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SPRING 2026

FOR THE PEOPLE WHO LIVE, WORK AND SHOP IN THE SHAKER SQUARE AREA

Vol. 49 No. 3

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Van Aken District:
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4-7 p.m.

Sips & Nibbles

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5K Run & Walk

Our Lady of Peace Church
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Entry is \$30-\$40.
Doors open at 8 a.m. Start time is 9:15 a.m.
Register at olpchurch.com/register

3rd Annual Shaker Heights

Historic Homes Tour

Sunday, April 19.
Two sessions: 10 a.m.-1 p.m. and 12-3 p.m.
Tix: \$130-\$160
Shaker Historical Society presents how rapid
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Shaker Heights. Guests will take a trolley
tour of homes located along or near the
city's historic rapid transit routes.
Tix: shakerhistory.org

Larchmere

Larchmere Plant Sale

The 27th Annual Sale is
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Sports

Edwards Wins Gold in 2026 Milan Cortina Winter Olympics!



Shaker Youth Hockey Association (SYHA) assistant coach Bobby Edwards (above left) traveled to Milan to witness his sister Laila Edwards compete and win gold with the USA Women's Ice Hockey team. A Squirt 1 assistant coach, Edwards has been coaching the Shaker Raiders for the past four years helping coach the unbeaten '09 Bantam team and this year's Squirt 1 squad among others. Coach Michael Berg and the SYHA helped raise \$5,000 so their coach could travel to Italy to cheer on his sister in the Olympics. Photo courtesy of ABC News 5 Cleveland.

Top right photo inset - Cleveland Heights native Laila Edwards made history as the first African American woman to win an Olympic gold medal for USA women's hockey. (AP photo.)

Dining

Sazani Oceana Restaurant Opens at Former EDWINS Too Space

By Andrea C. Turner

Former NFL professional football player and Cleveland Browns wide receiver Josh Cribbs has entered the restaurant business realm. He and local restaurateur Akin Affrica of Soul Republic Hospitality Group (Zanzibar Soul Fusion, Angie's Soul Café, Cleveland Breakfast Club, The Vegan Club) have partnered to open their upscale seafood dining restaurant, Sazani Oceana at 13220 Shaker Square. The restaurant's soft opening took place Valentine's Day weekend.

It's located in the former EDWINS Too space, which closed after a four-year run in February 2025 when chef Brandon Chrostowski consolidated and relocated his restaurant spaces to the former Nighttown on Cedar Road in Cleveland Heights. Fire Food & Drink occupied the space for the 20 years prior. The Sazani Oceana interior has been completely renovated with a chic



Sazani Oceana opened in February in Shaker Square.

Photo by Andrea C. Turner

atmosphere of exposed brick walls, wood floors, plenty of window lighting and an avant-garde chandelier – all brought together by SoMo Interior Design Studio. Rounded high back booths with seats resembling blue seashells provides table privacy but encourages lively conversation for groups of five to six.

Inspired by the coastal Sazani Beach in northern Zanzibar off the eastern coast of Africa, the restaurant hopes to exude the feel of a luxurious home near the bountiful sea.

See Sazani Oceana Restaurant Opens at Former EDWINS Too Space, page 7

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Message from the SHAD President

The Future We Deserve: Beyond Boundaries

Melissa Garrett-Hirsch

Our shared mission is to ensure every street and storefront as well as every voice and vision finds its place in the tapestry we are creating. Each member brings distinct perspectives and histories, but together we foster a vibrant, interconnected community.

Lasting vibrancy is built through small, intentional acts: partnerships, community markets, artistic expression, youth programs, and meaningful conversations. By uniting with respect and purpose, we illuminate a brighter future for our neighborhoods.

Shaker Square has long served as a hub – a crossroads where diverse stories converge. Sustaining its strength now requires us to look beyond boundaries. Buckeye's innovation energizes Shaker, Larchmere's creativity inspires Woodland, and CHALK's fresh ideas ignite growth for everyone.

Let's continue to demonstrate what collaboration can achieve when it is grounded in mutual respect and purpose.

Editor's Note: This condensed issue of the SHAD Connection was produced as our organization has begun collaborative discussions with other local community organizations to discern the best way forward for effectively communicating vital information and relevant news to our constituents. Be on the lookout for exciting changes ahead in 2026!

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- CHALK
- Drexmore/Chadbourne
- Historic Shaker Square
- Larchmere
- Ludlow
- Shaker Square
- Larchmere Blvd.
- Van Aken Plaza
- Shaker Boulevard West

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Shaker Square

A new era for a Cleveland classic

By Thomas Jewell

The vision that led up to iconic Shaker Square took more twists and turns than the Atlas Cinemas' "House of Curves" over the course of a century, a local historian noted during a recent presentation to the community.

For starters, the Van Sweringen brothers, who built Terminal Tower and the "Garden City" suburb of Shaker Heights – as well as the commuter train line in between – wanted a circle.

"Just over the western border of Shaker Heights, 'the Vans' planned a roundabout as a protective barrier from commercial and industrial 'encroachment,' as well as between city and suburb," Virginia Dawson explained.

The retired Case Western Reserve University history professor delivered a lively lecture on February 12, hosted by the Shaker Historical Society at the Shaker Heights Main library.

Cleveland Neighborhood Progress (CNP) president and CEO Tania Menesse joined Dawson for the presentation, providing some more recent history since Cleveland City Council rescued the Square from receivership and foreclosure in 2022.

The city put together a \$12 million financing package allowing CNP and fellow nonprofit Burten Bell Carr (BBC) Development to acquire the distressed landmark, one of the original "transit-oriented developments."

As Shaker Square approaches its centennial – it opened in 1929, just in time before the stock market crashed – Menesse noted that some new housing opportunities could be on their way.

"Moreland Courts residents recently voted to enter into negotiations to sell part of the parking lot in back of CVS," Menesse said.

That row of classic condominiums along Shaker Boulevard predates the Square, as the Van Sweringens responded to the burgeoning population in downtown Cleveland around World War I.

At that time, architect Alfred W. Harris was serving in the U.S. Army Air Service and stationed in England.

"He was inspired by the provincial English towns, enamored with the stonework features and the courtyards," Dawson said.

Harris returned stateside with a "grandiose" vision of his own that the Van Sweringens embraced, at least for nine of the 12 stately buildings planned at varied heights of 4-8 stories.

By that time, the Van Sweringens had wound up in bankruptcy court themselves due to some dealings with a crooked mortgage outfit known as the Cleveland Discount Co.

"Despite all of the success, there were lots of moments of trepidation in the past," Menesse mused.

But the court granted the brothers leniency. They bought the Moreland Courts properties back, then hired the up-and-coming Small and Rowley firm, also specializing in traditional Colonial and English architecture.

Small and Rowley finished the last three Moreland Courts buildings, then went on to design the actual Shaker Square.

The exception was the Colony Theater (now Atlas Cinemas), the art-deco "House of Curves" built by Warner Bros. in 1937.

"The movie houses were one business that really flourished during the Great Depression," Dawson said.

From there, Shaker Square hit its heyday in the post World War II decades, although things started trailing off during the 1980s, mirroring much of Cleveland.

Not that it really registered with Menesse as she was growing up in Shaker Heights.

"I really couldn't think of a more formative place during my high school years than Arabica Coffee House and Shaker Square in the '90s," Menesse said.

"It was already declining but I didn't know that – I was having too good of a time to notice," she added.

After the nonprofits' acquisition four years ago came the "stabilization" phase, raising \$6 million to basically "stop the hemorrhaging" at the Square, Menesse noted.

"We had 80 percent occupancy, but those tenants were getting rained on and basements were flooding," she added. "There was no heat in the Montessori school and no playscape – even though it's in their lease."

The next step for the nonprofit remains positioning the square for the



Photo by Margaret Simon

Retired CWRU Adjunct Associate Professor and Historian Virginia Dawson and Cleveland Neighborhood Progress (CNP) President and CEO Tania Menesse presented a program on the history and future of Shaker Square at the Shaker Heights Main Library on Feb. 12.



Shaker Heights first mayor, William J. Van Aken (center), cuts the cake for the 10th Anniversary of Shaker Square in 1939. Photo courtesy of Virginia Dawson.

future, originally part of a five-year plan to sell back to the private sector.

At this point, CNP and BBC now look more toward restructuring the debt in order to take on that next phase of finding a new owner.

"Shaker Square is timeless – you couldn't build it today," Menesse said. "There's no need to 'reinvent' something as authentic as this."

Through it all, Shaker Square emerged as an innovative business district that combined visionary urban planning, modern retail concepts, and community-centered design.

That's why they stuck with the slogan, "A new era for a Cleveland classic: Inviting. Inspiring. Timeless."

Meanwhile, across Shaker Boulevard and behind the square's southeast quadrant, Paran Management demolished a vacant row of storefronts along Van Aken Boulevard last fall, as well as their blighted parking garage. This adds more room for new growth.

Although the Opportunity Corridor now makes it a 15-minute destination drive from Tremont, Menesse sees the strongest opportunities for Shaker Square as a "true mixed-income neighborhood."

"With the most active transportation center in Cleveland, it would be almost impossible to find a neighborhood as laudable," Menesse said.

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Shaker Lakes Conservancy Advocates for Saving Shaker Lakes

Story and photos by Grant Segall

Attorneys Hired to Study Lower Lakes Viability

Two mayors and hundreds of residents are trying to save the Shaker Lakes.

Shaker Heights and Cleveland Heights have jointly hired a lawyer to consider options and responsibilities for Lower Lake's dam. Meanwhile, the new Shaker Lakes Conservancy is posting signs and circulating petitions to preserve Lower Lake and bring back the former Horseshoe (also called Upper) Lake.

In January, Shaker Heights Mayor David Weiss and Cleveland Heights Mayor Jim Petras hired Mark Wallach

from McCarthy, Lebit, Crystal & Liffman to review Lower Lake. The suburbs will evenly split his fee of \$350 per hour.

A joint mayoral statement said, "It is important to have an independent review of the basis

and impact of the [Northeast Ohio Regional] Sewer District's recent determination that the Lower Lake dam does not provide stormwater management or sufficient flood control benefits." Given that determination, the district says it can't pay to reinforce or replace the dam, just to raze it.

According to the mayors' statement, the suburbs might seek engineering analysis later of dam data from NEORSD and the state. Weiss also posted that they'd review the options' cost, safety, looks, environmental effects and more.

The suburbs aren't reconsidering

Horseshoe. In December, their councils unanimously approved NEORSD's approximately \$32 million plan to raze the breached dam there and add 54 acres of marsh to the six dry acres of Horseshoe Park. Shaker Heights agreed to pay about \$4.6 million and Cleveland Heights \$2.5 million of that cost, covering amenities such as trails, a nature play area, and an outdoor classroom.

Many people love both landmark lakes, created in the 1800s by the Shaker sect with earthen dams across the Doan Brook.

"They're a defining characteristic of the East Side and the parklands, and a wonderful quality of life," said Amy Weinfurter, a conservancy organizer.

"They're integral to people from a variety of areas and backgrounds being able to coexist and interact in ways that feel trusting and open."

Cleveland owns the lakes and surrounding parklands. Shaker Heights governs, leases and maintains more than half of the area and Cleveland Heights the rest.

In the late 2010s, the state declared the dams endangered and dangerous, and crews breached the one at Horseshoe. The ad hoc Friends of Horseshoe Lake lost a state lawsuit to restore that dam. For the pending project there, NEORSD is seeking an easement from Cleveland and a permit from the federal government, which protects the historic area. The district hopes to finish the work in two years.

From 1951 to 2020, Cleveland's precipitation rose by nearly a third, with more intense storms, increasing the park's polluted runoff from roads and homes.



This sign is one of several planted along the Shaker Lakes in a bid to preserve them.

Last summer, NEORSD dropped plans to reinforce Lower Lake's dam. Officials cited new findings about its limited value for flood control, its need for an obtrusive concrete spillway and a new opportunity to add a culvert downstream. Instead, NEORSD is offering to spend \$45 million to raze the dam, reconstruct the resulting marsh, do related work and possibly add a small pond. The suburbs could pay for other amenities there.

If the suburbs choose instead to reinforce the dam and dredge the lake, NEORSD estimates that they'd have to spend \$55 million.

Sewer district leader Kyle Dreyfuss-Wells said about the suburbs hiring a lawyer, "We're very encouraged that they are engaging in this effort to assess all options."

With or without dams, the parklands will never be the same as before the Shakers settled what's now Shaker Heights. From 1951 to 2020, Cleveland's precipitation rose by nearly a third, with more intense storms, increasing the park's polluted runoff from roads and homes.

Many dams elsewhere have been razed in recent years, resulting in marshes that reduce pollution and floods. But lakes, even if man-made, develop their own ecosystems, and the Shaker Lakes have come to host many species, from turtles to eagles. Weinfurter said, "Clearing mature trees, regrading land, cutting channels and installing engineered controls is not a passive return to nature."

The conservancy arose because The Friends of Horseshoe Lake would need state and federal approval to broaden their mission, and the eight-year-old Friends of Lower Lake support removing that dam. Weinfurter says the conservancy has drawn more than 700 participants.

Late last year, conservancy member Erin Flanagan vainly tried in federal court to pause work at the lakes. Now Weinfurter welcomes Wallach's appointment but wants a full study of the restoration and stewardship of both lakes as part of a single park, ecosystem and history.

An earlier version of this article was published Feb. 17, 2026, on The Land's website: <https://thelandcle.org/stories/lawyers-dams-money-the-shaker-lakes-sagas-next-chapter>.



The Shaker Lakes Conservancy has posted signs advocating for the preservation of the lakes and their dams.

Opinion

Loss and Regret: Update on the Levi Scofield house

By Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley

The Levi Scofield [sometimes spelled Schofield] house is a mere eight minutes from my front door near Larchmere Blvd. and North Moreland. The famous architect, Levi Scofield, known for the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument at Public Square, the Kimpton Schofield Building at East 9th and Euclid Avenue (downtown), and the Ohio Penitentiary, built a magnificent personal home in 1898 in the Buckeye Woodhill neighborhood. A family home until 1925, it's spent time as a convent, a chapel and most recently as a nursing home.

It's been abandoned since 1990, and in spite of efforts from a private owner and later, official efforts to restore it, recent drone footage makes clear the hurdles may have overcome best intentions. In 2016, local press reported Cleveland Neighborhood Progress (CNP),

the Cuyahoga County Land Bank (CCLB), and the Cleveland Restoration Society (CRS), coordinated, together with volunteers, to try and save the house. Media outlet *cleveland.com* described it in an October 27, 2016 article as "a last ditch and admittedly risky" undertaking. But it was helped in 2016, when the Cleveland Landmark Commission successfully designated Scofield house as a city landmark to be preserved and maintained.

According to a 2017 interview with *cleveland.com*, the Cleveland Restoration Society president, Kathleen Crowther, said "it's now or never."

Hopes were likely high. The then owner relinquished it to the CCLB in exchange for the forgiveness of over \$50,000 of fines. Volunteers stepped up, including Precision Environmental Co., that agreed to clean up the interior (before and after photos are available online) and Coon Restoration and Sealants Inc. that agreed to

help protect the roof and walls.

Architectural Afterlife wrote about the house and its possible restoration in February 2019, and highlighted the exterior made out of Berea sandstone and the hardwoods used to construct the interior – which have been exposed to weather neglect for so long.

Neighborhood expectations hinged on the increased public attention, these three organizations with a strong track record of saving architecturally important sites in the Cleveland area, and the volunteer efforts of companies and individuals to sustain the house until investors could be found.

With that background, when I visited the house last month, 10 years after the effort was announced, I expected to find a beautiful house. Instead, I found heartbreak. A struggling neighborhood weighed down by a massive eyesore in its mist. Further investigation online showed video footage that captured the continued deterioration of this once

beautiful property. The most recent video from Taco Slayer Aerial Urban Exploration and Community Activism shows collapsed floors from the first floor to the basement, from the second floor to the first floor, missing windows, walls, ceilings, pipes, and an acute danger to anyone who enters.

My phone calls to the CCLB, CRS, and CNP resulted in very little explanation of what happened. The CCLB told me that they had transferred the property in 2019 to the Land Assembly for Neighborhood Development, which has an address at Eaton Commons in Columbus. The official reading from "records" was unable to provide me a contact number for this organization.

The president of the CRS, Kathleen Crowther, told me they had worked on the property for approximately three years to get it stabilized and earn a historic designation, and turned it over to the CCLB that

Continued on page 5

By Margaret Simon

“What’s past is prologue.” And on a winter evening at Shaker Library, the past felt very much alive. Attendees gathered on Feb. 12 for a thoughtful program on the history of Shaker Square — that grand experiment in innovative planning and community-centered design. Historian **Virginia Dawson** traced how the Square emerged as a visionary business district, blending modern retail concepts with a belief that commerce and community could — and should — coexist.

Tania Menesse, President and CEO of Cleveland Neighborhood Progress, carried the story forward, illuminating the Square’s evolving economic vision and its continued promise. See *Thomas Jewell’s full story on page 3*.



Shaker Heights resident Gale Koritansky is the Heights Libraries new Director. Photo courtesy of Heights Libraries.

Speaking of new chapters, **Gale Koritansky** has been appointed the new Director of Heights Libraries for Cleveland Heights and University Heights.

With more than 20 years of experience serving both urban and suburban communities, this energetic leader brings deep knowledge and fresh enthusiasm. A Chardon native who now calls Shaker Heights home, she understands both the reach and the roots of public libraries.

Could **Brandon Ricca**, a 3rd grader at Boulevard School in Shaker Heights, be *America’s Most Artistic Kid* in a Bob Ross-inspired painting contest? Quite possibly. Introduced to Ross’s happy little trees by his second-grade teacher,



3rd grader Brandon Ricca’s landscape painting.

Katherine Eagleton, Brandon has since painted 50 landscapes — and now teaches his classmates how to do the same. Win, lose, or draw, he’s already a winner in our book. As the late Bob Ross reminded us, “Anytime you learn, you gain.” And yes, Brandon is the son of author **Brad Ricca**. Creativity clearly runs in the family.

Art continues to bloom across our neighborhoods. Shaker Art Circle gathers artists of all levels — from the merely curious to the quietly accomplished — to sketch and paint in inspiring settings around town. Hosted by **Sheri Lawrence**, the group meets on the second and third Tuesdays from 5:30–7 p.m., wintering at the Van Aken District and migrating to the Nature Center in spring. Might a plein air afternoon at Shaker Square be in their future? One can hope.

Textile artistry has also graced the walls of Shaker Heights Main Library, thanks to the *African-American Quilt and Doll Guild*, founded by **Gloria Kellon**. Exhibiting locally and internationally, the guild stitches history, story, and identity into every piece. One striking example, *The Brothers* by **Regina Abernathy**, invites viewers to pause — and look again.



“The Brothers,” a quilt created by artist Regina Abernathy

Looking to swap rather than shop? Shaker Library and the Shaker Lakes Nature Center will host a *Community Swap Meet* — a neighborly gathering where money stays home and treasures change hands on Saturday, March 21, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Books, records, gardening tools, small furniture — bring what you can part with and discover what you didn’t know you needed. Sustainable, social, and just plain fun. To learn more and sign up for a table, visit: bit.ly/ShakerSwapMeet

On Sunday, March 29, at 1:30 p.m., enjoy a free screening of “Best in Show” (2000) at the Cedar Lee Theatre. The mockumentary classic features the impeccable comedic timing of the late Shaker Heights native **Fred Willard**. The event is part of the Shaker Historical Society’s America250-Ohio celebration, reminding us that Ohio entertains — and always has.

Mark your calendar for Sunday, April 19, when the *Third Annual Historic Homes Tour* — sponsored by the Shaker Historical Society and the Nature Center at Shaker Lakes — rolls out once more. After a light brunch and brief presentation, guests will board a trolley to explore homes along the historic rapid transit lines.



A free screening of the film, “Best in Show” starring Shaker Heights native Fred Willard takes place March 29.

In honor of the Cleveland Museum of Art’s 110th birthday, the CMA invites area artists to submit work for a juried exhibition, *Lake Effect: Artists from Cleveland Now*. The show celebrates Northeast Ohio’s creative current — past, present, and still unfolding. Three artists will receive \$1,000 micro-grants. Deadline: April 24. Creativity thrives when community shows up. Register & apply at bit.ly/CMACallforArtists

April itself comes from the Latin “aperio” — “to open.” And open we shall. Friends of the Shaker Library invites readers to crack open something wonderful at the Spring Book Sale, April 29–May 3. A bag of books, a quiet corner, and an afternoon well spent — that’s spring renewal of the very best kind.

New to town? Or simply ready to widen your circle? The New Clevelanders Club welcomes women from across the city’s east side for friendship and philanthropy. Annual dues are \$50. Find out more at newclevelanders.com.

As the days grow longer and the Square begins to hum again, take a stroll. Look up. Look around. And keep your ears open for me.

Loss and Regret: Update on the Levi Scofield house

Continued from page 4

holds properties for neighborhood organizations. The intent was to get the property into the hands of CNP so that they could move forward with finding an investor and others to help with the home’s restoration. CNP was tasked with getting the property redeveloped as part of their plans for the overall area.

Crowther acknowledged during our conversation that without ongoing stabilization work, it is likely unsalvageable, but the final word would need to come from CNP — which provided the following statement: “CNP, through its real estate subsidiary, took ownership of the property in 2019 after its deferred maintenance created serious structural concerns. Our

original intent was to work with another developer to redevelop the property with the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program for affordable senior housing. Both parties agreed to pause development due to the Woodhill Choice project’s large, adjacent investments in affordable housing.”

Anyone interested in seeing the current state of the house can find graphic video online. Now the questions are simple: Has CNP given up on restoration? If so, where do demolition plans stand? If not, how much longer must the neighborhood be burdened by the current “city landmark” in such horrific condition?

Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley is a trustee of the Shaker Square Area Development Corporation (SHAD).



The family home of Levi Scofield, one of Cleveland’s finest architects, was built in 1898. Photo courtesy of Cleveland Public Library’s Digital Photograph Collection.



The Scofield house at it looks today at 2438 Mapleside Road at Notre Dame Ave.



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Housing

Battle over future of iconic Shaker Square apartments is tipping point for historic corridor

By Olivera Perkins

Cleveland officials and a community group are trying to stop lender Fannie Mae from auctioning off more than 300 apartments that deteriorated in the hands of an out-of-town investor

Reprinted from Signal Cleveland, Jan. 29, 2026. Edited for brevity. Read article in its entirety: https://bit.ly/Signal_ShSqApts

At South Moreland Blvd. near Ludlow in the Shaker Square (SS) apartment corridor, two buildings are bound to catch your eye. Drexmore Mansion is a handsome brick edifice with a hipped slate roof, decorative trim and accents such as leaded glass. Ludlow Castle is a striking brick and stucco building. (Despite their names, both buildings have always been apt's.)

You'll see the deterioration caused by nearly a decade of deferred maintenance. At Ludlow Castle, chunks of stucco have fallen from the exterior, exposing the brick. At Drexmore Mansion, Jay Westbrook points out the results of years of neglect—including roof problems, exterior water damage and faulty gutters and downspouts.

Westbrook is with the Morelands Group, a tenant-focused org. that advocates for the apartment corridor, including trying to reverse the damage that out-of-town investors have caused by allowing buildings to deteriorate. The corridor, centered on North Moreland & South Moreland Blvd's, includes 80-plus structures with 2,000 units. It also includes Van Aken & Shaker Blvd's.

The historic Drexmore Mansion & Ludlow Castle are among 15 in the corridor once owned by Brooklyn, N.Y.-based companies. Now they're in the hands of Fannie Mae (FM), the quasi-governmental entity whose mission includes fostering affordable rental housing and homeownership through lending. FM foreclosed on the \$22.6 million (mil) mortgage about 18 months ago. The lender is planning to auction the buildings in the spring. Cleveland is trying to put a stop to that. It wants FM to call off the auction and enter into a deal with the city that would see the buildings sold to responsible local owners.

In recent years, more out-of-town investors have bought buildings in the corridor, often looking to make fast money, Westbrook told *Signal Cleveland*. The out-of-towners have delighted in the high occupancy rates and long-term tenants. They often drooled at market-rate rents that seem lucrative given the cost of buildings. Too many of them disregarded what made the area popular among renters: well-maintained buildings.

Drexmore Mansion & Ludlow Castle are among what are known as the Steiner properties – 308 apartments spread across 14 deteriorating buildings in the corridor and one in Shaker Heights (SH). Only two buildings—one in each city—are currently occupied.

The city and SS-area stakeholders vehemently oppose FM auctioning the Steiner properties. They say an auction



Merle Gordon, the last resident to move out of Ludlow Castle, in front of the now-vacant apt. building. Credit: Michael Indriolo/Signal Cleveland/ CatchLight Local

is almost certainly guaranteed to attract another deadbeat investor. The city is trying to get FM to call off the auction and allow the city to lead the effort to find new owners. So far, FM hasn't responded, said Director of Building & Housing Sally Martin O'Toole.

"We believe the best approach is to keep the property in local hands, to find local actors who are going to do the right thing," she said, adding that the city has had recent success in finding responsible owners for delinquent apartment buildings in the corridor.

FM often partners with cities on affordable housing and neighborhood revitalization efforts, including through its multifamily housing financing programs.

"We found it very shocking that FM won't work with the city, given their mission," said Martin O'Toole.

Mass apartment vacancies could harm Shaker Square area

Westbrook explained that maintenance became lax. Buildings deteriorated. Tenants fled the decay. Attracting new renters often proved futile. The situation accelerated blight in the neighborhood, say community organizations and the city. They fear that prolonged mass vacancies are undermining the stability of the SS retail district. The longer buildings are left to rot, potentially hundreds of units of affordable housing will be lost. You can still find a one-bedroom there for about \$1,000 a month. The average for Cleveland is more than \$1,400, according to *RentCafe.com*.

Companies controlled by Mendel Steiner, the late Brooklyn, NY, real estate investor, bought the buildings in 2018. FM foreclosed on the mortgage in 2024. Steiner, 33, died last year.

Earlier this month, the city filed an injunction to stop the auction.

The Steiner properties were to go to auction in Dec. and then Jan. before being postponed again to late March.

Generally, FM auctions properties in an effort to recoup some of the money from the defaulted mortgage. With an auction, the city doesn't have a say in who buys the properties because they generally go to the highest bidder. The starting bid is \$1.5 mil.

"FM owns a share of responsibility for what has happened," Westbrook said, adding that the entity should have better screened Steiner before granting the huge mortgage. "It was reckless conduct. So, they should be willing to work with the city."

The pain of watching iconic Shaker Square apartment buildings deteriorate

At Drexmore Mansion, a glass door reveals crumbling plaster. Water damage could be the culprit. The area smells moldy. Photos taken inside the vacant Ludlow Castle before it was secured last fall show water-damaged ceilings with crumbling plaster.

It's familiar to Merle Gordon, who lived at Ludlow Castle for 18 years. The former Cleveland Council member can rattle off a host of issues during Steiner's ownership, ranging from a roof that needed to be replaced to no heat in winter to the owners not paying the water bills. Gordon's glad she got away from the derelict property, but she still pines for her old apartment.

"It was beautiful," said Gordon, also a former Cleveland director of public health. "Wood-burning fireplace. Cathedral ceilings. Wood floors."

Joanne Blanchard had lived nearby at Hampton Court, twin Tudor-style buildings, for nearly four decades. While there, the building changed hands, but each owner had the same philosophy about caring

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Sazani Oceana Restaurant Opens at Former EDWINS Too Space

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In an interview with *ABC News Channel 5*, Cribbs acknowledged that opening a restaurant is a risky business venture, but he's confident that its location in historic Shaker Square will be a boon to its success.

"This is not an unknown location," said Cribbs. "It's already an environment with a nice restaurant scene."

Led by chef

Joshua Scherger, the menu highlights fresh seafood prepared with creativity and care. Guests can expect a variety of coastal favorites, including oysters, crab cakes, and seasonal seafood dishes, alongside thoughtfully crafted options featuring beef, chicken, Southern influences, and vegan selections.

Scherger says that menu favorites include Steamed Mussels (\$13), The

Gilded Wedge (\$18), The Oceana Fish Sandwich (\$27), Seafood Pasta (\$38), and Lobster Wellington (\$56).

According to the restaurant website (sazanioceana.com), every dish reflects a

commitment to quality ingredients, balanced flavors, and an elevated yet approachable dining experience. Sazani Oceana purports to be a destination where Cleveland's culinary energy, culture, and community

come together – driving the future of Shaker Square's next chapter.

The restaurant plans a grand opening and ribbon cutting for March 4. Brunch is now available on weekends from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Happy hours start on Monday, March 9, from 4:30-6:30 p.m. Normal hours of operation are: Sunday: 9:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. (brunch) and 4:30-9:30 p.m. (dinner)

An Instagram influencer describes it as a restaurant with "low key coastal luxury vibes."



The restaurant specializes in upscale seafood options.

Photo courtesy of Sazani Oceana

Monday through Thursday: 4:30-9:30 p.m.

Friday: 4:30-10:30 p.m.

Saturday: 9:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. (brunch) and 4:30-10:30 p.m. (dinner)

The restaurant includes a full bar complete with signature cocktails and

mocktails, first bites, and dessert options. Reservations are highly suggested. Bar is first come, first serve. While the restaurant is working to secure valet parking, guests are encouraged to use free parking in Shaker Square, or behind the restaurant or movie theater.

Battle over future of iconic Shaker Square apartments is tipping point for historic corridor

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for the building. Her building was in "great condition," she said. And then it became a Steiner property. Makeshift repairs became the norm.

Cleveland's civil nuisance initiative deals with negligent landlords

Mayor Bibb's administration started to deal with negligent landlords. Though finding a way to deal with irresponsible out-of-town investors sparked the policy, it can be used on any negligent property owner, Martin O'Toole said.

The strategy can include targeted code enforcement and receivership, in which the city, a community-based nonprofit or another organization petition the court to declare a property a public nuisance. The court then appoints a receiver to oversee repairs, and the owner is responsible for paying. A civil nuisance action can involve Cleveland helping to negotiate a deal for the foreclosed property with the lender. The city works with community development groups to find potential buyers they and city officials deem will be responsible property owners.

A civil nuisance action that results in a new owner taking over a building can take a few years. During the process, high vacancy rates can remain, and tenants can continue to live in challenging conditions as things gradually turn around.

Perhaps the city's most high-profile example of the initiative took about three years to coalesce. It involves three apartment buildings on Shaker Blvd. in the corridor. Altogether they have about 250 units and had been owned by a New York-based LLC. The buildings had been so poorly maintained that the owners racked up a plethora of code violations.

Last fall, the city got the company to pay more than \$2.1 mil in Cleveland Housing Court fines, fees and back taxes. The city has also signed off on the buildings' owners selling them to a company that agreed to put an initial \$5.1 mil into the properties as part of a multi-phase investment

plan. The new owner is an LLC led by Martin Shkreli, founder of the NY-based Alba Construction. Progressive Urban Property Management manages the apartments.

"It was a big win for the city," said Martin O'Toole.

The city is close to announcing that it helped to strike a deal in the same vein for a 12-unit apt. building on South Moreland Blvd., she said.

The Morelands Group lobbied for both to be returned to quality housing, and the organization will continue to push for the same to happen with the Steiner properties. Neither of the deals reached for the three buildings or the one building in the corridor involved FM mortgages.

The city's plan for the Steiner properties includes reaching an agreement with FM for the buildings, which would be turned over to the Cuyahoga Land Bank. Cleveland Neighborhood Progress (CNP), a nonprofit focused on community revitalization, is working on lining up local buyers for the properties.

There are several good candidates who understand the corridor and have viable plans for making money while providing quality housing, said Tania Menesse, CNP's CEO and president.

In order for the city's plan to work, there is no way FM can offer the Steiner properties for anywhere near \$22.6 mil, say many of those advocating for a deal. They say it's improbable that the buildings were ever worth that much. After years of deterioration, the buildings are now worth only a fraction of what they were worth in 2018.

Westbrook refers to how FM's foreclosure complaint raises the possibility of exploring whether fraud occurred in connection with the mortgage loan. What is perceived as an inflated value plays into concerns about what would happen if the properties are auctioned. So does the way the buildings are being marketed, with photos depicting the properties in better shape than they are.

The city provided FM with the information about the Steiner properties being the subject of a civil nuisance action, but it took a month for the disclosure to appear on the auction website and materials. But even with the disclosure, misleading depictions of the buildings' true value may be enough for out-of-town investors to think they can turn a quick profit.

"Suddenly they realize, we're upside down [with the mortgage]," Menesse said. "There's really no downside to them for walking away. The company files bankruptcy and they're on to their next deal."

Then the city and its stakeholders have to find a way to clean up the mess.

Walkable neighborhoods like Shaker Square are seeing a resurgence nationally

The stakeholders are fighting to stabilize the SS area for its legacy and because of its promise. SS has existed as a retail district for nearly a century. The housing, including the corridor, was built around a central shopping/transit hub (RTA's SH Rapid Transit). It was intended to be a walkable community.

Today this is known as Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) – popular among urban planners. TOD reduces urban sprawl and often focuses on rebuilding neighborhoods. Creating mixed-use neighborhoods with businesses and housing is key. High-density mixed-income housing, such as the apartment corridor, is considered ideal.

"This is naturally occurring affordable housing in Cleveland that is still a thriving mixed-income neighborhood, but it is missing 300-plus of those residents," Menesse said.

When properties undergo major improvements, rents often rise. The threat of displacements rises, especially for lower-income renters. Some potential owners have included options for lower-income renters, she said.

CNP has a vested interest in making sure buildings are brought back online.

In 2023, CNP and the nonprofit Burten, Bell, Carr Development bought SS out of foreclosure for \$11 mil, with the help of the city. The bank was planning to take the shopping center to auction, before the nonprofits and the city persuaded them to strike a deal.

"With the support of the county and the foundations, almost \$6 mil has been invested in the Square, and that investment is at risk if the buildings are allowed to continue to deteriorate," Menesse said.

SS was planned to be supported by shoppers from the corridor, and that really hasn't changed. About 60% of shoppers walk to the retail district, according to the SS Vision Plan.

Many who have been in the struggle to save the properties say it caused residents, community organizations, and the city to collectively think about ways to strengthen the corridor.

Women were the last holdouts in their beloved Shaker Square apartments

Gordon was the last tenant to leave Ludlow Castle. Blanchard was the last to leave Hampton Court. Blanchard remembers it as the place where she raised her daughter and friendships formed with families who lived there and attended SH's schools with her child. She valued living in a racially and ethnically diverse neighborhood.

The court-appointed company managing the properties has only left two buildings occupied: the Larchmere on North Moreland Blvd. and Woodland Park on South Woodland Rd.

Gordon moved to Lakewood to be closer to an elderly parent. She viewed staying in her apt. as a way to fight back – even if symbolically – against the viable corridor slipping away. She knew that vacant buildings can turn into abandoned ones that are demolished.

"I thought that things could turn around if people continue living here," she said. "Somebody has to keep a stake in the ground."



Editor's Notebook

Story and photos by Andrea C. Turner

Morelands Group hosts tenant holiday reception



Photos by Andrea C. Turner and Jay Westbrook

The Morelands Group hosted its annual reception on December 9, 2025, at Zanzibar on Shaker Square. A festive time was shared by neighbors and community partners alike.

In Memoriam



Burton I. "Burt" Saltzman, longtime CEO of Dave's Markets, a cornerstone of the Shaker Square community, passed away January 13, 2026. Saltzman was the driving force behind Cleveland's hometown grocery chain. He was 88 years old.

Burt Saltzman, former CEO of Dave's Markets. Photo courtesy of the Saltzman family.

Café Indigo celebrates 1-year anniversary

The popular Shaker Square coffee and ice cream cafe celebrated its first year in business on February 25. To commemorate, they've introduced the Indigo Sip Menu which includes combinations of pea flower and blue spirulina. These plant-based and antioxidant-rich ingredients add vibrant color and a little calm to your cup.

Dallas choreographer works with Ohio Contemporary Ballet (OCB)

OCB, with dance studios located at 3558 Lee Road, hosted several visionary artists in winter choreographic residencies for their "Ballet Unbound" performance at Playhouse Square set for March 28, at 7 p.m.



Choreographer Nycole Ray, formerly of Dallas Black Dance Theatre, sets her piece, "Opaque," on OCB dancers.

Nycole Ray's piece "Opaque," brings a majestic aura, exploring hidden depths through dramatic choreography and sculptural use of long black skirts, adding a visual dimension to the performance. Formerly of Dallas Black Dance Theatre, her work has been in the International Black Dance Festival. Tickets at playhousesquare.org/events/detail/ballet-unbound.

City of Shaker Heights Council has second reading of new zoning ordinances; includes restrictions on smoke shops

Reprinted courtesy of Shaker Square Alliance. Edited for space.

In October 2025, Shaker Square Alliance (SSA) wrote to Shaker Heights City Council expressing concern about the lack of zoning regulations for smoke shops. A follow-up meeting with city officials and members of SSA provided insight into the language and restrictions the city was hoping to adopt in new regulations. The new ordinance has been read for the second of three times during a regular council session.

1263.24 SMOKE SHOPS. The following conditions shall apply to smoke shops when approved as a conditional use:

- A. No smoke shop shall be located within 1,500 feet of another smoke shop.
- B. No smoke shop shall be located within 500 feet of a school, university, child day care, library, or a place of worship.

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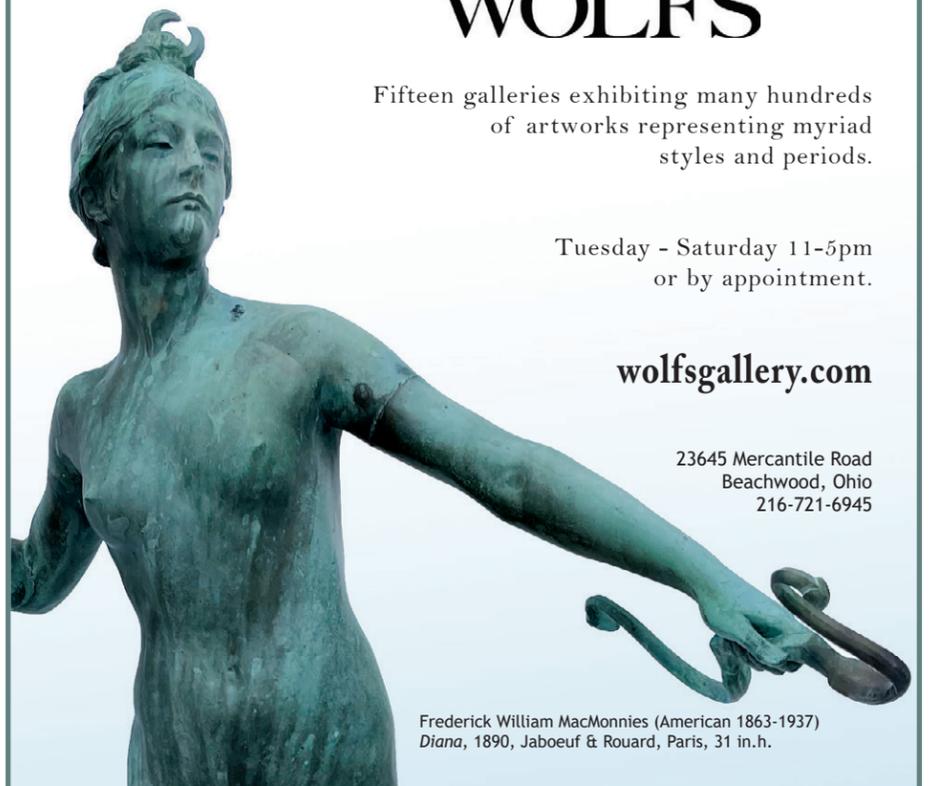
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