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Quick Hits

Next Thursday, as everyone knows, is Thanksgiving.
 Lately in Hamtramck there's been little to be thankful for. The economy sucks, the city is going broke and home foreclosures are still taking a toll.
 But there is actually still plenty to be thankful about. We are still a strong community with a lot of appeal. This coming year is going to present a number challenges, but Hamtramckans are known to meet challenges head on.
 Have a happy Thanksgiving and don't give up, Hamtramck.

This week in history

- One year after President John F. Kennedy was assassinated, Hamtramck held a memorial ceremony in 1964.
- It wasn't until 1971 that Hamtramck adopted its official city flag.
- Just how big was the Dodge Main Plant in terms of importance in the city? Well, in 1954, Roy Rogers lead a parade for "Dodge Days." We're assuming Trigger was also there.

Source: Hamtramck Historical Commission

— HAMTRAMCK'S NEWSPAPER OF RECORD —

There's a new 'horizon' at Hamtramck's adult education

By Ian Perrotta
 The Internet may have been down in Hamtramck this week, but at the Horizon Adult/Alternative Education Center the computers were up-and-running. On Tuesday (Nov. 16) the school celebrated the grand opening of its brand new computer lab.
 Thanks to a grant from the Department of Energy, Labor and Economic Growth, Horizon was one of 10 centers in the area to receive a state-of-the-art computer lab. Each one comes complete with 20 Acer desktop computers and flat screen monitors, handicap-accessible desks, printers, textbooks and other supplies to ensure a successful learning environment.
 One of the primary purposes of the new lab is to develop and implement an enhanced strategy to address the literacy and basic skill needs of the adult learner, which is why it was a perfect fit for Horizon. According to the National Institute for Literacy, nearly 75 percent of adults over the age of 25 do not have a college degree.
 There are a few things to know for anyone interested in using the new lab. First, all participants must be part of the adult education program. This

means they must enroll, take a pre-test that allows Horizon to make sure basic needs can be met before the learning process begins, and ultimately take a post-test to measure academic growth. Enrollment is open to everyone, including those who do not live in Hamtramck.
 As for the services provided by the computer lab, there are many. Software programs like SkillsTutor can help students review their individual academic schools, and courses with Rosetta Stone can help teach English to non-speakers. Moreover, the computers allow access to online and distance learning, basic reading, writing,

Continued on page 6



Hamtramck's Horizon Adult/Alternative Education Center recently received a state-of-the-art computer lab thanks to a grant from the Department of Energy, Labor and Economic Growth.



Smoking ban in bars has hurt business, owners say



*"Smokin' in the boys' room
 Smokin' in the boys' room
 Now, teacher, don't you fill me up with your rules
 But everybody knows that smokin' ain't allowed in school."*
 — Brownsville Station

By Charles Sercombe
 Call it a coincidence ... yeah, a coincidence.
 Six weeks after Michigan's smoking ban at bars and restaurants went into effect, there was a decrease of about \$8 million in Keno gambling money collected by

the state.
 The Keno game is limited to bars.
 And here is where the "coincidence" comes in: State lawmakers are now reconsidering the ban and may modify the law to allow bars and restaurants to offer smoking rooms, which are rooms that are completely walled off from the main part of the building.
 Of course there's a catch. Bar and restaurant owners would likely be charged a fee to offer a smoking room.
Continued on page 2

City offered loan instead of bankruptcy

By Charles Sercombe
 It's a no go for the city's request to file for bankruptcy. In late-breaking news, a representative from the state Treasury Department said the state will not allow the city to file for bankruptcy and instead will offer the city a loan to meet payroll and other financial obligations for the next year.
 Hamtramck City Manager Bill Cooper recently requested permission to file for bankruptcy because of a looming \$3 million budget deficit and the likelihood that the city won't be able to meet employee payroll come Feb. 1.
 Cooper also asked for "guidance" from the state if bankruptcy wasn't an option.
Continued on page 2

City manager's letter to the state

Last week, City Manager Bill Cooper sent a letter to the state Treasury Department asking for permission to file for bankruptcy. Here is the letter he sent to Frederick Headen, the state Treasury Department's Director of the Bureau of Local Government Service.
 I am writing with the permission of the Mayor and City Council to inform you of the financial crisis facing the City of Hamtramck. Simply put, based on our current situation, we anticipate that the City of Hamtramck will not be able to pay its bills or meet payroll as of February 1, 2011. This situation has unfolded over the past year, and is finally at a point where we feel that we have run out of options.
 As a way of providing some background, in 1981, the City of Hamtramck and the City of Detroit entered into an Inter-local Agreement relating to the Central Industrial Park
Continued on page 6

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City offered loan instead of bankruptcy

Continued from front page

Well, he indeed received guidance instead of a yes to bankruptcy. Cooper was quoted in a Free Press story saying that receiving a loan would only delay the city's financial problems.

There's been a media firestorm since Cooper announced last week that the city is seeking bankruptcy.

News reporters from local, state and national media outlets have been calling Cooper all week. This is the first case of a Michigan city asking state officials to help it file for bankruptcy. A Detroit News columnist called Hamtramck a canary in a coalmine, a forewarning of what many other communities are facing.

Communities can't file for bankruptcy alone. That action has to be done by state treasury officials.

There has also been plenty of buzz in town about the city's request among city employees – particularly firefighters and police officers. City retirees are concerned that their pensions and health insurance are in jeopardy.

"I'm terrified," said former Income Tax Department Director Pat Piasecki. "As a retiree I rely on my Blue Cross."

Cooper has been trying with no luck to get major benefits and staffing reductions from the city's union employees.

In his letter to the state, Cooper said there is no need for the state to appoint an emergency financial manager, which the state did in 2000.

"We do not need an EFM (Emergency Financial Manager) to look for cost savings within our operations, which was done under the previous

EFM, and has continued under my direction," Cooper said in his letter.

"We know what needs to be done, and are in a position to take action, we simply lack the authority to take the needed action. An analysis by an EFM will take time, and time is something we do not have if we want to avoid running out of funds. We need to work closely with your department in order to move quickly to bankruptcy, the only option available, to our knowledge, where we can set aside our union contracts, specifically our police and fire contracts, allowing for staffing and benefit reductions in both departments, offsetting the \$2,000,000-plus deficit we are facing.

"While this step may seem radical in its approach, it is

the only approach that will quickly and effectively allow us to address our shortfall."

Until last January, the city's finances were considered to be in good shape. But the city's financial health took a turn for the worse after a combination of several things. The main culprit was the loss of \$3 million in tax revenue that Detroit is withholding from the city.

Detroit is claiming it has overpaid Hamtramck for the last several years from a property tax revenue sharing agreement over GM's Poletown plant.

Hamtramck has since sued Detroit for the money and Detroit has filed a counter-suit. The matter likely won't be settled for over a year or more.

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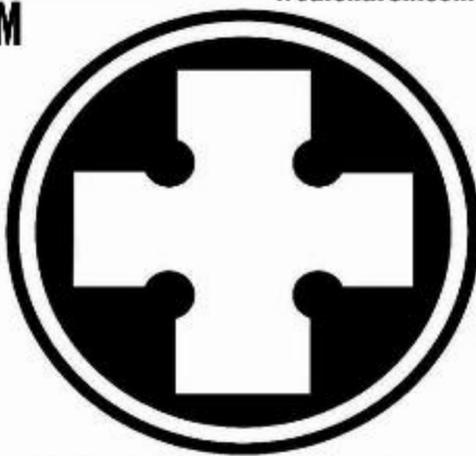
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Twelve (12) Brand New Police Cars	\$261,422.02	\$0
Police Radio System	\$260,000.00	\$0
Equipment for the new Police Cars	\$80,017.00	\$0
Fuel and Repairs for Police Cars	\$62,422.25	\$0
Police Computers Mobile Data Terminals	\$45,000.00	\$0
Bullet Proof Vests	\$15,000.00	\$0
Total Cost to the Taxpayers	\$0.00	\$0
GRAND TOTAL:	\$ 1,304,861.27	\$0

Blaming Your Hamtramck
Police Department ...

Priceless !!!

Smoking ban in bars has hurt business, owners say

Continued from front page

The effect of the ban was also immediately felt by local bar owners. The local opinion of the ban among bar owners and patrons can be summed up with a string of profanities. After the heated words cool down, bar owners say their business dropped off anywhere from 20 to 50 percent.

Why? Smokers are generally drinkers and what has happened since the ban, say bar owners, is that smokers get fed up with going back and forth outside to smoke. So, they order one or two drinks and then decide to leave and go home.

"It's an inconvenience for people to go out and smoke," said the owner of Three Star Bar B Que, Andy Shadain.

And now with cold weather setting in, bar owners say the situation is worse. No one wants to shiver in the cold for a quick smoke.

"Instead of having two drinks, they just have one and leave," said Maria Nukulaj, the manager of Motor City Sports Bar.

Even with Sunday morning liquor sales now OK'd, there is little hope for an uptick in business, locals say.

"I'm struggling to get people in here at noon," said

New Dodge Lounge owner Cathie Gordon.

Gordon said the new fees to open Sunday morning and now also on Christmas Day are out of reach for most bar owners. She said state lawmakers don't have a clue

"Why does the government want people to smoke outside?" said Jerry Tomberline, a patron at Paycheck's who says he doesn't smoke yet was outside the bar ... smoking. "Smoking never bothered anyone. It's government con-



Above: Jerry Tomberline says lawmakers should back off and reverse the ban on smoking in bars. Front page: Back before the smoking ban, patrons at Paycheck's Lounge enjoy a drink and a smoke.

about the bar business.

"How much money do they think we make?" she said.

Strangely – or since this is Hamtramck maybe not so strangely – the most vocal supporters of smokers' rights come from non-smokers.

Well, at least that's the case at Paycheck's Lounge.

trol. Next thing they'll control is what we eat."

Also at Paycheck's was Cezory Gorny, who quit smoking a month after the ban went into effect. Although he's now a non-smoker, he agrees that government should back off.

"If you don't like smoking, don't go to the bar," he said.

This week at the library...

ESL Class for Beginners - Saturday, November 20 at 10:30 a.m. Christine Templin is the instructor for the ESL class for beginners. Everyone is invited. Free to the public.

Storytime for Children - Saturday, November 20 at noon. All children are invited to children's storytime at the library. This Saturday we will read a story by Natasha Wing, "The Night Before Thanksgiving," and afterwards everyone will make a centerpiece for their holiday table.

Computer Classes for Beginners - Tuesday, November 23 at 11:30 a.m. Basic instructions on computer use for beginners will be held on Tuesdays. Number of participants is limited to available computers.

Reading and Conversation for ESL Students - Tuesday, November 23 at 5:30 p.m. Jide Aje is the instructor for the reading and conversation ESL classes.

Math Club Meeting - Tuesday, November 23 at 4 p.m. Mr. Nuo is the instructor for the math club and math tutoring.

Movie Wednesday - Wednesday, November 24 at 3:30 p.m. Every Wednesday is movie day at the library. Come and enjoy our feature presentation, which includes popcorn and snacks.

Computer Classes for Intermediate Users - Thursday, December 2 at 11:30 a.m. Adults with basic computer skills can enhance their computer literacy each Thursday at the library.

Number of participants is limited to available computers.

Fall Teen Club - Thursday, December 2 at 5 p.m. Members of the Teen Club will be making fall decorations for the library. Everyone is invited to join.

Jeopardy at the Library - Thursday, December 2 at 4 p.m. Sign up and participate in Jeopardy games held on Thursdays at the library. Compete against friends, win prizes and have fun developing your knowledge skills.

Santa Arrives at the Library - Saturday, December 11 at noon. All children are invited for the lighting of the Library Christmas Tree and arrival of Santa at the library with presents for all.

Meeting of the Library Board - Tuesday, December 16 at 6 p.m. Regular meeting of the Library Board will be held in the auditorium. Open to the public.

Holiday Concert "History of Black Madonna" - Friday, December 17 at 6 p.m. Holiday concert with musical history of Black Madonna will be presented by local musician and historian, Kazimierz Jedralczyk. Everyone is invited. Refreshments will be served.

Income Tax Training Classes - Monday, November 29 at 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wayne Metropolitan Community Action Agency will conduct tax training classes on Mondays and Wednesdays, starting Nov. 29.

For more information about events at the library call (313) 365-7050, or visit our website at <http://hamtramck.lib.mi.us> where you can also access our online catalog.

Second Front Page

Hit and run accident shines a bad light on PD

By Charles Sercombe

Talk about bad timing. Just as city officials are weighing various options of how to continue to fund the police department and even consider contracting out its services, along comes an investigative news story that makes the department look like a bunch of lazy cops.

WXYZ Action News Investigator Scott Lewis aired a report last week about a hit and run driver that Hamtramck cops refused to do anything about.

How's that?

An employee at the Mobil gasoline station at Caniff and

Dequindre said a driver rear-ended his car and then took off. The employee, Joe Zago, got the license plate number and a fellow employee got a good look at the driver, who appears to be Rebecca Alwagih.

The whole thing was also recorded by the gas station's security camera. When police officer Amy Buchl arrived at the scene, Zago said she refused to take a report, saying it's department policy not to take reports for accidents that happen on private property.

Technically, that policy is allowed under state law, which

says local departments are not "obligated" to take reports of incidents that occur on private property.

But there's a catch. This was a case of a hit and run, and according to state law that is a misdemeanor crime.

Even though Zago pointed that out to the Buchl and the department, the shift commander refused to investigate.

Had the department run down the license plate number, they would have found out that it belonged to Alwagih, who has a long history of traffic accidents and tickets. In fact, she also has ar-

rest warrants for her from Detroit and Birmingham.

She also owes Detroit over \$2,000 in traffic fines.

In Lewis' report, he said that Police Chief Mark Kalinowski, reached by phone, said he would review that policy.

Kalinowski could not be reached for comment, but City Manager Bill Cooper confirmed that the policy has been thrown out. He said traffic reports will now be taken no matter where they occur.

"Since it's become an issue, we're going to change it," Cooper said.

Homeowner convicted of trying to burn down his house

By Charles Sercombe

Had Mohammed Rahman knew what he was doing when he tried to set his furnace on fire, he probably would not be alive today, say Hamtramck investigators.

Rahman, 43, of Belmont St., was convicted Tuesday (Nov. 16) of arson. He tried to set a house at 12120 Lumpkin on fire last November. Rahman was convicted in Wayne County Circuit Court after four days of testimony, which included arson investigators for the insurance industry.

He will be sentenced on

Dec. 1 and faces a maximum prison time of 10 years. The judge in the jury trial, James Callahan, dealt harshly with Rahman, sentencing him to jail immediately after being convicted.

At the time of the arson, Rahman was a co-owner of the house and was living there with his niece, who also co-owned the house. Rahman is a self-employed home remodeler who is married and has a 3-year-old son. His wife is pregnant.

Detective Derek Suwalkowski said one reason that Judge Callahan may have

sent Rahman immediately to jail is that the fire could have injured or killed not only firefighters, but also neighbors.

Insurance investigators say there was clear evidence that gasoline had been poured around the furnace and the stairwell leading up to the attic where the furnace was located. Suwalkowski said that had a gas line connected to the furnace been active "the roof would have blown off."

And if that had happened, Suwalkowski said, it's likely that Rahman would have been killed. Rahman did suf-

fer minor burns to his face and hands. He denied he poured gasoline, but conceded that a can of gasoline was stored in the stairwell.

In a strange twist, it was Rahman who called the fire department about the fire. Not only that, he also drove to the fire station to further alert firefighters.

While there is no known motive for the fire, Suwalkowski said the house was insured. Rahman's niece was not implicated in the arson. Damage to the house was contained to the attic and roof.

Budget cutbacks end drug investigator

By Charles Sercombe

Hamtramck's financial trouble is leading to more employee cutbacks.

One of the more prominent cuts is the loss of a street crime investigator in the Police Department. The one-man department had been making a dent in the drug trade for the past several years.

Officer Richard Betleja said on Wednesday that he was told come this December his position will be cut and he will be reassigned to regular patrol.

Betleja is ending his tenure with last month's successful drug sting. Typically, what Betleja had been doing was raiding known drug houses and then setting up shop for customers. Most of the drug houses taken over were located just north of Carpenter on the Detroit side of the Hamtramck border.

Unwitting customers who tried to buy drugs were arrested and then forced to hand over their cash and cars. Last month's sting resulted in 22 arrests and the confiscation of 13 cars, as well as narcotics and money.

Betleja said that over half of those arrested or detained were from Hamtramck and from all walks of life.

The drugs being sold were crack cocaine and heroin.

Coming Events

DECEMBER 21, Tuesday, 7 p.m. – Preserve Our Parks meets every third Tuesday of the month, at the Senior Plaza at 2620 Holbrook. For more information, call Dick Kaleski at (313) 874-2651.

SECOND MONDAY of each month, through Dec. 13, 12:30-2:30 p.m. – A Wayne County program, food program for low-income families, at People's Community Services, 8625 Jos. Campau. To qualify you must be a Hamtramck resident and had picture ID and proof of income. Volunteers are needed to unload supplies, etc. To volunteer, show up at 10:30 a.m.

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Street Life

When the media comes knocking on Hamtramck's door

(Editor-at-Large Walter Wasacz writes a weekly column on life in Hamtramck.)

By Walter Wasacz

Sometimes we get the best material for Street Life by just looking in the mirror. Not to see our faces, but to get a glimpse of an even big-

ger picture that's there but often taken for granted.

That was my experience on Wednesday, when we got a call from the Takeaway, a joint production of Public Radio International and WNYC in New York. The show is hosted by John Hockenberry and Celeste Headlee, a former reporter

at Detroit's WDET.

They were preparing a story on Hamtramck's highly unusual tactical approach to resolving its financial shortfall: a request to the state's treasury department to allow the city to file for bankruptcy. Readers of the Review have no doubt followed this story, the Detroit dailies have covered it and now the national media is in the mix.

This all began because the city says Detroit auditors claim our bigger neighbor overpaid Hamtramck over \$7 million in tax revenue from the General Motors Poletown Plant property that straddles our shared border.

It's complicated. It goes back to 1981, when a deal was cut between the two cities and GM to create a subdivided revenue stream. If the economy had remained at 1981 levels (which weren't rosy, as longtime residents of the region well know), this just might have worked.

But the future got in the way. GM nearly went under, of course. Detroit is staring into its own financial abyss. Cities are trying to re-imagine and reinvent themselves. It's happening for the better, trust me, things might look a whole lot different in 10 years if our local economy becomes more diverse and no longer hangs on the thread of one industry.

GM looks like it will recover. But cities like Detroit and Hamtramck are no longer the direct beneficiaries of its corporate success. There are indirect benefits, sure. The tax issues need to be straightened out, legal maneuvers pushed to the back burner and real life resumed. But to go back to 1981 standards and expectations? No thanks. Let's think of something better and more sustainable.

That was the gist of what the Takeaway wanted to talk to me about: what is life really like in Hamtramck? What's happening on the ground, not in City Hall or in obtuse arguments between lawyers.

My story, Hamtramck's story, seemed fascinating to Jillian Weinberger, who called to prepare me for an interview on the show.

I gave her the short historical tour, beginning with the organizing of Hamtramck as one of Wayne County's original townships in the late 1700s - the boundaries once stretching from the river, veering east to Lake St. Clair and north to Base Line Road. It was settled by French landowners (Joseph Campau, among them), its land later cultivated by German farmers, still later saloons opened by Irish immigrants, perfectly setting up the explosion of hard-working (and hard-drinking) Polish-born laborers who flooded into the city during the auto manufacturing boom of the early 20th century.

I told her about the changing social landscape - let's stay with the year 1981 just as a convenient marker in time - and how over the



School district is relying on contract concessions to balance budget

By Charles Sercombe

Last week Hamtramck Schools Superintendent Tom Niczay warned that if school employees don't soon agree to contract concessions, there could be a state takeover of the district.

The school district thought it was facing a \$2.8 million budget deficit last January, but that figure has since ballooned to over \$6 million.

The clock is ticking for the district in more than one way.

With a new governor about to take office, there are warning signs that Governor-Elect Rick Snyder will cut deep into state spending. That could very well include forcing financially struggling school districts to merge in order to save money.

That concept isn't exactly new. Gov. Jennifer Granholm has urged districts to merge for over a year, and in fact offered financial incentives to entice districts.

But most communities are resistant to merging because it means a loss of identity and political independence.

Getting teachers' unions to agree to contract concessions is a tougher sell. Some teachers

see the call for concessions as a ruse - a foot in the door - toward breaking their union. Union leaders also say teachers are already over-worked and under-paid.

Last week's call for union cooperation from Superintendent Niczay didn't seem to have an impact on the 100 or so teachers who attended the school board meeting.

Bo Karpinsky, the president of Hamtramck's teachers' union, said the union has already helped the district save money, but just how was a bit unclear. He did not return a call to clarify his comments. Subsequent calls to his home went unanswered.

Niczay invited the district's three unions to meet with him on Dec. 1 or 2 to discuss ways to save money. The biggest savings would come from a less expensive health insurance plan. The unions, however, have been resistant to significant changes to their coverage plans.

Niczay said he has to submit a revised budget deficit plan by Dec. 15. If he has no savings plan in place, it's anyone's guess how the state will react.

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Review: Opinion Page

Police chief is right to change wrong-headed policy

What were they thinking? Last week, Channel 7 news investigator Scott Lewis aired a story about a gasoline station employee whose car was rear-ended by a woman driver who fled the scene. A Hamtramck police officer who responded said she couldn't take a traffic report because it's department policy not to take reports when traffic incidents occur on private property.

The gasoline station employee pointed out that this was more than a traffic accident; it was a hit-and-run, which is a crime in Michigan.

When the employee went to the police station after the officer told him to take it up with the lieutenant in charge of the shift, he was told there would be no investigation and to "have a nice night."

According to state law police departments indeed are not "obligated" to take traffic accident reports that happen on private property. However, it is a criminal act

to hit-and-run no matter where the accident happens.

There are two things that are deeply disturbing here: one, just because state law allows police departments to not take such reports, it's mystifying why our department would not take a report. We pay our officers well to serve our community. By opting out of taking these reports it's a slap to the face of the community.

Besides service, the city needs all the revenue it can get - including traffic tickets from accidents that happen anywhere in the city.

What were they thinking? The second - and perhaps the most disturbing thing - is the fact that some officers and their commanders don't know that a hit-and-run is a criminal act - no matter if it's on private property. It appears some officers need a refresher course on our laws.

Worse yet, the driver in

this hit-and-run has two arrest warrants for her and doesn't even have a driver's license. The driver, in other words, is a menace and needs to be restrained from driving.

And to top it off, this incident comes at a time when there is serious consideration of the city going broke and facing bankruptcy. Part of the city's financial woes comes from the police officers' union refusing to make any contract concessions.

At the same time there is serious consideration to contract out our police services because the department is too damn expensive.

Police Chief Mark Kalinowski said he is going to change department policy and is now instructing officers to take all traffic reports no matter where they occur.

While you're at it, chief, you should look at all of the department's policies to see if there are others that need to be changed.

Other Voices: Guest Editorial

Police officers have indeed helped raise money for the city

Over the past few months, the Hamtramck Police Unions have been slammed not only at city council meetings but also in the newspaper.

We have sat back and kept quiet until now. We feel that the citizens of Hamtramck need an explanation of what we have done to help the city to balance the budget and what we are trying to continue to do, instead of hearing from members of the City and others, that the police unions have not taken any concessions and have continued to not help.

Last October, the Hamtramck Fraternal Order of Police and City Manager, William Cooper, sat down to discuss ways to help the city. With the increase of crime and traffic crashes in mind the unions offered to begin a Traffic Safety Program. Since the Traffic Safety Program has been implemented, traffic crashes with vehicles and pedestrians have greatly reduced, furthermore, crimes have also reduced. Not only was the Police Department able to do those two things for the City, we were also able to generate nearly \$1 million net for the City.

The Police Department has also found a way to fully fund five (5) police officers and fund 50 percent for two (2) more officers for a total savings of more than \$315,000, just in salary alone. In those positions are two SCAT (stolen vehicle investigators), a K-9 who not only does random sniffs around the schools for drugs but also assists the Federal Government in area drug trafficking causing money to come back to the city.

Also included at two DEA Offices, who continue to work diligently with forfeiture and are continuing to bring money back into the city. Just within the past year they brought in over \$200,000. The last position that is fully funded is our narcotics investigator, who strives to keep drug houses and drug related crime out of our city, which in turn brings in revenue to the city. We also have an officer that is fully funded by the Hamtramck Housing Commission, who works strictly in the Hamtramck Housing Units off of Commor and Dequindre.

The total amount that the police has generated and saved the city is well over \$1.5 million dollars. This is also not to mention that in 2008 we had 44 police positions that were paid for by the general fund and now only 37 are paid for, so essentially we have saved the city over \$350,000 (approximately, not including benefits) in salary.

Another addition is the cost of health care. According to the city, health care cost has increased 40 percent, causing an additional burden onto the city. It was the City of Hamtramck's idea to change our health plan almost two years ago. Our old plan had co-pays and deductibles, however, the City ended up changing our insurance to no co-pay and a Benny card to pay our deductible.

Furthermore, The City (Mr. Cooper) signed a contract with the FOP in June of 2009. As he signed this contract he had stated to us that in six (6) months he would be coming back to the city unions to get

concessions because the city would be in financial trouble.

The Police Department is well aware of the pending financial situation of the City, however, when the information from the City keeps on changing, such as budget numbers and when we are going "broke," it is hard for the Police Department to make further concessions, especially when we have seen within the past two (2) years city hall get remodeled, new outside landscape including sprinkler systems that are on everyday during the summer months, and a financial director (who is still in charge) miss two (2) years of missed payments from the GM Poletown agreement that put the City in this mess.

The FOP would be open to sitting down with the City to discuss different options that they placed on the table, however, according to the recent bankruptcy letter from Mr. Cooper to the State of Michigan, we have already sat down three times and a fourth one is coming. The FOP can only think of two and it has been a while since the second one.

Lastly, the police department, its unions and members, want to assure the citizens and business owners of Hamtramck that we will continue to strive to bring you the best police response time, presence, and security possible, with the manpower that the City wants us to have. If anyone has any questions or concerns, please address them to this email address hamtramckpolice@yahoo.com.

John Bondra
FOP 109 Representative

Odds & Ends

Go Cougars! ... We received an email from Kosciuszko Middle School Robotics teacher Mike Dobynn about this year's team. Here's what he had to say:

"The kids that make up Kosciuszko's Robotics team have done it again! On Saturday they traveled to Allen Park to compete in the regional competition where they earned trophies in two separate categories.

"There were total of 15 schools both public and private from Troy, Plymouth, Canton, Waterford, New Boston, Novi, Dearborn Heights, Romulus, Detroit & Southgate. In the actual robotics portion of the competition the put up

a top score of 330 to win the 'Top Performance' award (the next highest score was a 165). In addition to building a robot the kids were also responsible for doing a project dealing with this year's theme "Bio-Medical Engineering."

During this portion of the competition the kids won the award for "Innovative Solution."

Now it is on to White Lake Michigan for the State Championship on December 4th. The team is made up of the following students: Almin Bilalovic, Zachery McIntosh-Young, Muhammad Harris, Ian Preston, Jenny Ghose, Tazia Miah, Tapia Miah, Ka-

reem Alriyashi, Naydeem Alriyashi & Rafia Quazi.

If you see any of them around please be sure to congratulate them, they really deserve it; they worked really hard. The team would also like to send out a special thanks to Bo Karpinski for his help with sharing the team's project idea with the people from MEBS as well as his neighbor, a pharmacist with St. John's Hospital. It was the wonderful letters of praise they wrote for the team that really made an impression on the judges.

If you get a chance, come on out a support the team on Dec. 4 in White Lake.

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City manager's letter to the state Continued from front page

Project, the project related to the construction of the General Motors Assembly Plant located on the border of Hamtramck and Detroit. (A copy of the agreement is attached.) That agreement has been, and still is in full force and effect.

In 2009, the City of Detroit began delaying payments to the City of Hamtramck, with the last payment being made in January 2010, that the agreement required be paid. Immediately following this last payment, the City of Detroit claimed that it had overpaid the City of Hamtramck from FY 2001 through FY2008, and immediately ceased all further payments in an attempt to recapture these supposed overpayments.

The City of Detroit, it should be pointed out, claims that the State of Michigan triggered this course of events through one of its audits of the City of Detroit. Whatever the case, the result of this action was that the City of Hamtramck, on September 3, 2010, filed suit against the City of Detroit in an attempt to enforce the contract, and to determine if overpayments had, in fact, occurred.

In order to provide you with more detail related to the lawsuit I am attaching a variety of documents:

- Verified complaint for declaratory judgment, injunctive and other relief, filed by the City of Hamtramck.
- Answer to complaint and counter complaint on behalf of the City of Detroit
- Plaintiff/Counter-defendant's answer to counter-complaint, filed by the City of Hamtramck
- Defendant City of Detroit Tax Increment Finance Authority's affirmative defenses
- Defendant City of Detroit Tax Increment Finance Authority's answer and affirmative defenses to plaintiff City of Hamtramck's complaint.

The above listed documentation will provide you with background and fairly current status of the lawsuit. Other activities continue outside of all of the filings that have taken place. The City of Hamtramck is hopeful that we will be in front of the judge during the month of November, at least for the first step in this potentially lengthy process.

Continuing with the background, as a result of Detroit's actions, the City of Hamtramck did not receive a full payment in FY 2009, and has received nothing for FY 2010. While amounts are still in dispute, the City of

Hamtramck feels that we are owed approximately \$3,000,000 covering FY 2009 and FY 2010. By not receiving the anticipated payments from the City of Detroit, the City of Hamtramck has experienced a \$1,000,000 shortfall for FY2009, and an additional \$2,000,000 shortfall for FY2010. An additional \$2,000,000 was anticipated as part of FY2011 revenues, which means that by the end of FY 2011 the City of Hamtramck will experience a total shortfall of approximately \$5,000,000. In a community with annual revenues of \$18,000,000, a \$2,000,000 annual shortfall is devastating, and, at this point, will result in us not being able to pay our bills.

We recently completed a revenue projection that shows, assuming no further payments from the City of Detroit, that we will have exhausted our General Fund balance and our Budget Stabilization Fund by January 31, 2011. (See the attached document.) At that point we will not be able to pay our bills, nor will we be able to meet our payroll obligations. This is what prompted discussion with the City Council, and led to the drafting of this letter.

As you will recall, an Emergency Financial Manager (EFM) was appointed for the City of Hamtramck in FY 2000. He remained in place for about 5 years, and was eventually released once the City adopted a new charter with the Council/Manager form of government in place. During his tenure with the City many changes were made including staffing reductions, privatization of services and the selling of property, all as ways of balancing our budget and helping us to avoid the situation we are facing today. Bonds were also sold to cover operating expenses, an approach that is currently costing us \$600,000 per year in order to pay off the bonds. The only thing that the EFM could not do was to ignore or eliminate the union contracts in order to make significant changes and balance our budget. One attempt to modify one of the contracts was made, and was quickly reversed in arbitration as the changes were made without the union's agreement.

In reviewing our current situation, in an attempt to offset the temporary, or permanent, loss of \$2,000,000+ annually, we have reduced services, laid off staff, and

implemented a 5% salary reduction for non-union personnel. While this has reduced overall costs, we are still far short of the \$2,000,000+ reduction needed to balance our budget. Adding to this situation are some critical cost increases. The cost of our health insurance has skyrocketed, up 41% from last year and anticipated to increase another 40+% next year. We are looking at alternatives presently. We have also experienced increases to the cost of our pension contributions. It is complicated enough finding ways to reduce overall costs without some of those costs continuing to escalate.

While the appointment of another EFM may be an approach that is considered, the fact is that an EFM will not be able to accomplish anything more than we have accomplished over the past few months. While we may be able to take additional, minimal steps to reduce costs, the fact is that reducing staff and benefits, especially in our police and fire departments, is the only alternative that is left in order to reduce costs by as much as \$2,000,000 or more per year. All three police and fire contracts contain minimum staffing requirements and guarantee certain benefits, and therefore do not allow us to reduce staff below current levels or modify benefits without approval from the unions. The contracts for our two police unions will expire on June 30, 2011, the fire fighters contract expires on June 30, 2014. Unfortunately if we are going to make changes to these agreements we cannot wait for the contracts to expire, nor can we wait beyond the next couple of months to begin making changes if we are to reduce our costs before we reach the point of not being able to pay our bills. Immediate action is needed.

We do not need an EFM to look for cost savings within our operations, which was done under the previous EFM, and has continued under my direction. We know what needs to be done, and are in a position to take action, we simply lack the authority to take the needed action. An analysis by an EFM will take time, and time is something we do not have if we want to avoid running out of funds. We need to work closely with your department in order to move quickly to bankruptcy, the only option available, to our knowledge, where we can set aside our union contracts, specifically our police and fire

contracts, allowing for staffing and benefit reductions in both departments, offsetting the \$2,000,000+ deficit we are facing. While this step may seem radical in its approach, it is the only approach that will quickly and effectively allow us to address our shortfall.

The first question I would ask, if I were in your position, is whether or not Hamtramck has approached its unions to ask for concessions. The fact is that we have approached our unions on 3 separate occasions over the past year, asking for concessions in an attempt to eliminate our deficit. (We are about to make a fourth attempt.) Each time we fully explained the financial situation, and warned of the potential consequences if our request was denied. Our requested concessions at that time were

smaller than they will be, as we felt, at that time, that we would have more time to feel the effect of any concessions and meet our goals for reducing cost. While the fire fighters union provided some very small concessions, passing on a negotiated salary increase and utilizing compensated time off in lieu of payment for holiday pay, our police and AFSCME unions have denied each request, refusing to give even the smallest concession. When finally faced with layoffs, our AFSCME unions offered some concessions, but their offer was far short of the concessions we had requested, and therefore the needed savings could not be realized through their offer. With our unions providing little or no concessions, we have not been able to offset the anticipated shortfall and are therefore

preparing for the worst.

I am notifying you of our situation, am asking for your assistance in addressing this issue, and I am asking that we work together to quickly and effectively address this shortfall. Hopefully by working together we will be able to avoid not being in a position to pay our bills or to meet our payroll obligations.

I look forward to your suggestions, and your guidance. As this is our most critical issue, my schedule will remain flexible so that I can be available to meet and discuss this matter at your convenience. Please feel free to contact me at the telephone number, or via my e-mail address, both of which are listed in the header of this letter.

Thank you for your consideration.

There's a new 'horizon' at Hamtramck's adult education Continued from front page

Continued from front page

math and computer skills enhancement, workplace training and a flexible pace for each learner.

"The lab is like the icing on the cake," says Cynthia Dowe, the Education Manager at Horizon. "Going to the computer lab allows students to enhance what they are learning in the classroom."

Beyond the addition of the new computer lab, as part of the Hamtramck Public Schools system Horizon has been providing services to the community for years. From 8:30 a.m.

to 3:30 p.m. during the week it provides high school completion courses through its alternative education program, and from 5 to 7:30 p.m. it offers courses in adult education.

Additionally, Horizon also has several off-site locations that it services. Through its partnerships with Wayne Metro, Corinthian Baptist Church, People's Community Services, Michigan Works Highland Park, Wayne State TRiO, Hamtramck Housing, Early Childhood Development and the Hamtramck Recreation Department, Horizon

is able to reach just about every corner of the city. And with all of the opportunities to learn, it's no surprise that Horizon educates nearly 500 students a year – with another 250 on the waiting list.

"We're providing everyday life skills," says Dowe. "We teach them things that most people take for granted."

For more information on the computer lab or any other programs offered by Horizon call 313-893-2214 or stop by the building at 3225 Caniff.



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Library celebrates its anniversary and inducts new members into 'Hall of Fame'

By Ian Perrotta

Here's something regarding the library that you don't have to keep quiet about: Last Thursday (Nov. 11) the Hamtramck Public Library celebrated its 92nd Anniversary with a commemorative ceremony at the Polish National Alliance (PNA) Banquet Hall on Caniff.

The evening kicked off with Katarina Quain performing various musical selections on the piano, and was continued with

a brief welcome by Library Board President Raymond Bittner. After that the singing of the National Anthem was led by local students Kaitlyn Hill, Kamryn Hill and Daisha Jackson, leading into a dinner service provided by Polonia Restaurant.

Once dinner was finished it was time for the main event – the induction of nominees into the Library Hall of Honor. This year there were four recipients of the award, each with their own unique reason for being nominated. And thanks to the volunteer work of Gregory Kirchner, a video of each person provided their background and reason for nomination.

First up for induction was Titus Walters, the School Board President for the Hamtramck Public Schools District. Walters, a 1981 graduate of Hamtramck High, was nominated for his continual dedication to education in Hamtramck as well as for his entrepreneurial ambition concerning his "Flavor" restaurant



Library Board President Raymond Bittner, far left, stands with this year's Library Hall of Fame inductees (from left) Shannon Lowell, John Ulaj, Library Director Tamara Sochacka, Titus Walters and Jerzy Dabrowski.

endeavor.

The second inductee of the night was John Ulaj, the publisher of this newspaper. Because of his investment in the community through both The Hamtramck Review and his real estate business Villa Realty, Ulaj was a natural choice for induction into the Hall of Fame. His support of the local economy, participation in

local politics, and especially his generosity were all contributing factors to his nomination.

Despite being hardly recognizable wearing a suit and with his hair cut, Shannon Lowell was the third inductee of the night. Lowell, the co-owner of Café 1923, has been a fixture in Hamtramck for years, serv-

Continued on page 8

'Meals on Wheels' needs help to stay on course

By Ian Perrotta

Do you know of a homebound and hungry senior citizen? If the answer is yes, then the Detroit Meals on Wheels Program needs your help.

In addition to providing meals to homebound seniors five days a week, since 1988 the organization has also delivered food during the holidays through its Holiday Meals on Wheels program. But because of a gap in funding, it has to help raise the money to cover the costs.

To do so, its parent organization the Detroit Area Agency on Aging (DAAA) created the Holiday Card Sales Campaign, an annual drive that sells greeting cards to pay for the extra meals it delivers on Labor Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter.

For just \$5, you can help

yourself and a senior by buying a holiday greeting card. The entire proceeds will go toward providing a hot and nutritious meal for an elderly area resident.

Paul Bridgewater, the DAAA's President and CEO, wrote in an open letter that it was the DAAA's mission to feed every homebound senior and that the public's participation will help reduce the number of seniors that face holidays which lack both meals and visitors.

"I am hopeful that you will join us in our undertaking," he wrote, "because 'Hunger Takes No Holiday'."

For more information about the Meals on Wheels Program or to purchase a greeting card contact the Detroit Area Agency on Aging at (313) 446-4444 or visit their website at www.daaa1a.org.

Happy Birthday Jackie!

"We love you and miss you"
Love, Mom, Sue, Grams, Kim, Manny and Jackson



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2356 Danforth, Hamtramck - 4 Bedroom 2-Family, w/ 2-Car Garage. **SOLD!**

2060 Norwalk, Hamtramck - "Portage Garage" - 3 bay auto repair facility including the 2nd family home at 2054 Norwalk. \$59,000 - New Price!

7516 Jackson Ave., Warren - 3 Bedrooms, 2 Baths, 2 car garage w/ driveway \$19,900 "Short-Sale"

3374 Comstock - Hamtramck - 2 family home w/ 4 bedrooms, basement, garage. Needs minor repairs. **SOLD!**

2682 Evaline, Hamtramck - 2 BR, Basement, Needs Work \$19,900 New Price!

2224 Belmont - Hamtramck - Single family home w/ 2 bedrooms, living room, dining room, 1/4 basement, garage \$29,900

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49254 Shady Glen, Chesterfield Twp. "Bank Owned" Detached Condo 3 Bedrooms, 1 1/2 baths, 2 car garage, \$109,900 - New Price!

2348 Zinow - Hamtramck - 4 Bedrooms, 2 Baths, completely remodeled. \$39,900

7240 Dale - Centerline - Full brick ranch w/ 3 bedrooms, first floor laundry, side driveway, 2 1/2 car garage. \$59,900 - New Price!

11662 Nagel - Hamtramck - Completely renovated with custom designer touches throughout. 3 BR, built-in appliances, basement, garage. Must see to appreciate. \$79,900 - New Price!

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Property owners may be eligible for a forgivable GRANT of \$25,000.00 - \$35,000.00 per unit to rehabilitate existing, or build new rental lofts and apartments. Each property owner will be limited to no more than four (4) units, and will be subject to US Department of Housing and Urban Development Guidelines and rental restrictions.

For more information please visit the Department of Community and Economic Development on the 3rd Floor of City Hall at 3401 Evaline, Hamtramck, Michigan 48212, or by calling the Department at 313.870.0355.

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After school program entertains and educates the community

By Ian Perrotta

The Hamtramck Community Center was packed last Friday (Nov.12) night for the Hamtramck Odyssey Project for Excellence (HOPE) Program's annual school basketball and cheerleading tournament.

It was the fourth year that HOPE has held the tournament, and this time around the competition was the closest it has ever been. The crowd added to the electric atmosphere by cheering non-stop from tipoff to the buzzer.

In the night's first game, the team from Dickinson East was defeated by Holbrook Elementary's squad, which then went on to face Dickinson

West in the championship round. In that game, Dickinson West won by a score of 32-29 and extended their tournament winning streak to four.

But the dominance of Dickinson West didn't stop with basketball – the school's cheerleading squad also took first place. Coming in second was the team from Dickinson East.

"It's friendly competition, which is something that's always good," says HOPE Program Coordinator Enid Ali-Reed. "The best part is that no matter who wins or loses, they all have a good time."

Library celebrates its anniversary and inducts new members into 'Hall of Fame'

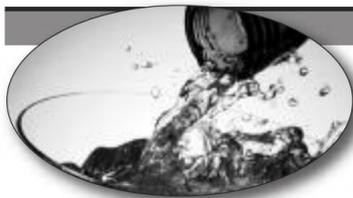
Continued from page 7

ing on the Beautification Commission as well as being involved in numerous other projects. In addition to his coffee shop, Lowell also owns Donovan's Pub in Southwest Detroit.

Last but not least was Jerzy Dabrowski, the fourth inductee of the night. As the only member of the Library Board who holds a librarian's degree, Dabrowski not only worked for over 30 years as a librarian in the Detroit Library System, but also began volunteering at the Hamtramck Library in 1974 as well. A resident of the city for over 50 years, Dabrowski can still be found volunteering at the library.

After the induction of the new members into the Hall of Fame, the library's current volunteers were also recognized for their work. Library Director Tamara Sochacka then provided some brief closing remarks, a drawing of door prizes was held, and a benediction was given by the Reverend Bogdan Bilosz.

"We started doing this about 10 years ago when we realized that there were so many people helping and willing to help the library," says Sochacka. "And when we realized we wouldn't be able to function without volunteers we knew we had to recognize them."



TOAST of the TOWN

When it comes to good food and great times, Hamtramck has plenty to offer. In this column, we'll talk about what's happening at our bars, restaurants and other events that can be found throughout the city.

By Charles Sercombe

Let's talk about the blues. No, not the fact that it seems like everyone has a case of the blues. We're talking about the blues as in playing and listening to the blues. Hamtramck was once home to one of the longest running blues bars in the metro area, the Attic.

The Attic closed a few years ago and its space was revamped as Celina's Sports Bar. We've got nothing against Celina's for gutting the old bar and doing a total makeover. In fact, they did a really great job.

But we miss the Attic.

We also miss Uncle Jesse White, who played there almost every weekend. Uncle Jesse passed away two years ago at the age of 87. God bless his soul.

As a side note, one of the proudest moments for Toast of the Town was sitting in with Uncle Jesse White behind the drum kit. Lemme tell you, playing the blues is trickier than you think, especially with authentic cats like Uncle Jesse.

Why? Because old blues guys like to play around with time signatures. In other words, they are all over place. You really have

to listen close to keep up with them. It can be an exhausting challenge to the uninitiated. Uncle Jesse's regular drummer, "Duke," made it look so easy.

Those were fun times but truth be told, the blues

But there's good news. The blues is back in Hamtramck. Kelly's bar on Holbrook is now the scene of a jumping blues jam. Bar owner Brad Ruff said he didn't plan on bringing the blues back.

"We kind of stumbled on it by accident," Ruff said.

Call it a happy accident. A loose jam session has turned into a weekly session.

"Now they (bar patrons) call it the new Attic," Ruff said.

Speaking of the blues, Ruff looks like a blues cat: he's got the backward Kangol-style cap, a soul patch on the chin and a raspy voice.

Kelly's Bar has been struggling in recent years so this shot of blues is a good thing.

Ruff said he's trying to attract more people during the 6 to 9 p.m. time slot by offering kitchen specials, such as 50 cent coney and \$1 beer specials. Wednesday, Friday and Saturday is open mic night but there is also a house band that he swaps out after a few weeks.

"You have to keep it fresh," Ruff said.

And now, let's take a break and imagine John Lee Hooker singing, "Boom Boom."



Uncle Jesse White was a star attraction at the former Attic blues bar for many years. Uncle Jesse passed away two years ago and then the Attic closed down, but now the blues is back in Hamtramck.

doesn't attract much of a crowd. Blues bars tend to attract crusty old guys and basically few to zilch in the hot babes department.

In other words, blues bars don't make much money.

That's why the Attic went through one owner after another. Each new owner thought they could turn things around.

So, the upshot is that the blues scene took a huge hit with the closing of the Attic.

As everyone knows, next Wednesday – the day before Thanksgiving – is the biggest bar night. That tradition has grown largely from college kids coming home for the holiday and also because a lot of people have Thanksgiving off so they want to go out and party before having to endure the pain of spending the entire day with their family.

We're not sure what Hamtramck bars have in store as far as entertainment goes, but we do know that at the New Dodge Lounge it's the return of The Orbitsons – a high-octane country/punk outfit.

If you do go out next Wednesday, watch out for extra police patrols throughout the metro area. With so many communities struggling financially, they rely on drunk driving arrests to rake in the dough.

Here's one more plug for a fundraiser this Saturday (Nov. 20) at Hippo's bar on Conant. Hippo's is raising money to help fund a Christmas party for the school district's Special Ed kids. For a mere \$6 you can get a kielbasa or a meatball dinner. The party runs from 2 to 6 p.m.

Stop by and have a toast with Toast of the Town.

Do you know of a cool bar, a great restaurant or just a nice place to hang out? If you have tips on special events or just want to shine some light on your favorite spot send a message to news@thehamtramck-review.com or call us at (313) 874-2100.

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Hamtramck, 3 Br. lower flat, living room, dining room, 2264 Grayling, Section 8 OK, 586-360-1029. 11/26

3 Br upper, water included, \$450/month, 3356 E. Palmer, Detroit. Also, 1 Br. upper, heat and water included, \$375/month, 13515 Syracuse St., Detroit, 586-634-5593. 12/10

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Hamtramck, McDougall St., 2 Br. upper, with balcony, near shopping district and 5 minutes from I-75, 900 sq. ft., freshly painted and cleaned carpet, appliances incl., \$550/month, \$1,375 moves you in, utilities separate, no pets, serious inquiries only, bring your last 2 paystubs, last year's tax return and your ID, by appointment only, call Joe, 586-321-4111 (day), or 586-532-8624 (evening). 11/19

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Metro news ...

It's said that whatever happens to Detroit, so goes Hamtramck. If you were to rely solely on the local mainstream media, you'd think Detroit is no more than a crime-infested wasteland. Well, we're here to say that isn't so. Our friends over at modeldmedia.com and metromode.com have been reporting on fascinating development projects for the past few years.

With their permission, here is a round-up of their reports from the past week:

This publication has covered the tastes of Southwest Detroit's Putnam Weekley before (see The Detroit Who Ate (and Drank) Everything). Well, he's making news again, this time with a new business: Detroit Wine Truck, a service that will deliver his personally curated bottle packages to any Detroit doorstep.

Weekley has honed his chops working for wine shops, depart-

ments and wholesalers in the suburbs and Ann Arbor for about a dozen years. Like many kinds of retail in the city, he found options back home to be lacking - stalwart Cost Plus in Eastern Market and new kid MotorCity Wine notwithstanding. "With such a diverse set of products, you could have have 20 wine stores next to each other, all with different products," he says. "Detroit has historically had less of those kinds of things than some suburban places."

With thoughts of opening a

storefront long on his mind, Weekley decided a delivery business was a good entry point. "I can learn who is drinking wine in Detroit, what they are interested in," he says. Added bonus: giving city dwellers "more access to a subject near and dear to me."

Packages range from the value-priced - six bottles of three French red varieties for \$66 - to a pricier pair of Italians for \$55. Deliveries began last week and, as he suspected, the lower cost packages have been the most popular. "Ten dollars is a lot of

money to spend on a beverage," says Weekley. "But to make interesting wine, it is hard to deliver that to market for much less - at least to the standards I apply when judging wine." He pledges that he will offer no wine, no matter the price tag, that is "formulaic or mass-produced."

Other "foodie" businesses popping up around town - Beau Bien, Neighborhood Noodle and Corridor Sausage, to name just a few - point to a critical mass of thoughtful eating and drinking choices in Detroit. Weekley sees

this as positive for his enterprise. "If you're an adventurous eater and trust your own palate, and you taste the wines...intuitively (there is) something delicious about them, satisfying and memorable," he says. "You might want more - and then maybe, I have a business that will sustain itself."

To schedule delivery call (313) 450-2420, twitter Putnam100 or email putnamweekley@gmail.com.

Writer: Kelli B. Kavanaugh

Hamtown's movers and shakers... By Alan R. Madeleine

Who he is:

Robert Zahorsky

is a sculptor with a substantial-sized studio space on Hamtramck's south end. He works in the media of metal, glass, stone and wood. His website (www.zahorskystudio.com) features a variety of different work, both fine art and functional aesthetic pieces. Earning a BFA from the College for Creative Studies in 2000, Zahorsky most often processes his artistic ideas through drawing, welding and casting.

To facilitate the creative work, Zahorsky established a business utilizing his experience, skill and knowledge of materials and design to construct functional pieces including custom-made gates, railings, furniture and lighting. Recently, he was chosen by a fellow artist (Doug Semivan, of Royal Oak, and Madonna University's Art Department Chair) to fabricate a large outdoor sculptural piece titled "The Edge of the Channel," which now sits on the shore of the St. Francis Pond at Madonna University. The project required a number of 16-hour days, over the course of a year and should result in increased exposure for this talented artist.



Robert Zahorsky (right) of Hamtramck teamed up with fellow artist Doug Semivan to create a sculpture now on display at Madonna University in Livonia.

Which brings us to your first question: Do you think of yourself as an artist, an artisan, or a bit of both? Or do you reject such labeling? You do create plenty of functional items, as well as those that seem more purely suited to aesthetics.

Zahorsky: According to my tax return, I am an artist. As an artist, I do a lot of sculpting. Some designs are intended to convey meaning; others are to fulfill a practical purpose. I enjoy the process of translating an idea or drawing into physical space—it requires problem solving with regard to engineering, as well as getting dirty and working with my hands. In either instance, while making art or fabricating functional pieces, I look for opportunities to use

a specific material with the particular context or place in which it will be displayed. Whether it is aluminum, stainless steel, bronze, copper, iron, glass, granite, marble or limestone, the intention is to achieve a cohesive or seamless design.

Please give us a bit of your background. Were you schooled specifically in art, or is this more of an avocation that's grown into something bigger? When do you recall first exhibiting a real interest in art as a possible career track? And where do you think you come by your talents – were either of your parents artistic, or did you have a good teacher somewhere along the way, or is it simply pure interest that's developed on its own that drives your work?

Zahorsky: Initially, I went to school for Building Construction Technology. After a year I realized that it was not what I wanted to do, and switched my focus to Visual Communication/Graphic Design. I was working as a freelance illustrator for a few years, and explored how some of the drawings I was working on could be translated to stained glass. I liked how the drawings could be manipulated through a new medium, and freed from the trappings of the sketch book.

I think drawing, which I have been doing since I was a child, is a vehicle for creativity, and ultimately informs the art and sculptures I create. I regularly carry a sketchbook and draw what I see around me, including musicians at Baker's Keyboard Lounge, or those performing at the DSO; waiting rooms, airports, dandelions in the backyard, equipment in my studio, or my cat friends.

After studying graphic design and illustration, I wanted to go to school for sculpture, and moved from Florida to Detroit to attend the Center for Creative Studies in 1995. By 2000, I began collecting and investing in equipment, expanding my studio from a detached garage in Ferndale to an industrial space in Detroit, and now to the 4,500 sq. ft. shop in Hamtramck. Zahorsky Studio is now in its 10th year of operation, and is equipped to weld, cast, forge, cut, sand, plane, sandblast, polish—you name it.

The region bears much opportunity with regard to acquiring industrial equipment and material—I boast that I have my pick of half a dozen places to order what I need and collect it the same day, while my artist friends in Miami or Boulder, CO have less selection, pay more, and wait longer to have what they need shipped. Though, when it's worth it, I build my own tools, including a forge and treddle-hammer for blacksmithing and a plastic-injection-mold machine, used to prototype plastic parts with high density polypropylene I recycle from used milk and laundry detergent containers. Ultimately the functional aesthetic work for commercial or residential clients enables the art-making, by supporting the cost of the space, equipment and materials.

How did you decide what materials you would specialize in? Many sculptors like to work in bronze, for example, and/or create castings for

their work. Do you operate in a more-standard way, or in a less so? Does working with multiple media, which are so very different in their natures, pose any special problems, for example in the way that you join two different media – say, glass and rock – together?

Zahorsky: I specialize in the materials I enjoy working with. Like my predecessors, the materials I use are those which are readily available. For much of my work, I employ traditional techniques such as: casting, mold-making, forging, additive and subtractive sculpting in clay and wax, welding, polishing and glass-blowing. In my art: the properties of the material inform the meaning of the work.

In my business, I look to incorporate the characteristics of the surrounding space in terms of material, pattern, color or finish to achieve a design that relates cohesively in its environment. I enjoy finding solutions for the inherent challenges created by joining dissimilar materials.

How did this Madonna University project come together? Had you known Doug from before, or did he call you based on other information or references? Once you realized the scope of the project, was it daunting, or exciting, or a mix of both? Did Doug present you with specific ideas, or more of a story or background from which you could create the look of the piece yourself, based on these concepts he had given you?

Zahorsky: When Doug got approval for the sculpture, he started looking for someone to fabricate it. He asked Michael Hall (who was formerly the head of Sculpture Department at Cranbrook). I had done some work on one of Michael's sculptures a few years back. I feel very fortunate and grateful to be referred by Michael.

Doug had a scale model of the piece in his studio, made from foam core. When I went to see the model, I immediately knew how I wanted to see the sculpture. I proposed to Doug that the piece should be sandblasted to create an even matte surface, and the edges should be brought up to a high polished mirrored finish. I made an aluminum sample to show Doug, and he loved it.

How do you know when a piece like this is finally finished, according to your stan-

dards? What was it like when you finally realized that this was it? Was there some trepidation in how others would accept the piece, or were they brought in at points to check the progress while it was underway? And what was it like to see the piece installed in its eventual home? Did you feel like you were leaving a piece of yourself behind out there beside the pond?

Zahorsky: I was relieved when the piece was completed and installed. I think I am my own most difficult critic. I labored over areas of the piece that will not be seen by anyone. I appreciate the opportunity to get work out there in the public's eye.

Lastly, what's next for you – some R&R, or do you jump right back into something new? Any other commissioned projects on your horizon, or any showings of your work, coming up soon? Has this project created any new opportunities for you yet, or

do have a sense that it might? Are you involved at all with HATCH here in town? How does living in Hamtramck inform your art – were you always based here? And – go ahead, if you like, and plug anyone or thing you'd care to, to our readership.

Zahorsky: What's next? For fun, I'll have time to go and listen to my friends' band, Final Assault – "toe-tapping annihilation." And I plan on rebuilding the engine of my motorcycle this winter. For my business, I am currently working on a few commissions – one is a custom wooden stereo cabinet with stained glass doors.

I enjoy living in Hamtramck. I appreciate the diversity and affordability. I have to give props to Hamtramck's finest, the police and firefighters. I also want to thank our military men and women.

PLUG: I have to say, HERE WE GO, STEELERS! I'm also a Lions fan, but I am from Pittsburgh, and I still have family there, so GO STEELERS!

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