

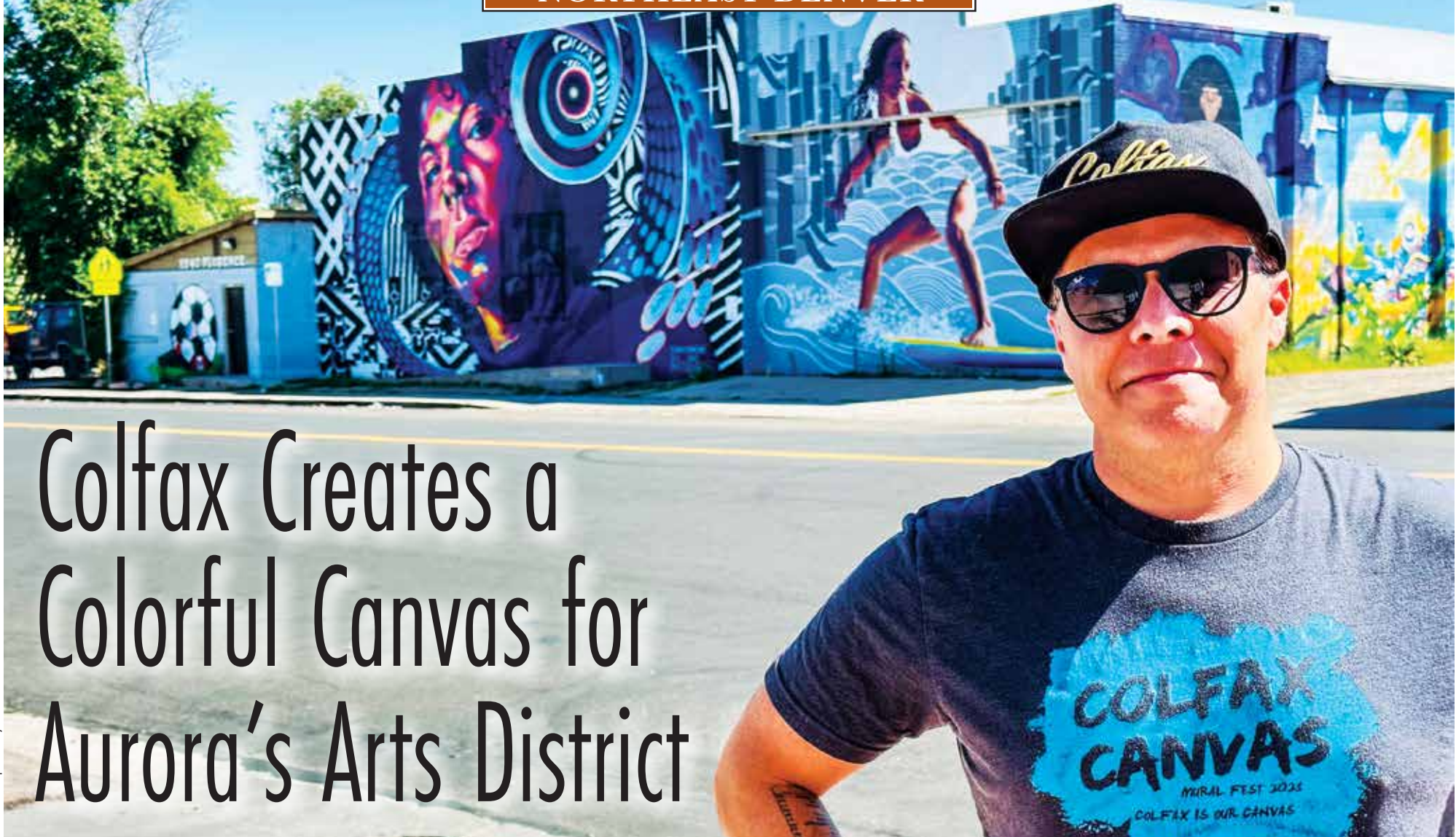
Front Porch

Central Park, Park Hill, Lowry, Montclair, Mayfair, East Colfax, NW Aurora

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SEPTEMBER 2023



Colfax Creates a Colorful Canvas for Aurora's Arts District

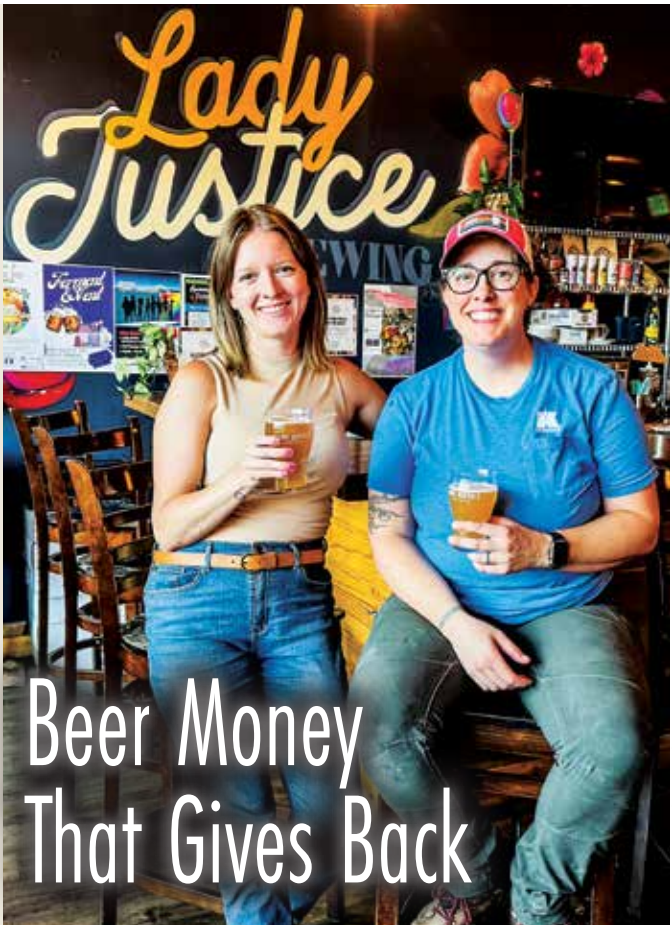
Aaron Vega, founder of the Colfax Canvas Mural Festival, stands in front of several brightly-colored murals at the corner of Florence St. and E. Colfax in Northwest Aurora. Artists start painting in early September, and the festival culminates with a block party on Sept. 16 from 12pm-5pm in the heart of Aurora's Arts District.

The fourth annual Colfax Canvas Mural Festival is a celebration of visual arts, local businesses, food, music, and cultural dancing. The centerpiece of the event is four new murals created by 10 artists on the walls of businesses in Northwest Aurora. "Colfax is our canvas," says founder Aaron Vega. "We want to use art and culture to uplift this very unique neighborhood." *Story by Mary Jo Brooks on page 8.*



Sounds of Mexico in the Neighborhood

Isahar Mendez-Flores, co-founder of the Colorado Youth Mariachi Program in Aurora, located near Central Park, teaches small group classes that range in age and skill level, allowing personal attention to students. Here, she teaches a class while students follow on instruments that include violin, guitar, and vihuela. Harp and guitarrón are other instruments common in mariachi music. *Story by Martina Will, PhD on page 4.*



Beer Money That Gives Back

Lady Justice Brewing's Alison Wisneski (left) and Betsy Lay (right), make beer with a mission. *Story by Courtney Drake-McDonough on page 6.*

New Developments Escalate Turmoil at McAuliffe International School

Story by Brian Heuberger on page 14.

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Bird Sightings

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Keystone Species

In early July, I walked along the Mule Deer trail in Golden Gate Canyon State Park to see birds that prefer a higher elevation than Denver. Many birds are raising their young at this time of year in the tree hole nests of aspen trees. One easy way to find a tree hole nest is to look for birds with insects or caterpillars in their beaks and follow them as they return to the same tree over and over again, like this Mountain Bluebird with a grasshopper in its beak (figure 1).

Once the nest is located and the feeding activity is witnessed, one can truly appreciate the effort and work put in by the parents to care for the young. The Mountain Bluebird (feeding its young in figure 2) and the Red-naped Sapsucker (figure 3) are rarely seen at the lower elevation of Denver except during migration in spring and fall.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

The Red-naped Sapsucker is both the architect and the construction crew that made these round cavities in the aspen trees. Woodpeckers, including flickers and sapsuckers, have the equipment to perform this task. The Red-naped Sapsucker is designated a keystone species because what it creates benefits other wildlife in the same habitat. The tree hole nest is shared among birds with lesser beaks that are incapable of constructing such cavities. In addition, the sapsucker makes holes in trees to allow the flow of sap on which it and other creatures feed. They also maintain the flow of sap continuously for the benefit of all.

Figure 4 shows a small mammal that has found its way into such a tree hole as a Northern Flicker looks on quizzically.

Bird Walks: Sep. 2 and Oct. 7. 2.5-hour walk at 7:30am or 2-hour walk at 8am. Free but must RSVP at blufflake.org/birdwatching. All are welcome. Bring your own binoculars, or borrow a pair from your guide. 11255 MLK Blvd.

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Mariachi Corazón de Oro performing for back to school night at SOAR Elementary School.

Sounds of Mexico in the Neighborhood

By Martina Will, PhD

If you want to hear mariachi music in Mexico City, the Plaza Garibaldi has been the place to go for over a century. Mariachi ensembles walk the plaza in traditional charro outfits, competing for attention and erupting into song when they secure a paying client. Familiar instruments include voice, guitar, violin, and trumpet. These combine with instruments that are less familiar in this country: guitarrón (a large six-string guitar), the vihuela mexicana (a 5-string instrument smaller than a guitarrón), and harp, to create a distinctive sound and typically joyous music.

If you want to hear—and learn—mariachi music in Denver, you only have to go so far as the East Central Park neighborhood in Aurora, home to the Colorado Youth Mariachi Program (CYMP). With a range of classes and opportunities for ages 7-23, CYMP is the realization of a dream for Isahar Mendez-Flores and her husband Victor Becerra. Together they founded the school for which Mendez serves as program director and Becerra as trumpet instructor.

Born in Guanajuato, Mexico and raised in Commerce City in a predominantly Hispanic community, Mendez fell in love with mariachi music after joining her high school’s mariachi ensemble. Becerra, who was born in Zacatecas, Mexico, met Mendez at Adams City High School, where he had taken up the trumpet in 11th grade to play mariachi music.

The music and culture of their high school experiences resonated with them both, but Mendez was alarmed by the high teacher turnover. She estimates that she had five mariachi teachers during her four years in high school. Despite a high Hispanic student population, she was disappointed when she realized that the program was severely under-resourced.

In Texas, Mendez says, mariachi programs are a staple in many high schools, treated with the same high regard as orchestra and band. In Colorado, however, she observed that a lot of mariachi programs would last a year or two and fall apart, due to a lack of institutional support and sustainability. “There’s no way to fund and support a program that represents these students,” says Mendez.

She reflects on what is available to students living in low-income communities or Hispanic neighborhoods compared to the options offered elsewhere. “There is no emphasis on quality music education. It’s more about quantity—trying to get the most students access to an instrument,” she says. Beyond putting an instrument in students’ hands, however, the public school programs she saw lacked the capacity to instruct beyond the basics, let alone teach students “how to play their instruments correctly or formally, in a professional setting.”

Understanding first-hand that receiving quality mariachi education was a challenge, she decided in her senior year of high school that she needed to pursue a degree in music education so she could teach people how to teach mariachi.

The first person in her family to attend college, Mendez sought a high-quality music education at Metro State University (MSU). There, she reached out to Prof. Peter Schimpf, who chaired the Department of Music at the time, and made her case for a mariachi music education program since MSU did not offer one. “He was very, very invested in the idea,” says Mendez. They began a student club, and in time

created a mariachi curriculum. MSU now hosts an annual Viva Southwest Mariachi Conference and Showcase, in partnership with the Latino Cultural Arts Center. On Sep. 16, the Viva Southwest Mariachi Festival will take place at the Levitt Pavilion, featuring the all-female and Latin Grammy-winning group, Flor de Toloache.

After graduating from Metro State, Mendez and Becerra realized they needed to fulfill their passion for mariachi in a new way. Their dream to teach the next generation in a sustainable program independent of vulnerable public school budgets led to the founding of CYMP. Two years ago, CYMP moved into its current space at 2520 Galena Street, Unit 1. Mendez hopes that community engagement and volunteerism can help them become a permanent fixture in the neighborhood. Mendez teaches as well as runs the non-profit, but she hopes to be able to hire administrative help or find volunteers who might support her fundraising and administrative efforts. She would like to hire an executive director to allow her to focus on programming and curriculum, which is her calling.

She hopes that CYMP makes quality mariachi education available to all. To this end, the school even has an instrument library to reduce barriers to trying an instrument. Ten-year-old Elena does not hesitate when asked about her violin lessons at CYMP: “I like to learn new things and play mariachi!”

The new semester of classes began Aug. 1, but Mendez welcomes students of all levels to reach out if they are interested in starting classes. Mariachi Corazón de Oro (Heart of Gold Mariachi) is the school’s performance ensemble, with a portion of performance fees returning to the school to sustain its programming.

For more information about classes, to donate to CYMP or to hire Mariachi Corazón de Oro for your event, email isaharcymp@gmail.com. Facebook: @CYMariachiProgram.



Front Porch photo by Christie Gosch

Teacher Luis Madrid demonstrates techniques on his guitarrón, a large bass guitar. Mariachi music is diverse in sound and feel, ranging from romantic boleros to upbeat polkas, and is a powerful representation of Mexican cultural heritage.



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Jess Burnett pours a cold one from tap handles made by a friend displaying Lady Justice Brewing's logo. Their Pouring Goodness program donates \$1 from every 13-ounce pour of a designated beer to a non-profit.

By Courtney Drake-McDonough

In 2010, in the midst of a recession, three friends regularly got together for a few beers despite living at the poverty level as AmeriCorps volunteers. Betsy Lay, Kate Power, and Jen Cuesta looked around at all the other people who were also prioritizing buying a beer despite money being so tight, and brewed up an idea. What if they could create a non-profit that would take beer money and give it back to the community?

After their stint in AmeriCorps ended in 2011, Power took a business law class and used their non-profit idea as the model for a business plan assignment. After graduation, the three friends decided to see if they could turn the assignment into reality by writing an extensive plan, raising money for the project, and opening a small beer production facility. They sold 75 beer memberships in their first year with a package that provided monthly 4-packs of crowlers. That model continued until the opportu-

nity to open a full-fledged brewery and taproom became available at 9735 E. Colfax Avenue in Aurora. They signed the lease on March 15, 2020. A few days later, Covid shutdowns brought their plans to an abrupt halt and required them to overcome that unexpected challenge.

“We’re a social enterprise that happens to serve beer as a tool to get that done.”

—Lady Justice co-owner Betsy Lay

“We realized we had a really strong to-go model already and had a built-in customer base of people who were used to getting to-go beer from us,” says Lay. “We just had to figure out how to scale it up in a way that would let us make enough money to stay afloat.”

From the start, the primary mission of Lady Justice was to use beer and their physical space to give back to the local community, support social causes, and empower girls and women throughout Colorado. At the brewery and taproom, they do that in a few ways. Their Pouring Goodness program is a designated in-house tap line that donates \$1 from every 13-ounce pour

Beer Money That Gives Back

to a different non-profit. Tabs can also be rounded up to be donated. And the biggest funding-driver is their Community-Supported Beer (CSB) Membership, which donates 100 percent of its profits over cost directly to a non-profit partner.

As of this year, Lady Justice Brewing has donated \$50,000 to 85 organizations, \$45,000 of which has happened since they moved into the taproom.

“The work we do has to go back into the community. So, we’re a social enterprise that happens to serve beer as a tool to get that done,” explains Lay. “But on the flipside, we care deeply about the beer and we want the beer experience to be enjoyable to people.”

Lady Justice Brewing Company’s core lineup follows classic American and English styles of beer, tending to brew what the team likes to drink. Lay says a lot of people come in to support their mission, to back a queer-owned business, or to patronize a woman-owned brewery. But many customers don’t necessarily know a lot about beer or if they even like it.

“We find a lot of people tend to prefer the more straightforward styles of beer,” says Lay. “Part of our approach is to be as inclusive of as many people as we can so it allows us to introduce people to beers who might not have been comfortable with it before.”

That doesn’t mean they only brew for newbies. Lay says those well-versed in beer also appreciate Lady Justice’s offerings because their brews represent what those styles should be. An example is their ESB, an English-style amber ale, which enables

them to use brewing methods that ensure it tastes authentic to its English heritage. Lay says a lot of people come in just to have that beer.

Non-alcoholic beer, soda, kombucha, whiskey, wine, and cocktails are also served, along with bar snacks that include Rosenberg’s Pizza Bagels. Guests can also bring carry-in food and order through one of the brewery’s free delivery partnerships with neighborhood restaurants, including Bánh & Butter Café. Three of their sandwiches are sold in the brewery every weekend.

“There’s a dedication from business owners and residents in the area to keep this part of Colfax strong, vibrant, and a little bit weird,” says Lay. “We get to use our mission of being community-focused by actually being in a place where we can be a part of the community.”

“We get people coming in here who just want to do good for the neighborhood they live in and they get to do it while they’re having a great time with other like-minded people,” Lay continues. “It feels really good to take a step back and see that we’re able to hold a space that allows people to do that, especially after being small and behind-the-scenes for so many years. It’s really wonderful to have the embodiment of our mission happen right in this room.”

For more information on Lady Justice Brewing, go to www.ladyjusticebrewing.com.



Famous women in history, including the late Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, adorn a vibrant mural that runs along the wall opposite the bar at Lady Justice Brewing.



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Colfax Creates a Colorful Canvas for Aurora's Arts District



Artist Tessa Fuqua shows a sketch that may become part of two murals she is creating with three other artists for the Colfax Canvas Mural Festival. Her team's murals will adorn Mango House in Northwest Aurora.

By Mary Jo Brooks

It's a way to celebrate visual arts, small businesses, food, music, and one of metro Denver's most under-appreciated neighborhoods. The Fourth Annual Colfax Canvas Mural Festival will be held on Sept. 16 from 12pm-5pm in the heart of Aurora's Arts District along Colfax Avenue. Aaron Vega says he created the festival to celebrate the rich diversity of Northwest Aurora. "Colfax Canvas is a community-building experience designed to uplift the neighborhood," says Vega. "There's a lot to be proud of in our neighborhood, but

people who don't live or work here maybe don't know about it."

Over the past three years, artists have painted 29 murals on the walls of businesses as part of the project. This year, 10 artists working in teams will add four more murals. The teams of artists work with local businesses to create murals that are meaningful to both parties. "You see something very dynamic in the way that interaction happens," says Vega. "We really want collaboration while creating a lovely vibe."

Previous murals have featured brightly colored Latin American imagery, musicians, graffiti art, the Denver skyline



Denver-based street artist Pher01 painted this colorful mural filled with images of South American rituals. It's located at Colfax and Florence Street.

framed by purple mountains, and a large portrait of a Peruvian immigrant. The art represents a vast array of styles and the artists come from very diverse backgrounds. Vega says that this variety in creative styles reflects the incredible diversity of historic Aurora. "It's one of the most diverse neighborhoods in the country."

This year Aurora artist Tessa Fuqua is partnering with three other artists to paint two murals on Mango House at Colfax and Galena. The refugee center features a medical and dental clinic, grocery store, and refugee-run restaurants offering cuisine from Syria, Burma, Ethiopia, Nepal, and more.

Fuqua, the daughter of two Filipino immigrants, says her team has sketched out murals that will include colorful botanical designs and words that convey equality, justice, and a celebration of life. She hopes the murals will provide a welcoming message for everyone, but especially the refugees. "I always like my art to make people think, but also smile." Fuqua has participated in the Denver Chalk Art Festival for 10 years, where she loves the interaction of creating art and meeting the public.

Although painting the Colfax murals will involve less public interaction during the installation, she's enjoyed the interaction with the rest of her team as they've mapped out plans for the enormous murals. "Each of the four of us have very different styles, but it's been a great experience to create together," says Fuqua. "I haven't collaborated with a team before, so I've really learned a lot through this process."

There are also logistical challenges—figuring out how much paint will be needed, renting lifts so the artists can safely reach high to paint on the upper sections of the walls, and marking out a grid pattern so the designs can be transferred from sketch pads onto walls that are up to 32 feet long.

The artists will begin painting the large murals beginning Labor Day Weekend and finish (weather permitting) just before the festival—hopefully adding their signatures

Graffiti artist Hiero Vega is known for his enormous portraits, like this one of Denver artist KoKo Bayer.

that day. The festival itself will feature a family-friendly block party with ethnic food from the neighborhood, a beer garden serving drinks from five nearby breweries, live music with cultural dancing, a jumpy castle, a Harry Potter quidditch field, and artist vendor booths. There will also be activities for families in the nearby Martin Luther King Library. "We want to make sure that there are enough free events so people don't feel like they have to buy something. We want the festival to be very accessible for all," says Vega.

One of the free events is a scavenger hunt that will encourage people to follow a map to the various murals where they will receive "stamps" in a passport-style booklet. Visitors can then enter a raffle to win prizes.

Vega hopes that people from all over Denver will attend the Colfax Canvas Mural Festival to see an arts district that doesn't have the name recognition of RINO or the Santa Fe Arts District, but is increasingly vibrant nonetheless. Attendees can take an RTD Colfax bus, park in one of the many free parking lots in the area, or ride their bikes while utilizing new bike racks recently added by the City of Aurora.

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Born into the Climate Crisis

Youth Working Toward a More Sustainable Future

By Martina Will, PhD

This summer's national and international headlines have included a steady stream of stories centered on extreme climate events—excessively high temperatures, more frequent cyclones, more intense hurricanes, and a host of environmental disasters from droughts to wildfires that have all been intensified by climate change.

In the case of Maui's recent wildfires, for example, experts say that invasive grasses and 80-mph winds combined with warmer ocean waters to exacerbate the fires that devastated the town of Lahaina. In a Los Angeles Times interview, Hiroyuki Murakami—a project scientist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Geophysical Fluid Dynamics Laboratory—explained that lower ocean temperatures typically cool cyclone winds but that the rising ocean temperatures prevented this from happening in Hawaii.

If you read only these stories, the outlook is bleak.

As the burden of climate change will increasingly fall on our youth, *Front Porch* features two local students taking different approaches to some of the environmental challenges before us.

Ben Wagner

"I was born into the climate crisis. I wasn't given a choice," says former Northfield High School student Ben Wagner, 17. The senior just relocated to Montezuma, New Mexico to finish his secondary education at United World College (UWC), a two-year internationally focused program that envisions a more peaceful and sustainable future. The Montezuma campus is home to 235 students, only about a



Photo courtesy of the Wagner family

Ben Wagner is settling into life at UWC in New Mexico, which was established in 1982 as the Armand Hammer United World College of the American West by Armand Hammer. Prince Charles was its president.

quarter of whom are from the U.S., making Wagner's participation exceptional. UWC features a program of coursework that includes emphases on community service, wilderness exploration, and conflict resolution.

Wagner is committed to exploring sustainability at UWC, where the surrounding natural landscape serves as a classroom. "The ideals of UWC have always aligned with mine," says Wagner, who learned about the program through a family member. Wagner understands that many teens see a car as a symbol of freedom, but he has long advocated—at City Council meetings and elsewhere—for greater access to bicycles and bike lanes as a sustainable solution to transportation challenges.

Wagner advises other young people to seek opportunities to take their education in a unique and purposeful direction as he is: "Don't feel like you have to follow the traditional school pathway," he says.

Luke Nortman

Luke Nortman, 17, a George Washington High School student and Central Park resident, has long pursued his passion for environmentalism outside of the classroom. Nortman works within the traditional education system while carving out a project-based learning path that has him in the running for a Distinguished Conservation Service Award from Boy Scouts of America.

Nortman's conservation work began in ninth grade, when he reached out to the Denver Parks and Recreation Department (DPR) to restore native habitats in Central Park's Greenway, hoping to attract native bat species to the area. Bats consume primarily mosquitoes and other small insects, but the bat house in the Greenway looked dilapidated and seemed to have no bat activity.

Over a two-year period, Nortman researched native Colorado bat species (there are 19 across the state's diverse ecosystems), as well (continued on p. 13)



Artist Juls Mendoza painted an image of the Mexican axolotl, an endangered amphibian, on the side of Banh & Butter Bakery Café.



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...NE News Updates

2023. Boychik, from the Yiddish term for “endearment,”

will take over the space where the restaurant Chook was formerly located. Boychik spokesperson Victoria Hagen notes, “Boychik is expected to offer traditional eastern Mediterranean comfort cuisine with modern interpretations, featuring healthy, fresh ingredients and flavors. Think dishes like pita wraps with shawarma, hummus bowls, salads, and delicious dips and spreads in the sunny, south-facing full-service restaurant at Stanley Marketplace.”



Front Porch photo by Steve Larson

Additional funding from 2I will help the Sam Gary Library increase its book collections.



3 I-70 Express Lane Tolling Now Live

Drivers now need to pay to use the Central 70 express lanes between Interstate 25 and Chambers Road. Cars were given free access to the express lane during the testing period, which was extended from February to July to fine-tune the live tolling equipment. The new fees vary by time of day. Between 6 and 8:59am, express lane drivers with an ExpressToll pass or switchable HOV transponder will pay up to \$4.50. Prices are reduced during less busy hours and will be displayed on overhead traffic signs. The evening commute (between 4pm and 6:59pm) is \$2.50 for pass holders. License plate fees will apply to drivers without an ExpressToll pass and is more expensive at all times of day, with costs above \$10 during the morning commute. Express lanes are free to motorcyclists, commercial transit, and carpoolers with three or more passengers and an HOV transponder. To learn more, visit expresstoll.com.

4 DEN Reserve Reduces DIA Screening Time

Ranked the third busiest airport in the country and following its busiest summer ever, the Denver International Airport rolled out a new program to expedite security screenings. DEN Reserve allows passengers to make a TSA reservation up to three days before their flight. Den Reserve passengers may then skip the standard DIA security lines and simply check in during their appointed time at the DEN Reserve Bridge Security TSA Checkpoint. Learn more at flydenver.com/denreserve.

5 Pauline Robinson Library Temporarily Closes

On Aug. 27, Denver Public Library (DPL) closed the Pauline Robinson branch in Northeast Park Hill to begin a renovation project that is expected to take a year. The construction project is funded by the Elevate Denver Bond program that was passed by voters in 2017 and that provided DPL with \$69.3 million to renovate several branches. The project at Pauline Robinson will increase the size of the branch to expand the community rooms, staff spaces, and learning areas. For the interior, the branch will receive new furniture, book shelves, technological equipment, and heating and air conditioning systems. For the exterior, the project will upgrade the book drop, parking lot, and landscaping features. Residents who patronize the Pauline Robinson library can use the pickup holds at the Sam Gary branch, and DPL is also collaborating with community leaders to supply offsite services.

6 Funding Supports Additional Hours at Sam Gary Library

Sam Gary Library is now open an additional 12 hours per week, thanks to funding from Strong Libraries, Strong Denver, or Initiative 2I, which voters overwhelmingly supported last November. New hours are Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday from 9am to 6pm; Wednesday from 9am to 8pm; and Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from 10am to 5pm. Sam Gary Library branch supervisor Kit Cusker explains, “Adding morning, evening, and Sunday hours makes the library more accessible to all. We’re excited to connect with the community more and welcome everyone to enjoy all the books, plus the computers, Wi-Fi, free printing, study rooms, family events, and our Idea Lab.” The funding, an annual increase of \$36 million for the Denver Public Library system, includes financing for more staff and extended hours while also covering facility upgrades, increased book collections, expanded programming, subscriptions to Tutor.com for library card holders, and the use of Launchpad tablets that do not require internet access.



The pickleball surge encouraged the MLK Rec Center to add more courts.

By Sarah Huber

1 New Pickleball Courts at MLK Rec Center

In response to pickleball’s rising popularity, this summer Denver Parks and Recreation over-striped the two tennis courts at the Martin Luther King Jr. Recreation Center, allowing the courts to be used for pickleball as well as tennis. DPR is “working with the pickleball community to identify if these courts may become permanent,” says Cynthia Karvaski, DPR communication specialist. The pickleball courts at Congress Park were closed this year due to concerns about noise violations, which prompted DPR to offer six new court locations at the MLK Rec Center and to also explore other possible locations throughout the city. Determining factors for court locations include noise mitigation, permitting issues, snow removal, and maintenance feasibility.

2 Boychik Expanding to Stanley Marketplace

Boychik, a Middle Eastern-inspired food stall and restaurant, is moving into the Stanley Marketplace in late

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year expedition to capture the alarming reality of disappearing glaciers on our planet. Through breathtaking visuals and compelling storytelling, the film showcases the profound impact of climate change on our planet's icy landscapes, awakening a sense

of urgency for climate action. These images, now burned into our collective psyche, were both a revelation and a dire warning upon the film's release. Suitable for all ages.

Wall-E (G)—Sept. 29, 2023

Transport yourself to a future where Earth has become an abandoned wasteland, consumed by pollution and excess. Follow the endearing and resilient robot, *Wall-E*, as he embarks on a remarkable adventure to restore hope and revive the planet's once-thriving ecosystems. This wonderful Pixar movie

delivers a poignant message about the importance of environmental stewardship and the consequences of unchecked human behavior. Suitable for all ages.

Nuoc 2030 (NR)—Oct. 6, 2023

I found this exceptional film at a festival over ten years ago and was dazzled by its vision and atmosphere. Director Minh Nguyen-Vo immerses us in an aesthetically stunning and evocative world where rising sea levels have reshaped the Vietnamese coast. This near-sci-fi dystopic vision explores the human struggle for survival amidst the encroaching waters and examines the socio-economic and political impacts of climate change. Through a captivating blend of drama and environmental commentary, the film raises questions about the price we pay for our actions and the potential we have for redemption. It is a future, unfortunately, that is rapidly nearing. Suitable for 16+.



Our Earth is burning. Our Earth is melting. Our Earth is screaming at us for help. One way to understand and process the world, for me, is through film. Therefore, in the spirit of education and action, I hope you join us at Earth Reel Resilience, a Climate Change Film Series this fall. We will screen and discuss four films over four weeks, each chosen for its specific area of climate change focus and the many issues therein. I host the series/discuss the films, and I will be joined by a series of experts to talk about the science in the films. Finally, we will have volunteers from the MSU Denver Film Club there to collect food for Rowdy's Corner, our university food pantry. Approximately 60 percent of our students suffer from some degree of food insecurity, and we aim to help them. I include summaries of the climate films here, along with one other, powerful gem from Ireland that I highly recommend. We round out the column with a fascinating historical nonfiction book from venerable author Erik Larson.

All films in the series are free and will begin at 6pm at The Cube, 8371 Northfield Blvd. Admission is free. Summaries here are co-written by Lawrence Uhling, Manager of The Cube.

Chasing Ice (PG-13)—Sept. 22, 2023

Environmental photographer James Balog, founder and director of Earth Vision Institute in Boulder, embarked on a multi-

Don't Look Up (R)—Oct. 13, 2023

This brutally honest film from director Adam McKay is a darkly comedic and satirical take on humanity's response to an impending global catastrophe. *Don't Look Up* follows two scientists as they desperately try to warn the world about an approaching comet that threatens to annihilate Earth. This star-studded film combines humor, social commentary, and a scathing critique of society's apathy towards scientific evidence, highlighting the absurdity of our collective inaction in the face of impending disaster. Suitable for 16+.

Additional Film and Book Review

The Quiet Girl (Ireland—2022)

This is a beautiful, heart-warming, and melancholy film that will leave you feeling. A lot. What those feelings will be depends on many things, but I can tell you this: keep the tissues handy. The Academy Award entry from Ireland for Best International Feature this past year, it is perhaps the exact antithesis of the magnificent, sprawling, loud, action-packed, dense, and devastating winner of the category, *All Quiet on the Western Front*. *The Quiet Girl* devastates just as severely.

The film is based on the short story "Foster" by Claire Keegan. Set in 1981 Ireland, a young girl, Cáit (played by luminous newcomer Catherine Clinch)—from a large, growing, impoverished, and neglectful family—is sent for a summer to live on a farm with relatives Eibhlín (a sharp Carrie Crowley) and Seán (in a delightfully understated performance by Andrew Bennett). The older couple have their own (unspoken) grief, and the three soon develop a close and loving bond. At summer's end, Cáit returns to her family. Cue the tissues.

Director Colm Bairéad fashions a contemplative and lush aesthetic that allows the cast to thrive in simple yet expressive surroundings. The cinematography, edit-



ing, and sound hit all the right complementary roles to finish off this captivating work of art. The stars here are the actors, the settings, and the melancholy mood suffused with just enough hope for better.

Streaming on all the usual suspects as well as Hulu.

The Splendid and The Vile

by Erik Larson

The outstanding Erik Larson is the author of such brilliant works as *Devil in the White City* (a must read!), *Dead Wake*, and *Isaac's Storm*, among others. He is one of my favorite authors, and along with Simon Winchester, Larson is a giant in the field of narrative nonfiction. The story here follows Winston Churchill and his inner circle from the time Churchill took office in May 1940 through May 1941. We get a minute-by-minute, blow-by-blow account of the historic time period through the eyes, ears, and pens of the very participants: diaries, notes, letters, correspondence of all sorts, and press accounts that paint a picture of the events of this traumatic period. We even get a glimpse of the Germans. The important piece to remember here is that this is *nonfiction*—all of this is true. All of this is accurate. All of this happened. Larson's journalistic attention to detail shines through, but this is not a news article nor an academic paper; it is a gripping, tense, and tightly structured story. Even though we all know the outcome, I was still reading on the edge of my seat. It is quite the experience.

Vincent Piturro, PhD, is a Professor of Film and Media Studies at MSU Denver. Contact him directly at vpiturro@msudenver.com or follow him on Twitter. For more reviews, search *The Indie Prof* at FrontPorchNE.com.

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LOCAL EVENTS

September thru Early October

View and add local events FREE at FrontPorchNE.com/events. Submissions by the 17th will be considered for printing in the upcoming month's issue.

Please double check event dates and times using contact info provided.

NE DENVER/NW AURORA EVENTS

Saturdays—City Park Farmers Market. 100+ local producers, live music, and more. 2551 E Colfax Ave. cityparkfarmersmarket.com

Sundays—Central Park Farmer's Market. Colorado-grown produce, baked goods, meats, and more. South Green (29th Ave & Roslyn St.) 8:30am–12:30pm. mca80238.com

9/2 Saturday—Denver Municipal Jazz Band. A variety of music starting at 6pm. South Green (29th Ave & Roslyn St.) mca80238.com

9/2 & 10/7—Bluff Lake Bird Walks. Sat: 2.5-hour walk at 7:30am or 2-hour walk at 8am. Free but must RSVP at blufflake.org/birdwatching

9/9 Saturday—Cockpit Demo Day. Get an up close look inside select aircraft. 10am–2pm. 7711 East Academy Blvd. wingsmuseum.org

9/9 Saturday—Denver Police Department' Safety Expo. 10am–2pm. Featuring emergency vehicles, the canine unit, and the police-mounted patrol. Main Street, between 46th & 47th. shopsatnorthfield.com

9/9 Saturday—Blues and BBQ – Free Community Concert. 2pm. Clayton Early Learning Center, 3801 Martin Luther King Blvd. Free. tickets at fundraise.givesmart.com/e/ooD-dTg?vid=10cci4

9/14 Thursday—Active Minds Presents Finland. Explore Finland's history as a country geographically influenced by its proximity to Russia. 1–2pm, Free. Sam Gary Library, 2961 Roslyn St. activeminds.com

9/15 Friday—Hispanic Heritage Celebration. Performers, bull riding, face painting, sugar skull crafts and a makers market. 5–9pm. Stanley Marketplace, 2501 N. Dallas St, Aurora. stanleymarketplace.com

9/16 Saturday—Forest Bathing. Open your senses and engage with nature. Bluff Lake Nature Center. 9–11am. 11255 E. MLK Jr Blvd. blufflake.org

9/16 Saturday—Farm Fest. 9am–1pm. Family-friendly event with music, activities, food trucks and more. Free admission. 10200 Smith Rd. theurbanfarm.org

9/16 Saturday—Colfax Canvas Block Party. Global entertainment, games, vendors, and more. 12–5pm. Fletcher Plaza, 9898 E Colfax Ave, Aurora. colfaxcanvas.com

9/16 Saturday—End of Summer Beer Garden & Concert. Free admission, food trucks, breweries, and music by the Cass Clayton Band. North Green (49th & Valentia.) 4–7pm. mca80238.com

9/22 to 10/13—Earth's Reel Resistance, a Climate Change Film Series. 9/22: *Chasing Ice* (PG-13); 9/29: *Wall-E* (G); 10/6: *Nuoc 2030* (NR); 10/13: *Don't Look Up* (R). The Cube, 8371 Northfield Blvd. Starts at 6pm. Free, accepting non-perishable food donations. mca80238.com

9/23 Saturday—Denver Century Ride. The ride thru Denver starts at The Shops at Northfield in front of Macy's. Post ride party from 10am–4pm. denvercenturyride.com

9/23 Saturday—Energy Day Colorado. Exhibits focused on science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM), and learning about future career opportunities. 10am–2pm. Free event at East High School,

1600 City Park Esplanade. energydayfestival.org/colorado

9/23 Saturday—The Disability User Experience. Tricia Downing is the author of *Cycle of Hope: A Journey from Paralysis to Possibility*. 11am–12pm. Sam Gary Library, 2961 Roslyn St. denverlibrary.org

9/24 Sunday—Qigong and Mindfulness Walk. Gentle mind/body practice followed by a contemplative walk. 7:30–9am. Bluff Lake Nature Center, 11255 E. MLK Jr Blvd. Free. blufflake.org

9/30 Saturday—Refuge Day. Free, annual Refuge Day celebration for the family at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center from 11am–2pm. fws.gov/refuge/rocky-mountain-arsenal

9/30 Saturday—Voice of the Wood Chamber Players. Enjoy the dulcet tones of String Quintets by Mozart and Mendelssohn. 3–4pm. Park Hill Library, 4705 Montview Blvd. denverlibrary.org

9/30 Saturday—Film on The Field. This month: Coco to celebrate Hispanic heritage month. Movie starts at dusk. Stanley Marketplace, 2501 N. Dallas St, Aurora. stanleymarketplace.com

METRO EVENTS

9/1 & 10/6—First Friday Art Walks. Art District on Santa Fe. 5:30–9:30pm. denver.org/things-to-do/denver-arts-culture/Denver-art-districts

9/8 to 9/16—Colorado Mineral and Fossil Fall Show. Crowne Plaza Airport Convention Center Hotel, 15500 E. 40th Ave. rmgmpromotions.com

9/9 Saturday—34th Annual Friendship Powwow. Join the local Native community and enjoy music, dance performances, food and more. Free event including museum admission. 10am–5pm. 100 W 14th Ave Pkwy. denverartmuseum.org

9/14 Thursday—Art & About Tours. For visitors with early-stage Alzheimer's or dementia and their care partners. 1–2:45pm. 100 W 14th Ave Pkwy. denverartmuseum.org

9/21 Thursday—1340 Penn After Hours: Bizarre Colorado. Dive into early Colorado history with chilling tales and taboo topics. 7pm. Molly Brown House Museum 1340 Pennsylvania St. Tickets at mollybrown.org

9/27 Wednesday—Bold Women. Change History. Susan Lee Johnson & Charlene Garcia Simms: Borderlands Scholars & Researchers. 7–8pm. 1200 North Broadway. Tickets at historycolorado.org

KIDS AND FAMILIES

Tuesday–Friday—Local Library Storytime. Different age groupings and locations. Info at denverlibrary.org

Wednesdays—Mornings at the Museum. Ages 3–6, 10:30–11:15am. Free. New programs every week. Aurora History Museum, 15051 East Alameda Pkwy. Register at auroragov.org

Fridays—Magic the Gathering Club. 4:30–5:30pm. Ages 12–18. A teen-run magic club. Park Hill Library, 4705 Montview Blvd. denverlibrary.org

9/6 Wednesday—ChatOMG! How high school and college students and families can survive & thrive in the AI era. The Cube 8371 Northfield Blvd. email info@collegeroutemap.com

9/8 Friday—Back to School: Spheros. Learn how to program and navigate the Spheros coding robotic ball. 3:30–4:30pm. Sam Gary Library, 2961 Roslyn St. denverlibrary.org

9/8 & 9/9—Dog Man: The Musical. Based on the worldwide bestselling hit series by Dav Pilkey. Recommended for ages 6–10. The Newman Center, 2344 East Iliff Ave. newmancenterpresents.com

9/9 Saturday—Low Sensory Morning. Admission is free and space is limited. RSVP is required. 8–10am. History Colorado Center, 1200 North Broadway. historycolorado.org



34th Annual Friendship Powwow at the Denver Art Museum

9/9 Saturday—CSU Spur 2nd Saturdays. Free. Lots of family-friendly programming. 10am–3pm. 4817 National Western Dr. csuspur.org

9/9 Saturday—Family Program: Cyanotypes (Sun Prints). Create your own processed photos with a little help from the sun. 10:30am–12:30pm. 1250 Bannock St. clyffordstillmuseum.org

9/9 Saturday—Sensory Friendly Show – Martin Gilmore. Free concert—we keep the lights up and the music down. A calm room and fidget sensory items available. 11am–12pm. 71 East Yale Ave. swallowhillmusic.org

9/17 Sunday—Spanish Storytime at Tattered Cover Kids. 5pm. Stanley Marketplace, 2501 N. Dallas St, Aurora. stanleymarketplace.com

9/21 Thursday—Kids Book Celebration. It's a book tasting! Sample books and snacks. Ages 5–12. 4–5pm. Park Hill Library, 4705 Montview Blvd. denverlibrary.org

9/24 Sunday—Teen Jam. Learn to better express yourself through music while forming relationships with peers. Youth-led. Free. 11am–1pm. Tuft Theatre, 71 East Yale Ave. swallowhillmusic.org

9/24, 9/27 & 9/30—Art Crawl: Building Blocks. 10:30–11:15am. For caregivers with infants–14 months. Registration required. 1250 Bannock St. clyffordstillmuseum.org

9/25 Monday—Wings of Wonder Family Workshop. Hands-on crafts and activities for families with children aged 2–12. 11am–1pm. Wings Over the Rockies Museum, 7711 East Academy Blvd. wingsmuseum.org

9/25 Monday—Lisa and Matt McMann Author Event. *Rebel Undercover* (The Forgotten Five, Book 3) and *Terror in Shadow Canyon* (Monsterville, Book 3). 4:30–5:30pm. Sam Gary Library, 2961 Roslyn St. denverlibrary.org

9/26 Tuesday—Hispanic Heritage Month Celebration - Weave a Mandala. Learn the meaning of mandalas and create one. 4–5pm. Sam Gary Library, 2961 Roslyn St. denverlibrary.org

9/28 Thursday—Busy Kids Book Club. This month's theme is activism—make custom buttons for the causes represented in our books. Ideal for ages 8–12. 4–5:15pm. Schlessman Family Library, 100 Poplar St. denverlibrary.org

MUSEUMS, ETC.

American Museum of Western Art. Open M, W & F from 10am–4:30pm. Admission is \$5. 1727 Tremont Pl. anschutzcollection.org

Aurora History Museum. Admission is free. Closed Mondays/holidays. 15051 East Alameda Pkwy. auroragov.org

The Byers-Evans House Museum. Operated by History Colorado as the Center for Colorado Women's History. History Colorado members are free. 1310 Bannock St. historycolorado.org

The Children's Museum. 50th birthday bash Sep. 8. Reservations recommended at mychildsmuseum.org

Clyfford Still Museum. SCFD Free Days Sep. 6 & Oct. 5. 10am to 5pm. Children ages 17 and under are always free. 1250 Bannock St. clyffordstillmuseum.org

Denver Art Museum. SCFD Free Days Sep. 9 & 12. Youth 18 & under always free. 100 W 14th Ave. Pkwy. denverartmuseum.org

Denver Botanic Gardens. Fall Plant & Bulb Sale: Sep. 22 & 23, 8am–4pm. 1007 York St. botanicgardens.org



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Denver Firefighters Museum. Hours: Tues–Sat, 10am–4pm. 1326 Tremont Pl. denverfirefightersmuseum.org

Denver Museum of Nature and Science. SCFD Free Night Sep. 6, 5–9pm, SCFD Free Day Sep. 18. Open till 9pm on Fridays. 2001 Colorado Blvd. dmns.org

Denver Zoo. Lottery opens Sep. 23 for Oct. 7 SCFD Free Day at denverzoo.org. 2900 E 23rd Ave.

The Forney Museum of Transportation. Mon, Th–Sat, 10am–5pm; Sun, 12–5pm. 4303 Brighton Blvd. forneymuseum.org

Four Mile Historic Park. SCFD Free Day Sep. 22. Open Wed–Sun, 10am–4pm. 715 S. Forest St. fourmilepark.org

History Colorado. Free membership for 4th graders. 1200 Broadway. historycolorado.org

Kirkland Museum of Fine and Decorative Art. Tue–Sat, 11am–5pm; Sun 12–5pm. Ages 13+ welcome. 1201 Bannock St. kirklandmuseum.org

Molly Brown House Museum. Tue–Sun, 10am–5pm. 1340 Pennsylvania St. mollybrown.org

Museo de las Americas. Tue–Fri, noon–6pm. Sat, noon–5pm. Closed Mon & Sun. 861 Santa Fe Dr. museo.org

Museum of Contemporary Art Denver. 1¢ admission 1st Sat. of the month. 1485 Delgany St. mcadenvr.org

National Ballpark Museum. 1940 Blake St. Check for days/hours at ballparkmuseum.com

The Urban Farm. Farm Fest on 9/16. Open to the public from 9am–1pm, Wed–Sat. 10200 Smith Rd. theurbanfarm.org

Wings Over the Rockies Museum. Grandparents Day (free admission) Sep. 10. SCFD Free Day Sep. 28. 7711 East Academy Blvd. wingsmuseum.org

PERFORMANCE/THEATRE

9/1 to 10/8—A Little Night Music. Music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim. Wolf Theatre. denvercenter.org

9/5 to 9/17—Beetlejuice. Based on Tim Burton’s film. For mature audiences. Buell Theatre. denvercenter.org

9/9 & 9/10—Star Wars: A New Hope in Concert. Watch the movie while the symphony plays. Boettcher Hall. coloradosymphony.org

9/9 to 10/14—The Minutes. The smallest towns keep the biggest secrets. Curious Theatre Company, 1080 Acoma St. curioustheatre.org

9/15 Friday—The Denver Moth - StorySLAM. 7:30pm. 71 East Yale Ave. swallowhillmusic.org

9/15 to 10/22—Cabaret. 1930s Berlin comes to life in this riveting musical. For mature audiences. Vintage Theatre, 1468 Dayton St, Aurora. vintagetheatre.org

9/17 Sunday—The CJRO Latin Jazz Ensemble presents Songs of Brazil and the Music of the Bronx Horns. 3–5pm. Aurora Fox Arts Center, 9900 E Colfax Ave, Aurora. aurorafoxartscenter.org

9/17 Sunday—Stories on Stage presents “Random Acts of Kindness” Stories of kindness to make you feel better! 2pm. Su Teatro Cultural and Performing Arts Center, 721 Santa Fe Dr. storiesonstage.org

9/22 to 9/23—Martha Graham Dance Company. The ingenuity of Graham in the 21st century. 2344 E. Iliff Ave. newmancenterpresents.com

9/30 to 10/28—Dracula. Bram Stoker’s classic novel on the stage. For mature audiences. Vintage Theatre, 1468 Dayton St. firehousetheatercompany.com

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

College Access Mentor with Minds Matter Colorado. Two hours a week during the school year. Info at mindsmatterco.org/volunteers

Denver Public Schools. Numerous volunteer opportunities with students and schools. equity.dpsk12.org/get-involved/volunteer-services

Denver Rescue Mission. To find volunteer opportunities, go to: denverrescuemission.org/volunteer/#opportunities

Food For Thought Denver. Providing food for students and their families. Sign up to volunteer or donate at foodforthoughtdenver.org

Project Worthmore. Help bag and deliver fresh fruits and vegetables, dairy, and household necessities to refugees. projectworthmore.org

Reach Out and Read Colorado. Help sort and pack gently-used children’s books for underserved families. Email info@reachoutandreadco.org for details.

Reading Volunteers Needed Read with students in grades K–8. One hour a week. No experience necessary. Email contact: Pil, 2011 | @partnersinliteracy.org.

Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) For volunteer opportunities, email Cathy Law at claw@voacolorado.org

Ronald McDonald House Charities Volunteer. Info at ronaldhouse.org under “How You Can Help”.

Sand Creek Greenway Volunteer Opportunities. Sep. 9 workday, 9am–12pm. Info or to register to volunteer at sandcreekgreenway.org/volunteer

Single Volunteers of Greater Denver. Not-for-profit singles group to meet others and assist nonprofit organizations for events/activities. Info at svgd.org

Spark the Change Colorado. Direct service programs that leverage the talents and expertise of skilled volunteers in fields like mental health and empowering aging. sparkthechangecolorado.org

Village Exchange Center A non-profit formed to serve immigrants and refugees in Aurora & Denver. villageexchangecenter.org

Volunteers of America Colorado Branch For volunteer opportunities go to voacolorado.org/volunteer-opportunities/

Born into the Climate Crisis *Continued from pg. 9*

as the fauna needed to attract them. DPR grew over 600 plants in its greenhouse for his bat project, and Nortman raised funds and recruited volunteers to assist his endeavor of cultivating the plants along the Greenway. He replaced the forlorn bat house, and returns periodically to try to monitor the project’s success. Although he has not yet had any bat sightings, he believes that over time, the healthy ecosystem will attract bats to the house.

This past year, Nortman implemented another project to understand why the area’s cottonwoods are losing their leaves prematurely. Soil samples detected high salinity around the trees. Working off the theory that road salt runoff in the winter has caused the cottonwood leaves to brown and die sooner than they should, he planted salt-tolerant plants around a group of cottonwoods near the skate park to help absorb the salt. “Changes happen all the time,” he says, and notes that these projects have taught him a lot of skills—such as leadership and flexibility—which he hopes will serve him well.

Nortman encourages youths to find what is meaningful to them and pursue those paths. He also appreciates the power of one, and wants kids to know “that even if you are young, you are able to reach out and have an impact.” He is considering applying to both Massachusetts Institute of Technology and California Institute of Technology so he can further his education after graduation.

Both young men acknowledge the Denver Public Schools classes that impacted their understanding of the world and passion for the environment. Nortman credits an Environmental Systems class and Wagner an AP Human Geography class taught by Constance Jandegian,

with both students crediting their classes for providing tools and information that were formative to their respective areas of interest. “You can’t solve problems just by talking about them,” says Wagner, “you have to take action.”



Luke Nortman stops for a photo while actively planting during his second project, which sought to reduce soil salinity.

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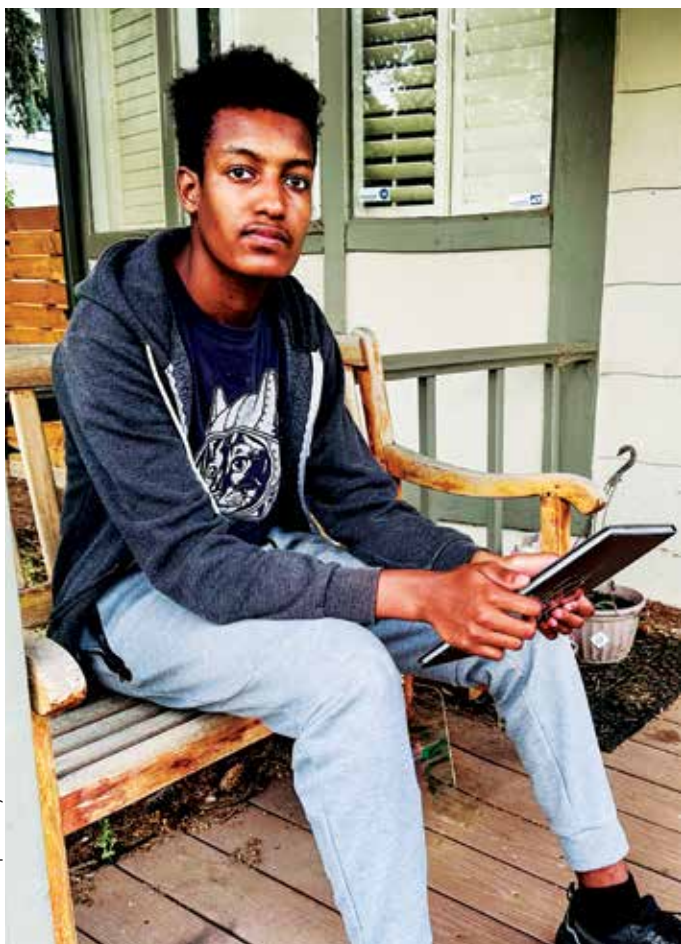
- Adult between 18 and 55 years old
- Generally healthy without diabetes and heart disease
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- Are willing to be randomized to either morning or evening exercise
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- Access to the exercise facility at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus
- Compensation provided

In order to enroll all participants must meet specific criteria. The criteria listed above is only a partial list of all the requirements to participate in this research study. Only a clinical research staff member can determine eligibility. If interested in participating please email timexstudy@cuanschutz.edu.

Principle Investigator: Victoria A Catenacci, MD. **COMIRB Protocol #:** 21-3094



Sedik Mote benefited from the programs at McAuliffe and is now thriving as a junior in high school. He will graduate from Aurora Central next year.

By Brian Heuberger

As the new school year began, McAuliffe International School continued to face turmoil about the firing of principal Kurt Dennis, the use of a seclusion room in the school, and a vote by the school board to approve Dennis' termination.

The conflict began in July, when Denver Public School administrators fired Dennis after he publicly criticized a policy requiring schools to conduct daily searches on students who have committed violent offenses. But outrage from Northeast Denver residents compelled DPS to hold an Aug. 1 meeting with the McAuliffe community in which district leaders justified their decision to terminate Dennis by addressing his record as the McAuliffe principal and by criticizing his treatment of minority students. This further infuriated supporters of Dennis, who after the meeting began defending his record and promoting his achievements.

Data demonstrates that the system implemented by Dennis was yielding positive results for the students. McAuliffe scored exceptional marks on the School Performance Framework, the students exceeded expectations in most academic subjects, and Dennis received one of the highest "effective" ratings on his annual principal evaluations. McAuliffe also had more students of color than any other middle school in the district, and the minority students outperformed 88 percent of their peers throughout the state. As a result, McAuliffe is one of only 10 schools in the district to receive a "Distinguished for Equity" rating, and *U.S. News* ranks McAuliffe as the 3rd best middle school in Denver.

"I am incredibly proud of how hard our staff and students worked to learn and grow every year," says Dennis. "Together, we created a culture of high expectations and excellence for everyone. We never had a system for tracking students or a separate Gifted and Talented program. All of

New Developments Escalate Turmoil at McAuliffe International School

our students took courses in Honors English and Honors Mathematics regardless of their test scores."

After the meeting, Denver school board Vice President Auon'tai (Tay) Anderson received an email from an anonymous staff member alerting him about McAuliffe using a seclusion room. "We found some disturbing stuff, such as locks placed on the windows, the exterior of the door, and exposed vents and pipes in the room," says Anderson. "Children should never have to be incarcerated at school. They go to school to learn, not to be incarcerated."

Anderson believes that the seclusion room was disproportionately used to punish minority students. "All students that we know were placed in that room were students of color," says Anderson, while adding that the district had spoken to three students about the room. "This goes to the notion that African American or Latino men are so aggressive that they need to be caged like animals to get them to calm down, and that's very troubling." Anderson also maintains that the use of the room violated a policy of the district. "Board policy clearly states that you can't leave kids alone in an unattended area, so at least one staff member needs to be in the room with the students."

This criticism from the district was disruptive for the school. It led to DPS launching an investigation into the seclusion room, interim principal Micah Klaver being placed on administrative leave, and Northfield Principal Amy Bringedahl being appointed as the new interim principal at McAuliffe.

However, supporters contend that the room is being mischaracterized and that it serves a beneficial function. They point out that these rooms are common in other district schools. DPS calls them "monitored seclusion rooms," and district guidelines permit these spaces. As a result, Dennis supporters emphasize that dozens of schools provide rooms where students who are experiencing violent episodes can calm their minds, alleviate their anger, and then return to class.

"The de-escalation room was used to support two students at McAuliffe," explains Dennis. "Both students were special education students that had Individualized Education Plans and Behavior Intervention Plans stating that the use of a de-escalation room was an appropriate intervention when their behaviors were not safe for either their classmates or themselves."

Although DPS claimed it never knew about the room at McAuliffe, email communications and Google Calendar documents obtained by *Front Porch*

verify that the district had been communicating with Dennis about its de-escalation room. "On March 8, we met with seven representatives from DPS in the de-escalation room to make sure the space complied with district expectations," says Dennis. "There were representatives from the district special education team and construction team present at the meeting. Within a few weeks, the district made improvements to the room, and we were working on a plan to create further enhancements over the summer."

Dennis also contends that a window on the door enabled staff members to supervise the students. "When a student had to use the de-escalation room, there were always at least two adults observing through the window at all times. Me, a special education teacher, a mental health provider, and the student's one-on-one paraprofessional were present."

Jessie Hawthorne is a former McAuliffe parent who was grateful for the impact that McAuliffe and the de-escalation room had on her son, Sedik. She adopted Sedik from Ethiopia in 2011, but he experienced severe struggles throughout elementary school.

"He was unable to sit still and they couldn't contain him," says Hawthorne. "He would get frustrated with teachers, kick at them, and run down the hall or outside the door." Hawthorne was unable to find adequate IEP programs despite trying many elementary schools, including Columbine, Whittier, Cole, Smith, and Bradley.

Fortunately, his circumstances improved in middle school when he began attending McAuliffe International. "All he needed was a special ed paraprofessional, and at McAuliffe that finally came true," says Hawthorne. "This paraprofessional would help Sedik go to classes, follow his schedule, and get used to being in classrooms with 25 other kids."

Sedik also benefited from the de-escalation room at McAuliffe. Although the room was in a different location, it was equipped with a punching bag to unleash his frustration, a therapy dog to elevate his mood, and staff members to offer him support. "If he was triggered by a disagreement with another student or an issue with a teacher, he would get upset and need a different environment to calm down," explains Hawthorne. "He was very responsive to mindfulness techniques, that's largely what they did, and so Sedik responded well to that room."

The de-escalation room was a crucial factor in the DPS vote. On Aug. 24, the Denver school board voted to uphold the termination of Dennis by a 6-1 margin, with many board members citing the room as the reason for their decision. Despite this vote, Dennis can still be reinstated at McAuliffe by pursuing legal action in federal court or an appeal process with the school district.



Denver school board Vice President Auon'tai (Tay) Anderson



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DENVER MUNICIPAL JAZZ BAND

Saturday, September 2nd, 6pm, South Green

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The 20-piece Jazz Band will perform a variety of music starting at 6pm.

END OF SUMMER BEER GARDEN AND CONCERT

Saturday, September 16th, 4–7pm, North Green

Come enjoy the last days of summer at our End of Summer Beer Garden & Concert on Saturday, September 16th. Local breweries will be selling their craft beer. There will also be food trucks selling delicious treats and live music! Music by the Cass Clayton Band will start at 5pm.

ACTIVE MINDS: Finland

Thursday, September 14th, 1–2pm. Sam Gary Library

With an 830 mile border with Russia, Finland recently joined NATO as a response to fear triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Join Active Minds as we explore Finland's history as a country geographically influenced by its proximity to Russia, but in many ways deeply tied to Europe, economically and politically. We will also cover Finland's current challenges and opportunities as well as what the future may hold for this country of 5 million people.

ACTIVE MINDS: Hinduism

Thursday, September 28th, 6:30–7:30pm, Online

Often referred to as the “oldest living religion,” Hinduism is the third largest religion in the world with over a billion followers, most of whom live in India. Join Active Minds for an examination of its origins, teachings, beliefs and practices.

Join the Active Minds webinars by visiting https://www.activeminds.com/events_denver.html.

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