

Miller Message for March 2017

Gary school problems won't go away

The Gary Community School Corporation is in serious trouble. It is failing financially, amassing huge deficits every year; and it is failing functionally, failing to educate the students entrusted to its care.

SCHOOL FINANCES

The Gary Community Schools (GCS) have accumulated debts of \$101 million, and will be adding \$8.5 million to that number in 2017 and \$6.5 million in 2018. At the same time, the district is struggling to meet its monthly payroll and the cost of essential services, like school buses and health care. For the past several years, the School City has employed a financial consultant, Jack Martin, who can advise the school district on spending decisions, but has no authority to compel the school administration to follow his advice.

State Senator Eddie Melton, who represents our district, is begging the Distressed Unit Appeal Board to provide funds to keep the school district functioning for the remainder of the current school year. At the same time, he is working with Senator Luke Kenley, chairman of the Indiana senate finance committee, on a plan to deal with the School City's long-term financial problems. Kenley's bill on this subject would provide for an Emergency Manager, and a Chief Financial Officer, appointed by the state's Distressed Unit Appeal Board (DUAB) along with a Chief Financial Officer with complete authority over school finances. Melton would prefer to see a local financial board with the same authority. In either case, the school superintendent and the school board would concentrate on improving the educational performance of the schools. Either approach would reflect Kenley's priority, which is protecting the credit rating of the State of Indiana. The concern is, that these plans would leave no funds available for educating the children.

When the Melton proposal was presented to the Gary school board, it received a favorable response, even though it does not make any additional funds available to the Gary schools.

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

Marquette elementary school in Miller has gotten an “F” rating for four years in a row, and the Indiana department of education is insisting that changes be made to improve this dismal performance. As a sign of community interest, an open house at Marquette school on January 26 and a hearing convened by the state Department of Education on February 3 both drew a substantial number of people,

To deal with the academic problems, a **Transformation Zone** has been established and a task force has been created to develop a plan for improving Marquette School performance. The group is headed by Joie Patterson, the Executive Director of Innovations and Improvements for the Gary schools. The team includes Angela Johnson, the Marquette School principal; Carlos Tolliver, our representative on the school board; George Rogge as community representative; teachers Constance Winfrey and Nicole Ascona, along with other counselors and teachers from the school system. They are scheduled to meet every two weeks for the remainder of the school year. They will be looking at curriculum, staffing, and whatever other factors influence the educational process.

As of now, the Transformation team has a long way to go in developing an academic program which will convince the state education board to let the school continue to operate within the Gary Community School Corp. Other alternatives would be to close the school entirely, merge it with another school, or turn it over to a private, for-profit management company (like Roosevelt). We think the community would prefer to keep the school under local control, rather than hire an outside manager to operate it.

Algren museum grand opening

The new Nelson Algren Museum at 541 S. Lake Street, will open its doors with a celebration of Algren's 108th birthday on **Sunday, March 26 at 3:00 pm**. Mary Wisniewski, who has written a biography of Algren, will make comments. There will be a \$10 entrance fee and beverages will be available for purchase. The museum will occupy the first floor of the 1928 Illinois Bell Telephone building, which was subsequently owned by Dave Peltz, a friend of Algren. For more information, contact Sue Rutsen at suerutsen@comcast.net or call 773-914-2474. Coincidentally, a new **American Writers Museum** is opening in May on Michigan Avenue in Chicago, and Algren will be one of their featured writers.

The Arts District presents upcoming exhibits and events

The Miller Beach Arts and Creative District has planned a continuing line-up of events at the Gardner Center on Lake Street:

DECAY DEVILS EXHIBIT

March 3 to 26, Fridays and Saturdays from 6:00 to 9:00 pm and Sundays from 1:00 to 4:00 pm. A group of photographers and community activists who are passionate about historic restoration have traveled the US, Canada and Italy. They will be displaying their photographs of abandoned buildings along with how properties can be reclaimed and repurposed. The exhibit will include interactive elements that engage and collect information from the visitors.

ARTISTS OF THE MBACD

A new member group - Artists of the Miller Beach Arts and Creative District - is

forming, and is inviting practitioners of all creative genres—visual, performance, culinary, landscape/architecture/interior design to join. Benefits include member shows, networking opportunities, discounted admission, early admission and sneak peaks to opening receptions, professional development, marketing assistance, and more. For more information, call Mary Ann Best at 219-309-9512.

The Artists of Miller Beach Arts and Creative District are holding their first reception and member show on Saturday, March 24 from 6:00 to 9:00 pm.

LAKE EFFEKT 2017

A street fair which will include workshops and documentary films, is scheduled for **June 17**, but planning is already under way. Please contact Meg Roman - meg@millerbeacharts.org - with comments or to volunteer for this event.

Duly noted . . .

FISH ON FRIDAY. St. Mary of the Lake on Miller Avenue invites **everyone** to enjoy a big fish dinner on **Friday, March 3 from 3:30 to 8:00 pm** in their gym. \$12 (or \$6 for kids) will get you all the fish you can eat, plus trimmings. Take-out is also available, but not all-you-can-eat. Beverages and home-made baked goods are extra.

St. Mary of the Lake will also present an **Easter cantata** on **Sunday, April 9 at 4:00 pm**. **The entire community is welcome.** A potluck will follow the service at Lessard Hall — just bring a dish. Reflect on the season and enjoy the company of your neighbors.

MAN CAVE APPLICATION. The owners of the Man-Cave building, on Rt. 20 near the interstate entrance, have applied for a zoning variance to operate an adult entertainment business — i.e., a strip joint. (This is exactly what they said they **didn't**

plan to do when they applied for a liquor license.) The variance request was heard by the Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) on February 14 and various local residents spoke in opposition to the request. Mayor Freeman-Wilson came forward before the meeting and explained why the proposed business did not fit the city's plans for that area. Subsequently, George Rogge spoke for the Miller Business Association, Tom Eaton spoke for the Miller Citizens Corp., and a number of residents spoke for themselves. All the speakers opposed the Man Cave request. It was therefore a surprise when the BZA voted to continue the issue to their next meeting, at 3:00 pm on March 14. At least some of the interested parties will attend the March meeting, expecting the BZA to reject the variance request.

MAN-CAVE LIQUOR LICENSE APPEAL. Before the zoning variance application, the Man-Cave owner applied for a liquor license which the local liquor board did not grant. The applicant subsequently appealed to the state liquor board in Indianapolis, and the appeal hearing is set for March 1. The MCC plans to be represented at the hearing.

FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE. Save the date! Temple Israel hosts its annual Community Peace Seder on the evening of Sunday, April 23. Join the celebration and enjoy a delicious meal. Call for details, 938-5232.

MARCH 2017 MONTHLY MEETING

THE MONTHLY MCC MEETING WILL BE HELD ON MONDAY, MARCH 13, AT 7:30 PM, IN THE MEETING ROOM OF THE MARQUETTE PARK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH ON GRAND BLVD. MCC members are invited to attend and participate.

Contact the MCC between meetings at P.O.Box 2645, Gary, IN 46403, or e-mail mcceaton@aol.com. Also visit the MCC website, www.millercitizenscorp.org.

CLEANING UP MILLER. Once a year, members of the various Miller organizations come together to clean up trash from the roadsides so we can start off the summer with a (relatively) clean neighborhood. This year's cleanup is planned for the morning of May 6, starting about 8:00 am at the corner of Miller Avenue and Gran Blvd. Save the date!

Miller organizations prepare for the coming of spring

THE MCC SHORELINE COMMITTEE will resume its monthly meetings on the morning of Thursday, March 9 and the late afternoon of Thursday, March 15. These initial meetings will focus on overall plans for the coming summer. The annual community meeting, with public officials and public safety personnel, will be scheduled for the third Thursday in April, at the Gardner Center on Lake Street.

THE MILLER GARDEN CLUB will also be emerging from its winter hibernation in March. Its meeting at 10:00 on March 18 will feature a talk by Dolly Foster on "Gardening for Butterflies". Looking ahead, the April meeting will be on April 22 (later than usual, to avoid the Easter weekend) and it will feature a number of master gardeners speaking on "Gardening in the Dunes". As part of this meeting, there will also be a light lunch. Everyone is invited to Garden Club meetings.

Developing Gary's North Side

For the past several years, a team of federal government consultants has been working with Gary planning and redevelopment personnel to devise plans for revitalizing the north side of the city, from the Horace Mann area to Aetna and Miller. Councilwoman Rebecca Wyatt hosted a community meeting in February, attended by a large number of local residents, to hear and see what the planners are proposing.

The focus of the Miller plan is the South Shore station, which will be at the center of a Transportation Development District, stretching along Rt. 20, up Lake Street, and down Miller Avenue. The Miller station will be one link in the railroad's double track project, to eliminate single-track sections of the line between Gary and Michigan City. Improvements will also include high-level platforms to eliminate the need to climb in and out of the trains.

Building parallel high-level platforms at the Miller station requires a long straight section of track, which will be accommodated by changing the path of Route 12, so that it diverges from Route 20 a little east of MacDonalds, rather than at the current 'point'. The area around the new station will be zoned for mixed commercial and manufacturing uses, to encourage more urban construction and more

activity. Significant funding has been obtained for the South Shore project, to pay for engineering studies and other preliminary work. The people involved feel confident that the South Shore upgrade will really happen.

The Transportation Development District will also attract funds for improvements in the Miller business district, including the construction of sidewalks up Lake Street to the beach, which the National Park has long desired.