as they moonwalk for the first time. \$9.95.

**Museum Nights**, 5-8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays. Explore museum galleries, check out special Science Live performances, enjoy food and drink, then catch an Omnitheater show.

**Omnitheater films:**  
"Ancient Caves," through Feb. 14. Join scientists and cave divers to explore vast underground worlds and elaborate rock foundations in search of geologic clues about the planet's climate history.

"Fungi Web of Life,"

through April 13. The film unravels how plants and animals would not exist without mushrooms, molds, yeasts and toadstools.

"Secrets of the Sea," through April 14. From the smallest krill to the largest whales, explore how ocean ecosystems depend on biodiversity and a surprising level of animal cooperation.

"Stellar Tours: A Star is Born," Wednesday-Sunday. Follow the life cycle of a star through this live digital telescope show.

Tickets are \$34.95 for adults and \$24.95 for ages 4-17, and include an Omnitheater show.

**Xcel Center**  
199 W. Kellogg Blvd.  
St. Paul  
651-726-8240  
xcelenergycenter.com

**Cinch World's Toughest Rodeo**, 7:30 p.m., January 31-February 1. The world's toughest cowboys compete in bull riding, saddle bronc riding and bareback riding, and the thrilling winner-takes-all showdown round and women's barrel racing. The rodeo opens at 6 p.m. each night for a pre-show event "down on the dirt," pony rides, the chance to meet the cowboys and more. From \$27.

**Tyler, The Creator**, Tues-

day, Feb. 4. From \$133.

**Sebastian Maniscalco**, Friday, Feb. 14. From \$51.

**Justin Timberlake**, Monday, Feb. 24. From \$79.

**Other events**

**Portraits of Indigenous Authors and Artists**, through June 30, at 3rd Floor Exhibit Gallery at the Minnesota State Capitol, 75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. Now featured is a collection of fine art photography by John Ratzloff. This project started when Ratzloff was invited to photograph the life and natural beauty of White Earth Nation. His photography hon-

ors the voices and legacies of Indigenous leaders, offering a unique visual narrative that celebrates their contributions to art, culture and advocacy. Open weekdays 8 a.m.-5 p.m.; Saturdays 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Free.

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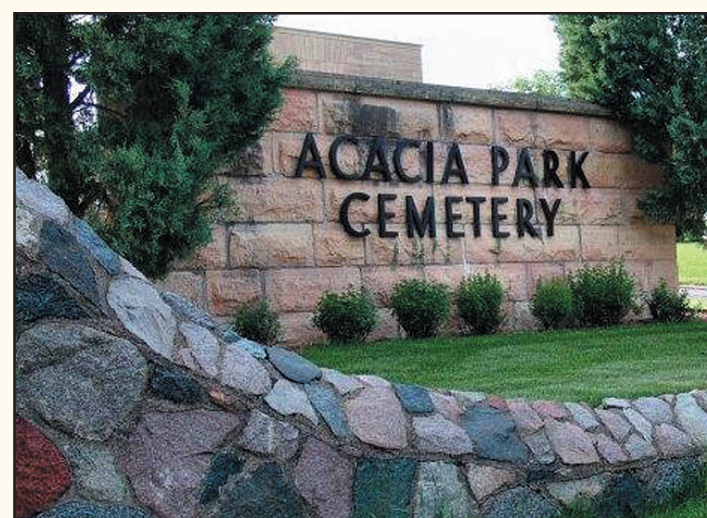
Established in 1925, Acacia Park Cemetery sits 350 feet above the Mississippi River, just south of the Mendota Bridge across from historic Fort Snelling. Pilot Knob was an early 19th Century viewing point for such frontiersmen as Zebulon Pike and Josiah Snelling. Native Americans often insisted that agreements be signed there because it was the site "closer to the heavens." Its majestic aura continues to impress visitors with the same peace that infused the Native Americans many years ago.

Acacia Park offers 21 different sections of property,

each, like the park itself, named after a type of tree. Ash, oak, pine, maple, elm, locust and linden are among the varieties dressing the park's rolling terrain. A stone chapel, built in the 1930s with stone from the old St. Paul courthouse provides an added remnant of a historical era.

Visitors to Acacia Park are greeted by a 40-foot steel bell tower donated to Acacia Park by Eva Hope Miller in memory of her husband Major General Ray S. Miller. The bell tower stands eminently in the main courtyard and its symmetrical grace lends a ceremonial harmony to the memorial grounds.

The Audubon Society recognized Acacia Park for its bird sanctuary, which attracts thousands of birds each year. The cemetery is also home to deer, wild turkeys, fox, and albino squirrels.



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# Winter Fun inside and out

**Tim Spitzack**  
Editor

One cool thing about our city is that there's always something fun to do – inside and out – even in the heart of winter. We're a hardy bunch and event organizers know a little snow and cold won't keep us from having a good time. Here's what's on tap in the coming weeks.

## Snowshoe by candlelight

South St. Paul Parks and Recreation is hosting a candlelight snowshoe hike at Kaposia Park at 5 p.m., Wednesday, Feb. 5. The trails will be illuminated by candlelight for a serene walk through the woods. Snowshoe rentals will be available for kids and adults, although they are limited and available on a first-come, first-served basis. If you don't have snowshoes, you can still hike the trails. The event is free. Food trucks will offer hot food and

beverages for purchase.

South St. Paul Parks and Recreation is offering cross-country ski lessons 3:30-5 p.m., on Mondays and Wednesdays, Feb. 3-12 at Como Park and Battle Creek Regional Park. Designed for beginners, instruction focuses on fundamental techniques like gliding, balancing and the proper use of ski poles. Skis are provided for kids. \$20.

For more information, visit [southstpaul.org](http://southstpaul.org) or call 651-366-6200.

## St. Paul Winter Carnival

The St. Paul Winter Carnival is in full swing and there's still time to enjoy the ice sculptures at Rice Park, snow sculptures and Vulcan Snow Park at the State Fairgrounds, and to witness the Vulcan Victory Torchlight Parade and overthrow of King Boreas. For more information on the following Winter Carnival events, visit [wintercarnival.com](http://wintercarnival.com).



## Around the World in a Day Kids & Family Day

11 a.m.-5 p.m., Feb. 1 at the Landmark Center. Entertaining performances by local cultural groups, educational presentations, arts and crafts, storytelling, and other activities for all ages. Vendors will also be selling their wares and food.

**Union Depot's Doggie Depot**, 10 a.m.-3 p.m., Feb. 1. Includes the crowning of the Canine King & Queen, giveaways, a marketplace, and visits with pet experts.

From 2-9 p.m., stop by the Great Northern Ice Bar on the North Plaza at Union Depot.

**Vulcan Victory Torchlight Parade**, Feb. 1. The parade starts at 5:30 p.m. at Smith Avenue and West Seventh and ends at Rice Park. Following the parade, the 2025 Krewe will gather at the steps of the George Latimer Central Library for the ever-dramatic overthrow of King Boreas. A fireworks show will follow.

**Vulcan Victory Dance**, 7:30 p.m., Feb. 1 at the InterContinental St. Paul Riverfront, 11 Kellogg Blvd. E. Rhino will play a wide range of tunes from funk to R&B to retro-pop and current chart-topping singles. For tickets, visit [vulcanvictorydance.com](http://vulcanvictorydance.com).

## Minnesota Ice Festival

The Minnesota Ice Festival runs through Feb. 16 at TCO Stadium, Viking Lakes, 2645 Vikings Circle, Eagan. It features a massive 18,000-square-foot ice maze (recently named the world's largest by Guinness World Records), a 44-by-80-foot skating rink, multi-lane ice slide, ice bar, food trucks,

outdoor firepits and warming house. The event also features the Carver Cup ice sculpting competition Jan. 30-Feb. 1. Ice sculpting teams from across the country compete to create spectacular works of art and the chance to win a cash prize and the Carver Cup trophy. Festival hours are 4-10 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays, 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Saturdays and 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Sundays. Tickets are \$24.99 for ages 15 and older and \$12.99 for ages 5-14. For more information, visit [minnesotaicefestival.com](http://minnesotaicefestival.com).

## MH Frozen Fun Fest

The Mendota Heights Parks and Recreation Department is hosting its annual Frozen Fun Fest February 3-9. Here's the line-up. Some events require registration. For more information or to register, visit [mendotaheightsmn.gov/500/Frozen-Fun-Fest](http://mendotaheightsmn.gov/500/Frozen-Fun-Fest).

The **medallion hunt** begins Monday, Feb. 3 and runs through Sunday, Feb. 9, or until the medallion is found. The winner receives a Minnesota-themed gift basket valued at \$200. The medallion will be in a city park and daily clues will be

posted at 9 a.m. beginning Feb. 3 on the City's website and at [facebook.com/MH-ParksandRec](http://facebook.com/MH-ParksandRec).

**Ice Block Party**, 5-8 p.m., Friday, Feb. 7 at Friendly Hills Park, 2360 Pueblo Ln. An evening of live music, snowshoeing among luminaries (snowshoes available to use for free), ice skating, hot chocolate, food trucks and more. Music takes place in an enclosed, heated tent. The Teddy Bear Band will perform 5-5:45 p.m. and the Beatnik Brothers 6:30-8 p.m.

**Puzzle competition**, 9 a.m.-noon, Saturday, Feb. 8, at Somerset Elementary School, 1355 Dodd Rd. Teams and individuals will race to finish a 500-piece puzzle. Kids ages 8-14 will compete to complete a 100-piece puzzle, beginning at 10:45 a.m. Each member of the winning team will receive a puzzle to take home. Free. Registration required.

**Learn to Ice Fish**, 2-4 p.m., Saturday, Feb. 8 at Roger's Lake Park, 1000 Wagon Wheel Trail. Discover why ice fishing is so popular in Minnesota and learn how to be successful at it. Equipment provided. Free.

**Coffee with the Council**, 9-10 a.m., Sunday, Feb. 9 at Par 3 Golf Course, 1695 Dodd Rd. Join city council members for a cup of java and conversation.

**Coloring contest**, Feb. 3-9. Color a wintery masterpiece for a chance to win prizes. There will be two categories: ages 5 and under, and 6-12. Coloring sheets can be picked up at Mendota Heights City Hall, 1101 Victoria Curve, or found online. Drop off completed coloring sheets at City Hall during normal business hours or after hours in the outdoor utility bill drop box at City Hall.

## WSP Winter Fun Fest

The annual Winter Fun Fest in West St. Paul returns 2-5 p.m., Saturday, Feb. 15, at Dodge Nature Center, 1701 Charlton St. Activities include horse-drawn wagon rides, snowshoeing, boot hockey, ice golf, otter sliding, kicksledding and more. Visitors can also join a medallion hunt for the chance to win a prize package, enjoy music and a toasty bonfire, and more. All activities are free. Food and beverages will be available for purchase. For more information, visit [dodge-nature-center.org/event/winter-fun-fest](http://dodge-nature-center.org/event/winter-fun-fest) or call 651-455-4531.



# Space Fest: Cosmic Chaos

February 14-16

With a crash and a bang (a big one), we're gearing up for the 7th annual **Space Fest: Cosmic Chaos**. Get ready for crashes, collisions, astronomical anomalies, and all the things we have yet to understand about our universe. Stop by **February 14** for our late night Star Party or during the day on **February 15 and 16** for in-person activities and events. Just watch out for that black hole...

Event details: [z.umn.edu/space-fest-2025](http://z.umn.edu/space-fest-2025)

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**Custodian** - Perform cleaning, event set-up/clean-up, and ensure safety of buildings. Full-time starting base wage \$23.31/hr. Part-time and seasonal starting base wage \$20/hr. (DOQ).

**Kids Club Supervisor** - Lead a school-age child care program in one of our elementary buildings and supervise paraprofessional staff. Full-time, 12-month. Starting base wage \$21.93/hr. (DOQ).

**For more information and to apply:**  
[sowashco.org/careers](http://sowashco.org/careers)

EOE



# POSTSCRIPT

## The car wash dress

My sister took me to task. "You know I was not being mean about your dress, don't you?"

She meant the dress that she had said made me look like a car wash – the part of the car wash where the flappy things slap the car dry. My dress looked a lot like that, especially if I spun around. I thought this was hilarious and mentioned it in a column.

"Of course I knew you weren't being mean!" I told her.

It was not my intention to be so amusing, wearing the car wash dress. From a certain angle, it looks pretty stylish. It was some designer's idea of a good look, and because I wear a smaller size, I can usually fit into these ill-conceived but affordable cast-offs I find on the internet. Not all of them work out. But I'm delighted when I can cause some unexpected merriment simply by showing up in an \$11 used dress.

My sister ought to know. She should know that, at



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62, I'm not angling for some best-dressed list. I'm all about having fun with clothes, trying weird and different things, and a lot of those things absolutely are not going to work out. That's fine with me. I still have the

car wash dress. It's black, so I could wear it to a funeral sometime when I felt a little levity might be welcomed at the end of the service.

My family has a fine tradition of teasing. I know some people find this hard to believe, and I know some people tease cruelly. That's not what I mean at all. The teasing in my family has always been delivered with a heavy dose of love. Since I was a small child, I've known that the person who got teased was loved and the more people teased, the more love there was.

My dad and his sister were terrible to each other. My father always gave my aunt the

meanest birthday cards, until one year she said, "Just once, I'd like a nice birthday card."

The next year, my father went on a mission to find the most maudlin, absurdly sentimental, "To My Beloved Sister" birthday cards he could find. He found three, doused them in perfume, and presented them to her. (My dad also made her a rather nice set of candleholders in his woodshop that year, as I recall.)

They both laughed so hard they had to wipe away tears.

She never asked for another nice card. So when my sister tells me I look like a car wash, it makes my day. I feel seen. I feel loved.

Being able to tell someone they look like a car wash means you know them well. She knows I have an oversized interest in buying dresses – too many dresses – for cheap on the internet. She knows I'm not terribly self-conscious. (OK, I'm a bit of a ham.) Most of all, she knows that I know she loves me. She has supported

me through every crazy and life-disturbing decision and event – career changes, a divorce, and moves across the country. There has never been a moment of my life when I have doubted that my sister would be there for me.

So, she gets to tease me. I am definitely keeping the car wash dress. And it's not the last crazy dress I will buy. I figure it's my duty to give my sister something new to laugh about.

Till next time.

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**Worship Guide**

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another." Hebrews 10: 24-25

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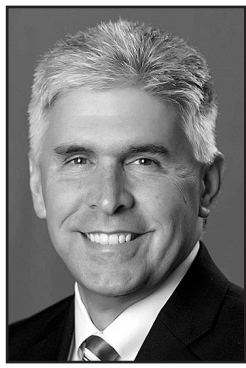


# Can AI help us lead in 2025?

## 10 lessons from a year using ChatGPT in public service

In January 2024, I embarked on a yearlong journey to explore how artificial intelligence (AI) tools – specifically ChatGPT – could enhance my work as chair of the Dakota County Board. Leading a fast-growing county of 455,000 residents demands immense time and energy, and I was curious: could AI boost productivity without compromising quality? The results surprised me, offering valuable insights into leadership, technology and human connection.

**Amplifying productivity and creativity** - Throughout the year, ChatGPT helped me craft 33 speeches, 24 newsletters, 12 newspaper columns and 91 social media posts. Among the highlights was carrying out a cohesive campaign to call attention to Dakota County's groundbreaking achievement as the first U.S. county able to generate more electricity from renewable energy sources than our county buildings and facilities consume. By streamlining communication efforts, AI freed me to engage more directly with constituents, attend events



Joe Atkins  
Dakota County Commissioner

and focus on policymaking.

**Strengthening community engagement** - AI-assisted content often performed as well as, or better than, my solo efforts. For instance, a December social media post about Dakota County's superior financial rating – higher than 33 states and 181 nations – sparked significant engagement. ChatGPT not only drafted compelling text but also suggested an eye-catching image, transforming a dry topic into one that resonated with thousands of readers.

**Striking the human-AI balance** - While ChatGPT excelled at producing polished, structured content,

it couldn't replace the emotional depth needed for certain moments. At the October grand opening of Dakota County's Veterans Memorial Greenway, for example, AI struggled to capture the profound sacrifices of local heroes in attendance. Personal anecdotes and heartfelt touches were indispensable.

**Mastering the art of prompting** - The quality of ChatGPT's outputs heavily depended on how well I framed my prompts. For instance, when drafting a speech highlighting Dakota County's national awards in public safety, health and infrastructure – all achieved while maintaining Minnesota's lowest taxes – precise instructions made all the difference.

**Navigating ethical considerations** - Transparency was key. I openly shared with constituents that I was experimenting with AI to enhance efficiency and free up more time for direct service. I also never shared constituent data or identifying information with ChatGPT. At its core, AI is a tool – like a pen or a computer – and its ethical use depends on the

person wielding it.

**Recognizing AI's limitations** - AI wasn't without its flaws. Its outputs occasionally lacked nuance or accuracy, underscoring the importance of thorough fact-checking and incorporating local context.

**Supporting, not leading, policy** - I never used AI to create policy, but it supported research efforts. For example, ChatGPT helped me explore innovative ways to keep libraries relevant in a digital age. Together with recommendations from expert library staff, Dakota County expanded self-service hours, launched a new, highly popular branch, and eliminated outdated fines, earning the county the title of Minnesota's Best Library System from Minnesota Star Tribune readers.

**Preparing for the future** - This experiment highlighted AI's potential to improve governance, from policy research to service delivery. However, it also underscored the need for human oversight. No tool can replace insights from constituents, colleagues, staff and stakeholders.

**Discovering AI's sense of humor** - Surprisingly, ChatGPT's light and positive humor often aligned with my own, making collaboration enjoyable. While neither of us will write for "Saturday Night Live," this shared tone helped make complex topics more accessible and engaging for audiences.

**Reflecting on impact** - AI encouraged clearer, more consistent communication, particularly on complex topics like county finances. This experience reaffirmed that leadership is fundamentally about connection, trust and vision, qualities that no AI can replicate.

**The surprise ending** - The entirety of the column above was composed by ChatGPT and it illustrates both the best and worst of AI. The best work that ChatGPT performed for me in 2024 occurred when I used it essentially as a supercharged thesaurus. I would draft material for speeches, newsletters and social media, then sometimes run the text through ChatGPT to see if it generated better word choices or phrasing. Occasionally it did, and it deserves credit for this. Typically, though, the tool merely rephrased or rearranged, with little difference or meaningful

improvement. The worst part about ChatGPT was its misguided need to impress and exaggerate, to the point of inaccuracy. Using it for research proved even more futile, since the time it took me to fact-check AI's sources exceeded any time it saved.

**The bottom line** - My yearlong experiment with ChatGPT kept reminding me of the famous Cliff Clavin character from the old TV show "Cheers": fun to engage with but possessing an oversized ego too careless with facts to be reliable. Nonetheless, I remain hopeful AI will eventually help improve public service, making it more efficient, effective and accessible. Only time will tell. For now, I'm going to continue serving Dakota County and the folks I represent the same way I have for the past eight years, through old-fashioned hard work, staying in touch, and working together to get good things done.

*Joe Atkins represents District 2 on the Dakota County Board, which includes South St. Paul, West St. Paul and Inver Grove Heights. He welcomes feedback. To share comments, concerns or questions, contact him at Joe.Atkins@co.dakota.mn.us or 651-438-4430.*

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**Neighbors, Inc.**

Dawn Wambeke  
President & CEO



In this editorial, we are celebrating Black History Month and volunteerism.

Black History Month is a time to reflect on and celebrate the rich history, achievements and contributions of African Americans. Its establishment is credited to Carter G. Woodson, one of the first scholars to study the history of the African diaspora. In 1916, he founded The Journal of Negro History, and in 1926 established "Negro History Week," the precursor of Black History Month.

The National Museum of African American History and Culture is dedicating this year to celebrating the multifaceted brilliance of Black women, honoring their resilience and contri-

butions to society. We remember Sarah Boone, who received a patent in 1892 for an improved ironing board, and Marie Van Brittan Brown, who co-invented the home security system.

Other notable Black inventors are Garrett Morgan, who improved the traffic light through the three-light system, and Frederick McKinley Jones, who invented the refrigerated truck.

African Americans were at the forefront of the civil rights movement, exemplified by Thurgood Marshall's leadership as chief attorney in the landmark Brown v. Board of Education case, Rosa Parks' courageous defiance in Montgomery, Ala., and the relentless determination of the Freedom Rid-

ers in 1961 who challenged segregation in the American South.

Although African Americans have contributed significantly to the historical and cultural fabric of the United States, they have encountered substantial adversity throughout history. For example, when the National Housing Act of 1934 introduced 30-year mortgages and fixed interest rates to allow more people to buy a home, it did not benefit everyone. The process of redlining excluded some racial groups from living in certain neighborhoods. That process was eventually outlawed in 1968 with the Fair Housing Act but it has left a deep and enduring impact on our community, contributing significantly to health disparities and the homeownership gap. A study from 2015-2020 highlights this stark contrast: 77.5% of White households in Minnesota own their homes compared to 30.5% of Black households. The rates are even lower in the metro area.

Neighbors, Inc. is dedicated to enhancing the financial well-being of all people

through a range of services. From improving financial literacy and reducing debt to guiding major purchases, we provide comprehensive support. We also help people secure family-sustaining wage jobs by offering free assistance in resume building, interview preparation, job-specific training and job placement. This is all made possible through financial support from our funders, partnerships with businesses, and invaluable mentorship from community members. Together, we are building a stronger, more financially secure community.

**Volunteerism**

Neighbors, Inc. was founded over 52 years ago by local churches and volunteers. Today, we have more than 325 dedicated volunteers who bring our mission to life and nearly double our staffing capacity each day. They play a crucial role by helping us significantly increase our reach, reduce operational costs and enhance community engagement.

Neighbors offers a wide and growing array of mean-

ingful volunteer opportunities, ranging from helping in our thrift store, to ensuring that families have healthy and nutritious food, and mentoring individuals in their job search. Whether you can commit to a one-time event or prefer a weekly or monthly engagement, we have a place for you. Our self-scheduling is a breeze and allows volunteers to schedule based on their availability.

Volunteering not only strengthens our community but also enriches the life of volunteers. By giving your time, you can make a tangible difference, build lasting relationships, and gain a sense of fulfillment. Together, we can create a stronger, more vibrant community. Consider volunteering at Neighbors, Inc. or one of our other local nonprofits. Your time and effort can make a world of difference. We are incredibly grateful for our volunteers, and truly believe they are our "superpower."

Inclusion stands as a core value at Neighbors, Inc. We are committed to diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging

and justice. Our aim is to welcome all communities and cultivate an environment where every individual experiences a genuine sense of belonging.

As always, I'd love to connect. You may reach me at dawn@neighborsmn.org, 651-272-1135 or by stopping by our office. Stay connected with Neighbors neighborsmn.org.

**Volunteer In Your Community**

Lutheran Social Service of MN is seeks volunteers age 55 or over in your area to provide companionship to older adults or mentor school-age children. Volunteers commit to regular weekly hours for a tax-free stipend and mileage reimbursement. Contact us at 888.205.3770, or AmericorpsSeniors@lssmn.org for more information and to make an impact in your community.



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**Saturday, March 15, 10 a.m.-1 p.m.**  
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