

the Westsider

Winter 2021



PRESENTED BY THE Westside Neighborhood Association



Welcome to the Westside!

Hey Westsiders,

It happened again, and you may have missed the transition. During our first fall in the neighborhood, a neighbor made a comment about seeing us in the spring when the neighbors come out of hibernation. Being new to a neighborhood like the Westside, I didn't know what he meant by the statement. Come spring, his meaning became very apparent. The quick waves and head nods of the winter turned into thoughtful exchanges. It was interesting learning the vibe of the block.

With the COVID-19 conditions of 2020, there was already a sense of separation so to speak. Slow casual banter became polite distance-keeping quick hellos. So when the winter weather happened upon us, a lot of us were already mostly housebound without our usual neighborhood BBQs, parties, and festivities. What didn't lessen was the sense of being neighborly. When word went out that someone was in need, you still made it a point to love thy neighbor. Even if it meant leaving a food basket on the front stoop and sending a message. Another example is the dynamic duo of the Drexel Street Snow Blowers. They have been up early, each armed with a snowblower to make quick work of clearing the sidewalk around the block. With a new baby in the house, it has been most welcome to wake up to such a treat.

As we continue to navigate in this world with COVID-19 parameters, I applaud you for continuing to be a space where people feel welcome. I applaud your continued effort to maintain positive and friendly relationships with your fellow Westsiders.

A huge thank you to the board members of the Westside Neighborhood Association. They definitely rose to the occasion of being the best one could be, navigating through the chaos to continue the work of the association. They worked diligently on maintaining communication with our neighbors, continued to encourage camaraderie, as well as quell any tensions that may have arisen.

As we come out of the winter doldrums and begin to once again spread our wings welcoming the spring sun, I hope you will continue to find innovative ways to cultivate positive interactions with your neighbors.

Be well Westsiders. Godspeed

~Metro Melik



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The Westsider Layout and Design by Eric Hall | Cover photo courtesy of Metro Melik

Connecting Virtually at the Annual Meeting

The Westside Neighborhood Association hosted its 2021 Annual Meeting on Jan. 13, though the event looked a little different from those held in the past. Hosted via Zoom, the Annual Meeting was a chance for nearly 70 neighbors to connect virtually and hear updates from across the city.



Speakers included Mayor Andy Schor, Lansing City Council president Peter Spadafore, Anne Brown from the Office of U.S. Rep. Elissa Slotkin, State Rep. Sarah Anthony, Ingham County Commissioner Ryan Sebolt, speakers from RACER Trust, DeLisa Fountain of City of Lansing Department of Neighborhoods, Officer Anthony J. VandeVoorde of Lansing Police Department, and J.W. Sexton High School Principal Daniel Boggan.

Important updates included:

- A request from J.W. Sexton High School and Riddle Elementary School for Meijer gift cards that can be used by students and their families to purchase food and necessities, especially as they deal with challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and remote learning. Neighbors who wish to give Meijer gift cards for students may deliver them directly to the schools.
- An update on the RACER Trust properties, see page 12 for more information.
- Updates from lawmakers at the federal, state, and local levels about happenings in our community.

A recording of the Annual Meeting, as well as materials from the meeting are available at www.wnalansing.com/2021-annual-meeting.

Black History Month

February marks Black History Month when we pay tribute to Black American men and women who have made significant contributions in the fields of science, politics, law, sports, the arts, entertainment, and many other fields.

Everybody knows about famous Black Americans like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Barack Obama. But did you know about the amazing feats of these lesser-known Black pioneers that made their home within the WNA boundaries? In this edition of the Westsider we'd like to introduce and present some of these local pioneers.

Andrea Collier, an award-winning author, journalist and photographer. Collier is deeply committed to, and knowledgeable about, health issues that affect people of color and contributed articles to Heart Insight on topics that are given short shrift in other health publications even though heart disease, diabetes and stroke—and risk factors for these conditions—are epidemic in the Black community. She brought authenticity and passion to her coverage of these issues.



Andrea Collier

Rev. Joseph Graves Sr., spearheaded the campaign to rename Logan Street after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. 1966, Rev. J.E. Graves was called to pastor Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church.

Willie Hudson, affectionately called the Mayor of Heather Lane, was a member of the U.S. Army, Buffalo Soldiers Division, World War II and was stationed in Italy. Mr. Hudson, with his wonderful wife Dorothy of 76 years, made his home on the corner of Hillsdale and Heather Lane for decades!



Thomas Merchant

Thomas Merchant proudly served others all his life, serving our country as a soldier and the citizens of Lansing as a firefighter for 25 years. Tommy was a lifelong member of the NAACP, served on the Veterans Affairs Committee of Lansing and helped establish the first Black Firefighters' Association Board.

Rev. Michael Murphy founded St. Stephen's Community Church in 1987, while he was working as an adviser on children's services to Gov. James Blanchard. He served as the Senior Minister of St. Stephen's United Church of Christ for 21 years. He was elected to the Lansing City Council in 1997. Later, Rev. Murphy was

elected and served in the Michigan House of Representatives for three terms, where he was known for his work on safety issues for children. In 2006, the National Black Caucus of State Legislators awarded him the President's Award for his leadership in responding to the need in the Gulf Coast states after Hurricane Katrina.

Earl Nelson started his career as a teacher in the Lansing school district. He then served 8 years in the Michigan Legislature as both a State Representative and Senator. He finished his career as the Director of Equity for the State Department of Education. He is also remembered as founder of the Earl Nelson Singers and a Lansing community advocate.

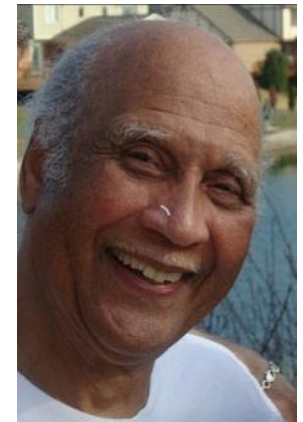


Fred Porter

Fred Porter, community activist and organizer of the Lansing Black College Tour, which offers an alternative to local students looking to obtain a quality education while learning about Black history and culture. The tour is important for today's college-bound students to see what their ancestors built at a time when Black students were not allowed to attend traditional white universities.

Raymond Riddle was Lansing's first Black police officer, hired in 1950. Riddle eventually left the police department to become a brick mason. Riddle was a brick mason and foreman for 20 years, became a state building inspector in 1977, and retired in 1994 as assistant chief with the Michigan Department of Labor's Bureau of Construction Codes.

Robert Riddle, director of the Urban League's Labor Education Advancement Program (LEAP) and Master Brick Layer. One of Riddle's greatest contributions lived on through the LEAP program, preparing Black youth for employment opportunities in the skilled trades industry. Riddle saw something in individuals that they sometimes didn't see in themselves. In order to be successful, the young man had to have motivation, ambition and dedication. Riddle always greeted you with a huge smile and a crushing handshake. It's because of him that many Black Americans in Lansing entered the skills programs. Lansing lost an icon with his passing in early February. He opened many doors and helped so many people along the way.



Robert Riddle

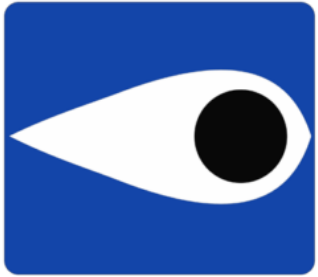
Vivian Riddle, a West Junior High School graduate, Sexton High School valedictorian and Michigan State University alumna, as well as the first Black American student inducted into MSU's Tower Guard Honorary Society, began her teaching career at Pattengill Junior High School. During her 16 years with the Lansing School District, Riddle was recognized with numerous awards and accolades for her stellar service to students in the greater Lansing community, including "Teacher of the Year" from the Lansing Civitan Club. In 1975, the school board voted to rename the newly built school the Vivian Riddle Elementary School.

Crime and Safety Updates

The Crime and Safety Committee held its first meeting for 2021 via Zoom on Jan. 27.

Ward 4 City Council Member Brian T. Jackson provided updates to neighbors about activities and developments around the city, including his effort to review and possibly reform some of the city's ordinances. He invited neighbors to contact him at briant.jackson@lansingmi.gov in order to receive his newsletter.

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH



WE LOOK OUT FOR EACH OTHER

Lansing Police Department Community Police Officer Anthony J. VandeVoorde spoke about police department efforts to offer more tools to neighbors to monitor for safety concerns, including camera systems and new speed monitors. The department is submitting applications for grants to support these efforts, so watch for information in the future.

He also spoke about the benefits of Neighborhood Watch, which gives neighbors an avenue to identify and address concerns before they become critical incidents. The WNA does not have an active Neighborhood Watch, but there is interest in forming one and resources from the city to get started.

He invited neighbors to contact him with questions and concerns at Anthony.VandeVoorde@lansingmi.gov.

Neighbors interested in taking a leadership role in organizing a Neighborhood Watch program in the Westside are encouraged to contact board@wnalansing.com.

Cheers on Everett Drive

By Mary Boudreau, DNP

Since March of 2020, every evening at 7 p.m., a socially distanced group of 3 to 16 people stand on the driveways and sidewalks on Everett Drive to cheer, play recorders, bang pans and clap for the health care workers who are serving our community in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. These neighbors range from 3-year-old grandchildren to “mature” adults and are often joined by cats and dogs. They provide support and encouragement to one another on a daily basis as well as encourage onlookers to honk, wave and smile.

These hardy neighbors have provided inspiration and support for neighborhood health care workers during the difficult crisis. They often share information on what they have read and heard, and their laughter and cheerful conversation are “good medicine” for our community. It is a chance to share about emotional as well as practical needs (“do you have any coffee creamer left?”) and is another example of the beauty of the Westside Neighborhood. Please feel free to come by any evening at 7 p.m. “rain or shine” and say “Woo-Hoo” with your neighbors!

Lansing City Clerk's Office 2020 Recap and 2021 Update

By Lansing City Clerk Chris Swope



The November election results are verified as accurate, the election was peaceful, and ballots were secured. I am extremely confident in stating these facts after our Lansing City ballots were part of a statewide random ballot audit, a recount of two precincts, and another audit of a randomly selected precinct by the County Clerk.

I consulted with health experts to make sure that the risk to public health was minimized during last year's three elections. We created a drive-thru tent, mailed applications to give every voter the opportunity to vote at home, changed our procedures in the precincts, added 13 election drop boxes, added a third location for early voting, and more.

We could not have done these things without the support of the community. Hundreds of citizens volunteered despite the health risks, and Lansing City voters let their voices be heard in the democratic process safely and respected other people's right to do the same.

Elections in 2021: We have city elections scheduled this year, with the primary being held on Aug. 3 and the General Election on Nov. 2.

I encourage every voter to take advantage of the opportunity to vote from home (also known as absentee voting). You can get added to our automatic application list so that you receive an application to vote at home at www.lansingvotes.com or call 517-483-4131.

You can return your absentee ballots at any election drop box. We have one in our Westside Neighborhood at the Letts Community Center.

Forty days before every election, I open the South Washington Election Unit during regular business hours (8 a.m. to 5 p.m.), as well as extended evening and weekend hours, to allow one-stop in-person voting until 4 p.m. on the Monday before the election. Located at 2500 S. Washington, the Election Unit offers free parking.

Voters may also visit the City Clerk's Office on the 9th floor of City Hall during regular business hours to complete the absentee voter application, ballot, and register to vote.

Clerk's Office is Open by Appointment: We have made changes to ensure the safety of our citizens and staff by using an appointment system for face-to-face transactions.

If you need to apply for a U.S. Passport, you need to make an appointment through our website lansingmi.gov/clerk or call 517-483-4131. We also provide notary services for Lansing City residents at \$5 per document by appointment too.

Bradly and I are proud to have been part of the Westside Neighborhood for over 20 years and I have been proud to be your clerk for 15 years. If the Lansing City Clerk's Office can ever be of service, please contact us by email at city.clerk@lansingmi.gov, phone 517-483-4131 or through Facebook [@lansingclerkswope](https://www.facebook.com/lansingclerkswope).

Westside Resident

Ivy Beyond the Wall

By Bettye Thomas-Gilkey

When I relocated to Lansing from Battle Creek in 1977, I immediately became involved with the Lansing Branch NAACP and began meeting the movers and shakers of the greater Lansing community. Among them were Dr. Olivia Letts and her husband Richard.

While Richard, who was affectionately known as “Dick”, was an administrator for the City of Lansing, his wife, Olivia, was an educator with the Lansing School District and a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, the premiere African American Greek-lettered organization for college-educated woman that was founded in 1909 at Howard University.

Although our paths as community activists crossed frequently through the years, it was not until 1991 when I was initiated into Alpha Kappa Alpha that I experienced a personal encounter with Dr. Olivia who was president of Lansing’s Delta Tau Omega Chapter.

The initiation process though exciting, was both intimidating and powerful for 17 new initiates who were awestruck by every ceremonial nuance like neophytes entering the road to Greek-life led by Dr. Olivia who presided regally. She exuded a deftness of knowledge, pride and decorum that enthralled us with a persona that loomed majestically. Dr. Olivia Letts was a consummate leader and highly revered on local, state, regional and national platforms.

One of my fondest and most vivid memories of Dr. Olivia is watching her get up from her seat and lead the dance floor with The Hustle while sorority sisters, decades younger, always followed suit. She was frequently the first and last dancer, NEVER missing a beat. That, in a nutshell, is who Dr. Olivia Letts was; always a leader and never a follower.

Yes! The greater Lansing community and Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority has lost a true leader. Rest in Heavenly Peace, Soror Dr. Olivia Letts.

Former Westside resident Bettye Thomas-Gilkey is a published author and Senior Staff Writer for the Chronicle Newspaper. Her non-fiction personal memoir, “The White Purse: Wherein the Secret Lies” explores the pain and complexities of adoption and is available for order on Amazon and Barnes & Noble. Thomas-Gilkey makes her home in Atlanta, GA.

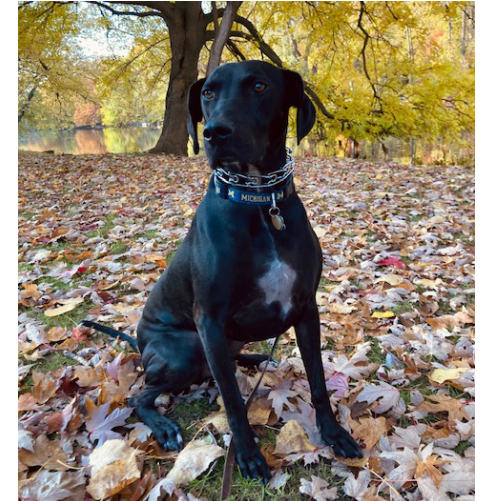


Dr. Olivia Letts
Jan. 18, 1928 – Feb. 1, 2021
Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority

Pet Spotlight: Charlie

Charlie is a 4 year old black mystery mutt who resides on Everett Drive but insists on patrolling the neighborhood regularly, racking up about 5 miles a day.

Adopted from Capital Area Humane Society a year ago, speculation is that he washed out of hunting dog school: he’s excellent at sniffing out animals (his person has used the Lansing Connect app to report the 17 (and counting!) dead animals he’s located, mostly around the neighborhood, since she’s gotten him) but immediately streaks for home when he hears loud noises. 2020’s six-month-long fireworks season was especially traumatic for him!



Charlie is a very good boy, oh yes he is.

Charlie’s likes include walks, food (and things he thinks are food), having the blankets lifted so he can snuggle underneath, having the back door opened for him and then sitting in the doorway instead of going outside, plopping in the middle of the kitchen floor so people are forced to step around him, peoples’ ears, the mailman, and new adventures. He enjoys frequent trips to Woldumar Nature Center, Grand Ledge’s Island Park, Moore’s Park, and the river trail.

He dislikes having his talons clipped, loud noises, people eating bacon in front of him and not giving him any, the cat across the street that taunts him, and not being the center of attention.

Unusual Neighborhood Visitor



We’ve seen plenty of snow in 2021 so far, and some neighbors have made the most of the winter wonderland to bring some extra fun to the Westside.

In addition to the usual snowmen bringing smiles across the neighborhood, a penguin made a special “visit” to the thanks to the creativity of some neighborhood snow artists!

When the snow piles up, we hope to see even more “new friends” all over the Westside.

Neighborhood Roots



If only a tree could tell us the history it has seen! This tree, located on the 200 block of Huron St., was here perhaps a full century before Michigan became a state in 1837. With a circumference of over 16 feet, its canopy spreading an estimated 70 feet, and a trunk diameter of 5.3 feet (63.5 inches), this majestic white oak has lived a very long life, spanning the history of Michigan from Native American land to U.S. Territory and then to state, and the transformation of the Westside neighborhood from forest to farm, and then to housing.

Approximately 300 years ago (based on

estimated growth rates) this tree was a sapling in a seasonally-wet hardwood forest, likely surrounded by elms, maples and other oaks. When it was around 200 years old, it marked the edge of the city limits. Spared by a farmer, developer and residential property owners, its modern joy is to oversee children walking to Riddle Elementary School and Letts Community Center. It is probably missing those children right now! Considering that white oaks can live as long as 500 to 600 years, this tree could have many more years ahead.

Thank you to those that stewarded this tree in the past and to its modern stewards, Carol Skillings and Tom Stanton! Trees this size are truly remarkable, especially when nestled right here in our neighborhood!

Our homes are filled with character and charm that create the unique sense of place in our neighborhood. Trees, young and old, add to the story of what makes the Westside a unique and wonderful place to call home. Do you know a tree that you want to introduce to your neighbors? Submit your tree to Heidi at board@wnalansing.com and share its story!

**Age is estimated using species growth factor for white oaks. Visit www.purduelandscapereport.org/article/how-old-is-my-tree for more information.*

Services Available From Tri-County Office on Aging

As the Area Agency on Aging for Clinton, Eaton, and Ingham Counties, Tri-County Office on Aging provides support and resources to older adults, adults with disabilities, and their families and caregivers to help keep individuals living safely and independently in their homes and communities. While our most well-known program is Meals on Wheels, TCOA provides everything from basic information and assistance (I&A) to health and wellness workshops and care coordination of in-home supports for activities of daily living.



I&A and Options Counseling provide resources and support on subjects such as housing, financial eligibility, in-home services and long-term care options, offering assistance in planning to meet needs related to aging.

Evidence-based Health and Wellness workshops provide information and resources, as well action planning and problem solving to help address chronic conditions, diabetes, chronic pain, fall prevention, as well as caregiver supports for taking care of oneself as you take care of someone else.

Project Choices/MI Choice Waiver offers an alternative to nursing home care. Individuals and their support teams identify and secure key services to live in their homes or other setting of their choice.

Case Coordination is available for those who can benefit from limited support with personal care, homemaking, chores or respite, but are not nursing home eligible.

Crisis Services for the Elderly responds to non-medical emergencies, such as utility shut off notices and prescription drug issues.

The Kinship Care Respite Program provides rest and relief for a non-parent older adult (55+) who is raising a child 18 years or younger. The program can help pay for activities such as day care, sports camps, summer classes, and extracurricular activities.

Michigan Medicare/Medicaid Assistance Program's counselors help with understanding Medicare & Medicaid, enroll in Medicare prescription drug coverage, review supplemental insurance needs, apply for Medicaid or Medicare Savings programs, identify and report fraud and abuse or scams, and explore long term care insurance.

Nutrition Programs include Meals on Wheels Home delivered meal program, as well as Congregate or Senior Dining Sites at locations across the area. (Due to COVID-19, congregate sites currently offer weekly pick up only, rather than the traditional in person dining and programming.)

These programs are offered at no-cost to those who are eligible (based on age and/or income) with I&A available to anyone. Donations are accepted and cost-sharing may be required for some in-home services. To learn more, contact 517-887-1440, or visit www.tcoa.org.

RACER Trust Update on Lansing-Area Properties

RACER Trust participated in the WNA Annual Meeting in January and updated members on its properties in the city of Lansing (Plant 6) and Lansing Township (Plants 2 and 3). RACER's presentation and other information referenced below can be found at: www.racertrust.org/lansing18.

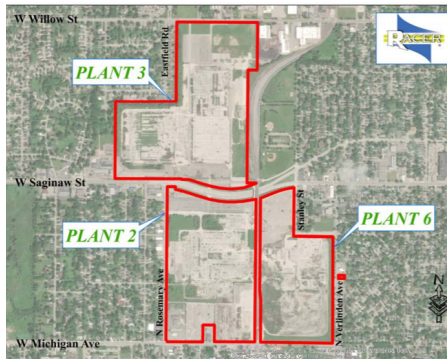
As earlier reported, the sites are under contract for redevelopment with NorthPoint Development, a Kansas City-based developer of commercial and industrial properties with a national footprint. RACER has required NorthPoint to get city and township approvals, which typically provides an opportunity for citizen input, as a condition of sale.

Limited use permits were granted for (1) car parking on Plant 3 north of Saginaw, off Willow that expired January 7th; and (2) work by Consumers Energy on Plant 6, south of Saginaw, bordering Verlinden, which expires October 31.

Among the highlights of RACER's environmental activities in the 2020 4th quarter are the following:

- There continues to be no known exposure for area residents associated with contaminants found at the former GM properties. Drinking water is provided to the area by the municipal system.
- Characterization of potential soil vapor intrusion into indoor air is ongoing and will continue in the northeast portion of Plant 6 and the immediate adjacent off-site area.
- Characterization of PFAS impacts is ongoing, particularly around the perimeter of Plant 6.
- Several interim steps have been taken to control PFAS impacts, including modifications to sanitary and storm sewer lines to minimize off-site transport of PFAS-impacted groundwater that has infiltrated into on-site sewers.
- Biosparge systems to remediate 1,4-dioxane in weathered bedrock at the Plants 2 and 3 appear to be working effectively. Performance monitoring is on-going and results will be reported in subsequent quarterly updates.

Additional information about RACER's environmental activities in the Lansing area, including groundwater monitoring and a schedule of upcoming milestones, is included in the full quarterly report at www.racertrust.org/lansing18.



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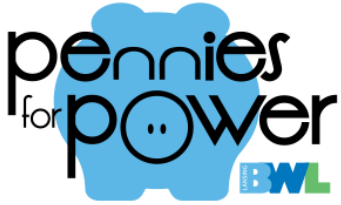
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Chris Swope
Lansing City Clerk

Proud Resident and Advocate of
The Westside Neighborhood!

Services of the Clerk's Office include:

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Metro Melik
www.metromelik.com
517-285-4224
melik4398@gmail.com

the **Westsider**

The Westside Neighborhood Association
c/o Letts Community Center
1220 W. Kalamazoo
Lansing, MI 48915

