

FROM YOUR ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT

*“Better to be a dog in times of tranquility
than a human in times of chaos.”*

—寧為太平犬，不做亂世人

Our individual lives and our community have been dramatically altered by the coronavirus pandemic. We’ve all learned to adapt to new ways of life – more interaction with some folks, far less with others; getting a new sense of what seems essential and what doesn’t. Nevertheless our neighborhood has adapted to the new requirements that living in a pandemic has required of us, and maintained the values that make this community unique.

Recently, the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra held a free concert in Annwood Park, and the Know Theater performed an outdoor play called *Speak*

On It!, recreating one of the rallies of civil and voting rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer. In keeping with the spirit of the performance, the Greater Cincinnati Voter Collaborative was on-site to register people to vote.

We are acquiring a plot of land to meet the demand for more garden space and to provide a new composting option for the residents of our neighborhood.

The monthly Assembly meetings will remain in an online format for the foreseeable future. While it is certainly an unwieldy technology and creates challenges alongside new conveniences, I have been greatly impressed with the attendance.

—Tony Fischer

A GIFT TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Vibrant colors now adorn a portion of the St. Francis DeSales School, welcoming all who walk or drive on Madison Rd. The mural, which depicts children and a colorful mosaic design, is modeled after the stained glass found in the St. Francis de Sales Catholic church next door, whose parish sponsored the ArtWorks project.

Father Gene Contadino retired in August as pastor of St. Francis de Sales Parish but, for the last 5 years, he looked for ways that the parish could give back to the community and school. He studied statues, murals and other artwork to gain inspiration for a gift to the neighborhood. Contadino eventually reached out to ArtWorks, a local non-profit best known for its large-scale murals, which worked with the parish and Fr. Gene to bring his idea to life.

Artist Brandon Hawkins designed the mural with its multicultural theme, to reflect the students of St. Francis DeSales School, and the neighborhood as a whole. The mural, painted by local teen

apprentices working under Hawkins’ direction, took over eight weeks to complete. The apprentices earned income while learning valuable artistic and professional skills. Apprentice Sam Rowlett, age 16, gained confidence and learned, “I can do more than I give myself credit for.”

“Together We Win” is the second ArtWorks mural in the Woodburn business district.



COMMUNITY, CONNECTION WITH CHEESE AND GAMES

What do a local cheese shop and a friendly neighborhood game store have in common? Community and connection.

Urban Stead Cheese makes cheese on site to sell in their retail space on Woodburn Ave. on the border of Evanston, and in local restaurants and shops. Scott and Andrea Robbins made an intentional choice to start the business in the East Walnut Hills community because they loved it. Their cheese is created with milk from an Ohio Valley farmer.

For lifelong gamer Michael Hubbard of Woodburn Games, board gaming is all about building a community through the play of tabletop games. During board game nights and tournaments, players build personal connections. Hubbard sells board games, and his perfect suggestion for our times is

Pandemic, which he promises is one of the most cooperative games ever made.

Both businesses are strong, committed members of our community. Keep them and all the other local independent businesses in mind now and during the holiday season. Together, as a community built on strong personal connections, we will weather whatever the future brings.



FLEXIBILITY AT &SUNDRIES

John Meyer, owner of &Sundries in the East Walnut Hills business district, is a full-time practicing architect. His “passion project” is &Sundries. He started his business online, producing and selling soaps to friends and family.

By 2019 Meyer had expanded production – from soaps, body lotions and bath products to scented candles and essential oils. He opened &Sundries on Woodburn Ave. in late 2019.

When COVID hit and the governor shut down retail business, Meyer decided that flexibility and thinking creatively were key to survival. He made a “huge investment” in the store’s online presence and in enhancing customer service. The upgraded website made for easy browsing and ordering (including custom order gifts, that are artfully boxed). He offered delivery and, when it was time to reopen doors, he did so, with all safety precautions in place.

As for the future? Meyer says that his “growth plans are not deterred.” He has put a pause on the expansion to in-store workshops and will be ready to go when the time is right.

A BOUNTY OF KIDS’ LUNCHES AT O PIE O

Realizing the surplus of food due to the pandemic’s impact on O Pie O in East Walnut Hills, the restaurant initiated a free lunch initiative to feed school-aged kids during the spring and summer. The initiative was a win-win solution for all, feeding children with the surplus inventory as well as retaining employment for several staff members.

The initial goal was to provide 25 lunches for children daily but, with an outpouring of monetary donations, O Pie O was able to provide over 60 meals/day. In addition, care packages were sent to various families in need, and O Pie O partnered with a school in Price Hill to provide free lunches to children multiple times throughout the week. General Manager Lou Ginocchio credits the success of the initiative to volunteers who delivered lunches, donations received from the community and his dedicated staff. In total, O Pie O donated more than 4,000 meals to children over a three month period.

SAYING GOODBYE TO CAFE DESALES

Almost nine years ago, Sandy Vierling showed up for work at the coffee shop that she managed in the East Walnut Hills business district. She arrived to find the owner gone, the shop stripped bare of furniture, and the now-former employees wondering what was going to happen to the shop and to their jobs. She did what she's done all her life. She stepped up, as she says, "to fill the need."

With the help of neighbors and friends, and with donations of chairs and tables from restaurateurs, she and her husband JV (John) opened Cafe DeSales. Sandy says she wanted to give back to the community of East Walnut Hills where she had come to love the people.

2020 has not been kind to Sandy and JV. COVID hit, and they had to shut down the Cafe. They struggled through re-opening in May with reduced sales. Then Sandy contracted bacterial pneumonia in August, and she had to shut down again. She thought it might be temporary but, as she continued to struggle to regain full health, she and JV decided that they had to close Cafe DeSales for good.

Closing was a difficult decision but, as COVID infections continued throughout Cincinnati, and with the fall flu season coming, it had to be done.

When Cafe De Sales closed what customers called East Walnut Hills' "living room," the community lost a warm and welcoming place. A former customer said that she originally came in for the chai tea latte but kept coming back because of the Vierlings' "hospitality, kindness and warmth... [The Vierlings] loved ALL of their customers..."

Sandy rejoiced when she overheard the kids, who came in after school from Purcell Marian and St. Ursula, refer to the Cafe as "our place" or "our cafe." The students loved to be there, whether to grab a quick to-go drink and snack or to settle down to do homework at a comfortable table.

At the next table, local community council members likely would be deep in conversation, while a couple of business types would be animatedly exchanging ideas.



And, at one of the high-top tables in the window, a couple of friends would be laughing hard about some shared story from the weekend before. It was, for many, the heart and the soul of the community.

Near Cafe DeSales is the Hamilton County Disabilities Services Building. People would wander in from there, often hungry and looking for a bit of goodwill. Sandy said she would figuratively and literally "gently put an arm around people" who needed a lift and offer them something to eat. She felt that by doing good, which comes to her naturally, people "did good back." These days, she worries about the most vulnerable in the neighborhood and wonders if anyone is taking care of them.

A recent comment by a neighbor says it all, "I'm deeply saddened for Cincinnati. They ran a special place. I wish we had a city full of business owners like them. I'm better for [the Vierlings]. There will never be another place like it."

Sandy and JV, the East Walnut Hills community thanks you for all you did to make our neighborhood a better place. We wish you well as you move on to your next adventure. Don't forget us and please come back to visit us. You are, and will continue to be, missed.

PIVOTING+GIVING BACK

For 11 years, Khisa Asubuhi has been selling her signature Originalitees apparel in pop-up locations and online while she's also worked for the US Post Office as a business development specialist. She is passionate about her t-shirts; she may even be more passionate about promoting "unity within the community" and "giving back" to Cincinnati.

Asubuhi decided to open a permanent bricks and mortar location and was planning to open on Woodburn Ave. in East Walnut Hills on April 3, 2020. And then the governor shut down Ohio to slow down the spread of COVID. Asubuhi says that her next steps were "all about pivoting" and "being creative" to keep her business afloat and to continue her mission to support her community.

Early on during the pandemic, she partnered with the Freestore Food Bank: a portion of sales from t-shirts went to support the nonprofit. Her "Buckeye Strong" themed face mask has been a popular item. In early June, Originalitees produced a "Cincinnati Believes Black Lives Matter" t-shirt line. Again, a portion of the sales proceeds went to two nonprofits working on social and racial justice. Want an RBG t-shirt? Originalitees has one.

Asubuhi believes that an uptick in new customers can be attributed to people intentionally choosing to support black-owned businesses, especially a small, locally owned business.

Finally, on July 3, Originalitees had its delayed grand opening. Asubuhi says that customers return to the store – both online and in person – because she uses materials "that last" in her apparel, and, more importantly, don't shrink.

Asubuhi has produced a line of community streets t-shirts and hinted that an East Walnut Hills streets t-shirt may be in the works for 2021. Stay tuned.

This newsletter is a production of the Communications Committee on behalf of the East Walnut Hills Assembly, your official neighborhood council. Questions? Please get in touch:

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PERSISTENCE AT ARGOS

Argos has been offering its own signature line of natural pet food to the Cincinnati community since 2011 (starting in Madeira). Owner Elisabeth Meyer opened her second location in 2015 at the corner of Woodburn and Myrtle Aves.

Argos has been delivering its natural products and remedies for common ailments for cats and dogs for years. Meyer credits Argos' fully developed delivery service in Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky with saving the business in the early days of the COVID shutdown. She started curbside pickup during the shutdown to complement her delivery service. She also credits the work and money she put into Argos' fully integrated website, a number of years ago, that allows for seamless online ordering. Meyer was, in many ways, as well positioned as she could be to weather the shutdown.

When the shutdown ended, Argos safely welcomed back many loyal customers (and their human owners) to the East Walnut Hills location. Meyer loves being in the neighborhood. Her experience in the community has been "so much fun." She has loved seeing the business district grow and change.

Meyer also credits a surge in new customers helping her business to weather COVID. She credits the surge, in part, on her NPR underwriting and her active presence on social media. She also credits new customers who took advantage of the Argos delivery service during the early days of the shutdown and continue to shop at Argos these many months later.



Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra performance in Annwood Park

Please check out eastwalnuthills.org for all the businesses and organizations in our neighborhood!