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# the SHAD Connection

SUMMER 2026

Vol. 49 No. 4

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

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## Larchmere PorchFest

Larchmere Blvd.  
Saturday, June 13, 1-10 p.m.  
Hear 30 bands on 30 porches! Two finale concerts at 6 and 7 p.m. on 126<sup>th</sup> which will be closed to through traffic. Performances take place at participating restaurants from 8-10 p.m. Pick a time or stay in the neighborhood all day for summer fun music vibes! *Band lineup/schedule at [larchmereporchfest.org](http://larchmereporchfest.org)*



## United by Lee Community Picnic

Shaker Historical Society  
16740 South Park Blvd, Shaker Heights  
Sunday, July 19, 1-3:30 p.m. • FREE  
Gather for food, fun, and friendship to celebrate the histories of Shaker Heights and the Lee-Harvard neighborhood as part of the statewide America250-Ohio celebration.

## North Union Farmers Market Outdoor Season

Shaker Square:  
Saturdays through Dec. 19, 8 a.m.-Noon

Van Aken District:  
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The luncheon takes place from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., with doors opening to the buffet at 10:30 a.m. Tickets to the luncheon are \$75 each, with tables accommodating up to 10 people. *Tix at <https://www.benrose.org/event/triumph26>.*

After lunch, join the FREE community fair from 1:30-4 p.m. Includes activities, info. from local partners, live music, and dancing. Everyone welcome.



## Larchmere Sidewalk Sale

Larchmere Boulevard  
Saturday, Sept. 5, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.

## Hike & Run

Nature Center at Shaker Lakes  
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## Larchmere Candy Run

Larchmere Boulevard  
Saturday, Oct. 3 • 5-8 p.m.  
Look for the "Candy Run" sign in participating merchant windows. Wear a costume to get a treat!

## Local Entrepreneurs

### New jazz club to debut on Larchmere

By Kevin McLaughlin

Melissa Garrett-Hirsch, doyenne of Larchmere's UnBar and Shaker Square's Café Indigo, is trying to give the neighborhood something it doesn't quite have—place for live jazz, where you can sit with a drink if you want and linger into the evening.

Her latest project, Larchmere Reserve, is set to open at 12635 Larchmere Boulevard, in the former event space adjacent to UnBar.

The plan is straightforward: a small jazz club with an emphasis on atmosphere. "It is a club. It is a jazz club," Garrett-Hirsch said, drawing a

line between what she's building and the usual neighborhood bar.

Hours are Wednesday through Saturday, roughly 4 p.m. to midnight, with a grand opening targeted for early June and live music beginning soon after.

Garrett-Hirsch arrives at the idea

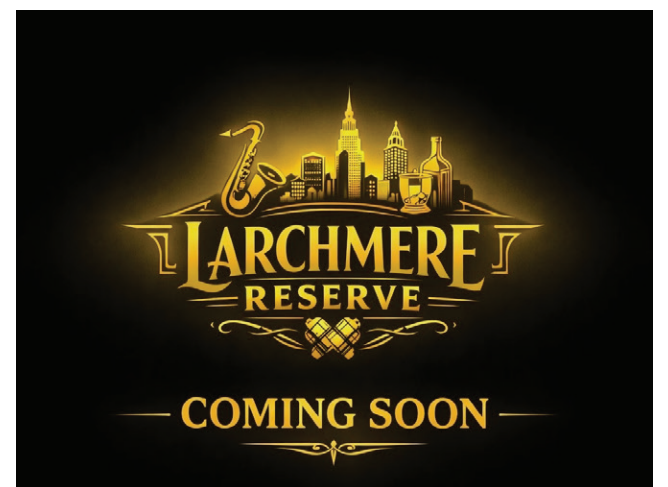
from experience. She already operates Café Indigo on Shaker Square and UnBar Café on Larchmere Blvd., and recently opened a new café, 601 Coffee House, inside City Hall. The Larchmere Reserve grows out of what she has been hearing from customers—and what she has been seeing firsthand.

People like to hang out. They like to relax.

But after a certain hour, coffee alone doesn't sustain a business. "I need to be able to entertain you and keep you ... but I also need to monetize you're being here," she said.

The answer, for her, was not to abandon the social, low-pressure feel she has cultivated, but to extend it. The club will offer wine, beer, and high-

**"There's nothing like us in the city," she said—a place to hear jazz, relax, and linger a while.**  
-Melissa Garrett-Hirsch



Larchmere Reserve to Present Jazz Beginning in June 2026

end spirits alongside a limited menu of small plates. Non-alcoholic options will also be part of the identity. "Hanging out, being social, doesn't have to center around alcohol," she said—but it can be available for those who want it.

The tone she's after is "more like an experience"—a room for "mature adults," with a "laid-back, speakeasy... kind of vibe." There will be no minors, no outside food or drink, and, on weekends, valet parking. The design reinforces the idea: visitors will move from the café into a darker, more

*See New jazz club to debut on Larchmere, page 3*

## Neighborhood News Survey

### Community News + Information Survey

#### For Buckeye, Larchmere, Shaker Square, and Woodland Hills residents

A group of community organizations is building a new resource to get local news and information for the Greater Buckeye area, which includes Buckeye, Larchmere, Shaker Square, and Woodland Hills. Your input will help us understand how residents currently get information, what topics matter most, and how we can make a resource that's truly useful for the community.

Your responses will not be shared publicly and will only be used by our team to inform the new community news resource we want to build. This survey should take no more than 5 minutes.



## Help shape the future of news in Greater Buckeye!

Several local non-profit organizations have been exploring methods to better share news & information within the community.

To support this collaborative effort, we are looking for community feedback. **PLEASE HELP US BY TAKING THE SURVEY.** The survey will close June 15.

All of us wish to better serve the Greater Buckeye community with relevant news and share it through the means that reflects the needs of readers.

Questions? Interested in this effort?  
[comms@neighborhoodgrants.org](mailto:comms@neighborhoodgrants.org)



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Melissa Garrett-Hirsch

## Message from the SHAD President

now it's all about leisurely strolls and enjoying the company of neighbors.

But let's not get too carried away with the sunshine! I'd like to keep the spotlight on a theme that's close to my heart: the power of collaboration among citizen-led organizations in our neighborhoods.

At SHAD, we know that building strong communities means modeling leadership that embraces both active participation and a spirit of teamwork.

SHAD is actively involved in two important efforts to foster community. First, we're participating in the development of a plan to

organize local news so it's informative without overwhelming those who read it—because staying connected shouldn't feel like a chore!

Secondly, we're leading the Light Up Larchmere project, which uses creative lighting to promote safety and foster neighborhood pride. Our goal is to build a repeatable model that other groups can use, shining a light (literally and figuratively) on what makes our neighborhoods so special.

Together, through collaboration and shared vision, we can make this summer and every season a time for connection and community.

Summer has finally arrived, and you can feel it in the air! The days are brighter, the breeze is warmer, and friendly faces seem to pop up everywhere as we enjoy the outdoors. I must admit, this is absolutely my favorite time of year. Gone are those hurried races to escape the cold;

## Advertise!

### The SHAD Connection Deadlines Fall Issue

For advertising rate and ad size information and media kit go to [shad.org](http://shad.org) or email [jgdalessandro@gmail.com](mailto:jgdalessandro@gmail.com).

### Reserve ad space for the SHAD Connection

Fall issue covering September, October and November by **July 10, 2026**. Ad artwork is due no later than: **July 24, 2026**.

Send artwork to Jim at [jgdalessandro@gmail.com](mailto:jgdalessandro@gmail.com).

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### SHAD MISSION STATEMENT

To provide the Shaker Square area with the leadership needed to re-imagine and foster well-maintained, diverse and vibrant neighborhoods.

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

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Sandra Graubard

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## Neighborhood Improvements

# Larchmere District to shine brighter

Story and photo by Thomas Jewell

Several years after the Safe Smart CLE Initiative brought LED streetlights to the historic Larchmere district, some safety enhancement work continues closer to sidewalk level.

Meanwhile, as Phase Two of "Lighting Up Larchmere" got underway this spring, a similar project has gained traction on Buckeye Road as well.

"Lights make a real difference around the Square and along Buckeye" as a deterrent to potentially shady activities, Shaker Square Alliance Director Chip Bromley noted at the group's April meeting.

The initial effort came through collaboration among the Alliance, Larchmere Community Association, Shaker Square Area Development Corp. (SHAD) and other community members.

As a result, "we project increased engagement in this legacy neighborhood," a joint press release stated, pointing to "a safer walkable street and the gateway into the commercial area."

The first \$16,000 phase, funded by Neighborhood Connections, involved a survey conducted by City Architecture, headquartered in the 121 Larchmere mixed-use building that includes 88 apartments.

Their groundwork provided the template for addressing lighting and visibility gaps affecting walkability, nighttime safety, and curb appeal, organizers added.

"The existing lighting only illuminates the streets and parking lots," said Alliance facilitator and SHAD board member Fran Kalafatis. "The study highlighted the deficits and some really impactful things we can do."

In April, the Lighting Up Larchmere project focused on the

primarily residential western section of the corridor, with about 40 homes between Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and East 121st Street.

Organizers started by meeting with residents about opting into the program, presenting them with four different options for porch lighting.

"Once selected, the project will cover the cost of the lighting and the certified electrician to complete installation," organizers said.

The City of Cleveland and Neighborhood Connections each came up with \$10,000 for the rest of Phase Two. Any leftover funds can be put toward Phase Three for the commercial district, coming this fall.

"That's going to be the 'glam' part, from East 122nd Street up to Scorpacciata Pasta Co.," Kalafatis said.

Upgrades, including solar-powered features, would need to be attached to existing poles and other fixtures already there.

"It would be decorative, even during the day," Kalafatis said of the further element of attraction for the district, straddling the borders of Cleveland and Shaker Heights.

"It would make people just driving through want to come back," she added. "Visitors always look for a lit-up and welcoming place."

"We're excited to get started and to work directly with residents and business owners," Alex Pesta, partner at City Architecture, told the Shaker Square Alliance. "We believe there is an opportunity to go beyond lighting for safety's sake. If storefronts can be highlighted, public spaces made brighter, and parking areas lit, this work can improve everyone's experiences along the street."



As part of the "Light Up Larchmere" project, residents along Larchmere Blvd. have a choice of four differing porch light options to enhance safety and visibility along the sidewalks.

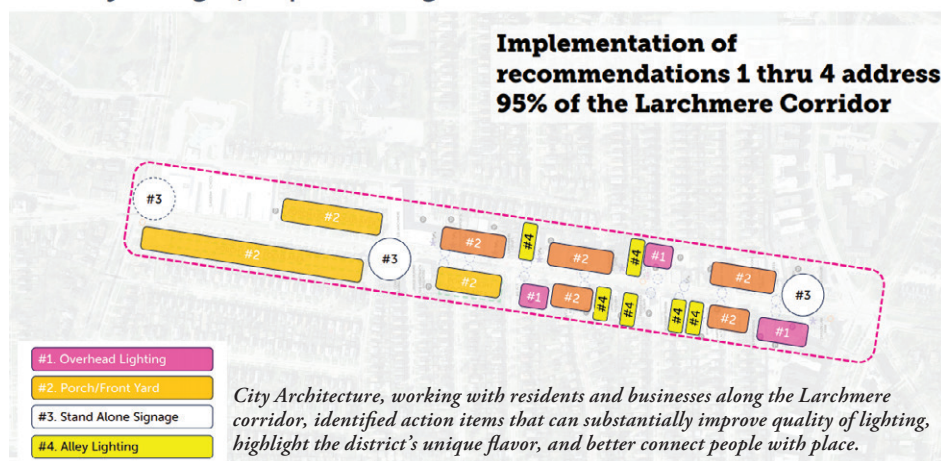
Back on Phase Two in the residential section, the "good neighbor" project component also provides residents with an introduction to community organizations, the annual Larchmere Plant Sale, Larchmere PorchFest, Rock The Blocks and Larchmere Beautification. South of Shaker Square, the Alliance and Neighborhood Connections will provide another \$20,000 for a sidewalk lighting effort stretching from the Shoppes at Buckeye Plaza east to Van Aken Boulevard.

"Lighting alone isn't going to solve the deeper challenges we face around poverty and safety on Buckeye," Julian Khan shared with Shaker Square Alliance. "It can play a role in how a place feels and how people show up. I think about growing up here in

the 90s, when streetlights and park lights stretched our time outside and made space for connection, play, and community. There's something powerful about illuminating what's already here. Buckeye has always had life, culture, and beauty, and none of that deserves to sit in the shadows, figuratively or literally. If done thoughtfully, lighting can help support that and connect to bigger efforts like the Buckeye EcoVillage, which are focused on long-term investment in both the place and the people who call it home."

Bromley credited Alliance member Greg Bonanno with identifying unspent funds still available in "Byrne grant (Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program)," allowing them to proceed there as well.

## Lead by Design | Impact along Larchmere



## New jazz club to debut on Larchmere *Continued from cover story*

intimate space, with changes in color and artwork helping the transition.

Music will be local, at least to start. Garrett-Hirsch expects to book established Cleveland players and singers, leaning on the network of her collaborator, Claude Davis, an experienced lounge operator who will handle much of the club's day-to-day production and booking. "He has all the expertise and all the connections with the local jazz bands," she said.

If the concept feels familiar, that is partly the point. Garrett-Hirsch points to a past generation of east-side venues—places people still talk about—and sees a void. "We don't have that anymore," she said. The Reserve is meant to bring some of that back, in a form that fits Larchmere as it stands now.

Garrett-Hirsch speaks plainly about the pressures facing small businesses along the corridor—uneven foot traffic and the difficulty of sustaining momentum between larger events like PorchFest. Her hope is that the club can help steady the rhythm.

"I'm hoping that Larchmere Reserve will be one of those catalysts to drive that foot traffic that we need," she said.

Success, at least at the start, is not defined in grand terms. A full room. A good reputation. No trouble. "Mature people showing up and having a good time," she said. If that happens, she expects the benefit to spread—not just to her own businesses, but to the rest of the street.

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# Stream work continues at Shaker Lakes amid dam controversies

By Grant Segall

Sixty years ago, locals created a pioneering nature center as part of stopping a threat to the Shaker Lakes. Now the lakes are threatened again, and the Nature Center at Shaker Lakes has reworked its sections of streams between them.

From late February to late March, crews shifted those sections closer to their original beds. They also began to remove invasive plants and bring in native ones.

The 2600 South Park Blvd. Center hosts mallows, butterflies, and many other species, including more than 140,000 two-legged visitors per year, who enjoy a rare urban encounter with nature. It offers two miles of trails, partly accessible. It also offers talks, walks, plant sales, exhibits, festivals, camps, teacher training, programs for field trippers, even an occasional ballet on a boardwalk over a marsh.

The Center has been declared a National Environmental Education Landmark and National Environmental Study Area.

Peter Bode, Center President and Chief Executive Officer, says the stream work was independent of the lakes' future and planned before the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District (NEORS) changed its recommendations last summer from replacing Lower Lake's dam to razing it.

Cleveland owns Lower and Horseshoe Lakes and surrounding parklands. Shaker Heights and Cleveland Heights govern them. The suburbs and the Nature Center lease and maintain them. Shaker

also owns, governs and maintains nearby Green and Marshall Lakes.

The Center's more than 20 acres hosts two branches of the Doan Brook: one from Horseshoe and the other from Green through Marshall. The merged waters enter Lower Lake just inside the Center's grounds.

Over the years, the streams were displaced by construction and erosion. Since 1951, Cleveland's average yearly precipitation has soared by 27% and has fallen in heavier storms. The swollen branches washed out some of the

Center's slopes and trees, while starting to threaten a bird-banding station and a parking lot.

Bode says the stream work reconnects eight acres of wetlands and protects the trails.

The \$495,000 project was funded by NEORS and the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The Center spends more than \$2 million per year on operations. It has more than 1,000 members and about 35 employees, or 22 full-time equivalents.

Three centuries ago, the Shaker sect formed Lower and Horseshoe Lakes with earthen dams across the Doan Brook. In the 1960s, Albert Porter, Cuyahoga County's engineer and Democratic chairman, wanted to run freeways through the parklands and surrounding estates. He called foes "little old ladies in tennis shoes" and the area "a dinky little park and a two-bit duck pond," singular. But, after improving the parklands with the Nature Center, residents persuaded the state to stop him. He later pled guilty to shaking down employees.

In the late 2010s, the Ohio EPA said

**For Lower Lake, Bode has proposed a compromise: raze its dam and embank a lake alongside the Doan Brook of about 10 acres versus the current 18.**



Photo by Gus Chan

At Horseshoe Park, NEORS will save this outlet but raze the dam behind it.

that the dams at Horseshoe and Lower Lakes were decaying dangerously. Crews breached Horseshoe's. The district has won federal approval and is seeking state approval for a two-year, \$32 million project to raze that dam and rework the site's roughly 60 acres of marsh and dry land. Shaker Heights would contribute about \$4.6 million and Cleveland Heights \$2.5 million of the cost, covering trails, a nature playground and other amenities. The work would begin late this year and last about two years.

District officials say Lower Lake's dam holds back too little water to serve their mission of flood control, but could burst and release a fatal amount all at once. They plan to add a culvert downstream in University Circle, reducing the dam's value.

NEORS has offered to spend an estimated \$45 million to eliminate the dam and do related work. If the suburbs replace the dam instead, the district says they'd have to bear that project's roughly \$55 million cost.

Meanwhile, NEORS is temporarily adding riprap to that dam. At Horseshoe,

it's removing about 1,065 trees nearby, planting about 1,106 and adding more than 14,000 shrubs and cuttings.

A lawyer and an engineering firm are helping the suburbs examine the district's obligations. Erin Flanagan of the new advocacy group Shaker Lakes Conservancy has filed a lawsuit against the district's plans at Lower and Horseshoe Lakes.

For Lower Lake, Bode has proposed a compromise: raze its dam and embank a lake alongside the Doan Brook of about 10 acres versus the current 18. "The current lake is highly sedimented and is not a healthy ecosystem," he says. "It is beautiful but needs quite a bit of love and attention."

He thinks the marsh would slow floodwaters and filter pollution, while the lake would please visitors, reflect Shaker history, and keep justifying the name of the Nature Center at Shaker Lakes.

*An earlier version of this article appeared March 25, 2026, in The Land, a local online news outlet: <https://thelandcle.org/stories/stream-work-continues-at-shaker-lakes-amid-dam-controversies/>.*

## Neighborhoods

# Community picnic planned to connect neighborhoods with a shared history

By Benjamin Sperry

A free picnic on Sunday, July 19 will be a chance for two adjacent communities—Lee-Harvard in southeast Cleveland and Shaker Heights—to come together to celebrate their unity and focus on shared history. The picnic, scheduled for 1-3:30 p.m., at the Shaker Historical Society Museum, is part of an ongoing effort to mend a complicated relationship between the two areas divided historically by race, class, housing segregation, physical barricades, and other interrelated factors.

"There have been so many historical barriers between the two communities," said Brianna Treleven, Executive Director of the Shaker Historical Society where the picnic is to be held. "People have not always felt welcome in a nearby neighborhood. We want to

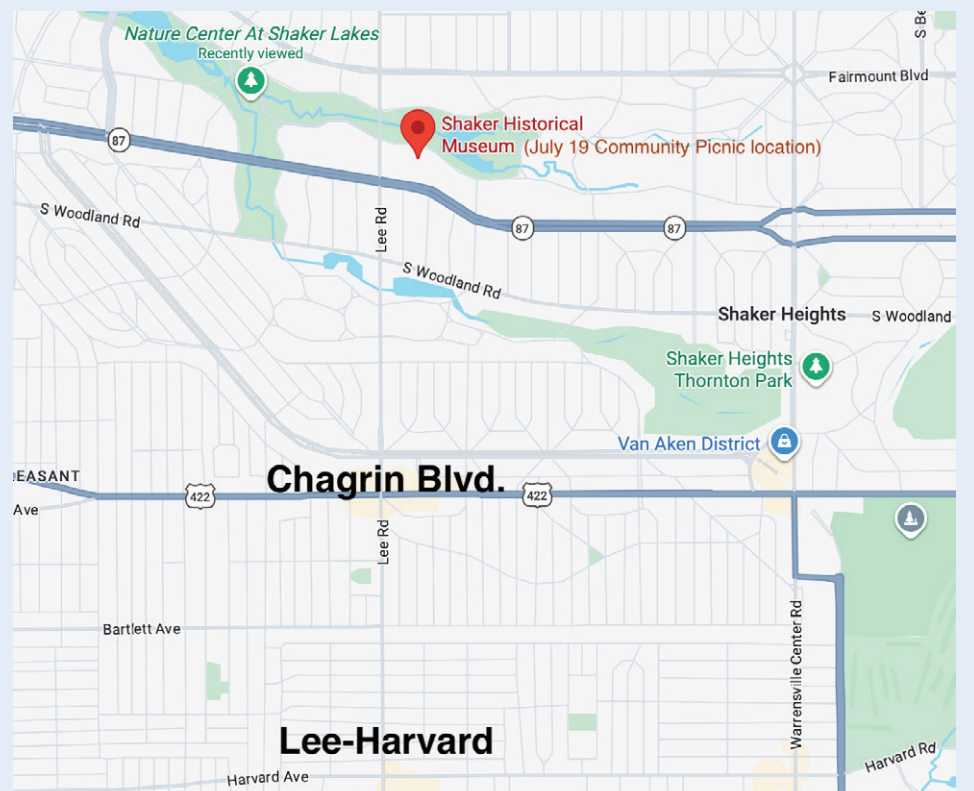
change that and start to build trust."

The afternoon picnic will include food, live music, games, and other "unstructured fun," Treleven said. Also, a "community quilt" will be revealed at the event. The historical society, located at 16740 South Park Boulevard in Shaker Heights, operates the Shaker Historical Museum on the site, across the street from Horseshoe Lake Park.

The picnic will be the third of four events promoted this year by United by Lee, a collaborative partnership involving the historical society and other community groups. Their yearlong initiative is called Resilient Lee. Lee Road is the main artery connecting Lee-Harvard and Shaker Heights. The first two events – a youth summit and a community meal – were held at venues on Miles Avenue in Cleveland. In July, it will be Shaker Heights' turn to host.

In addition to the picnic and the other community-building activities, the two neighborhoods also are working together

*Continued on page 5*



*The community picnic at the Shaker Historical Society planned for July 19, aims to bring together neighborhoods that are close in proximity but separated by a fraught history. Lee-Harvard and Shaker Heights are contiguous along the Lee Road corridor. Image courtesy of GoogleMaps.*

Story and photos by Margaret Simon

June is a time to celebrate growth and graduates—and to show *grad-itude* to teachers. Students' talents and art teachers' dedication were on display at Shaker Library from May 9-20 during the **Art Exposed** exhibit, an impressive showcase of student artwork including jewelry, painting, ceramics, photography, and more. Organizing, designing, preparing, and installing the exhibit—and earning well-deserved praise for their efforts—were Art Department Chair **Karen Howsol** and fiber arts teachers **Kris Walter** and **Matt Deibel**. Kudos as well to Shaker Library's **Stacie Anderson**, who facilitated the installation. Gallery-goers were amazed by the artwork, and opening night even featured a fashion show. Congratulations also to **Karen Howsol** on her retirement. From chalkboards to canvases to Art Exposed, she has certainly left her artistic mark—now it's time for her to paint the town!

Congratulations to **Ann McGuire**, Director of Communications and Marketing for the City of Shaker Heights, on her retirement. Beginning July 1, she will become the editor and publisher of her own life story, and her only communications crisis may be deciding between coffee or tea each morning.

Shaker residents and longtime family friends **Melody Chu**, author of *Mathey Girls*, and **Margaret Wong**, author of *The Immigrant's Way*, spoke at Shaker Library in May about writing, friendship, identity, and culture. The program was presented by Shaker Historical Society and Shaker Library as part of the America250 celebration of Ohio Arts, Culture & Literature and in recognition of Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month.

Shaker Arts Council, under the leadership of **André Taylor**, is offering more creative evenings through its



Stacie Anderson, Karen Howsol, and Kris Walter worked on the Shaker Library's "Art Exposed" exhibit



Jewelry made for the "Art Exposed" exhibit



Authors Margaret Wong and Melody Chu. Photo courtesy of Melody Chu.

**Heart of the Arts** series. The series begins June 19 and 20 with **Ballet Under the Stars** that features free ballet classes at 6 p.m. for youth ages 3-12, followed by a performance by **Ohio Contemporary Ballet**. The studio is located in The Dealership at 3558 Lee Road. BYOLC—Bring Your Own Lawn Chair—to ensure a seat for the performances. *Tickets available through Eventbrite at [bit.ly/BalletUndertheStars](http://bit.ly/BalletUndertheStars).*

The series continues Thursday, July 30, from 6:30-8:30 p.m. at **Loganberry Books** with "An Evening of Poetry" featuring **Donald King**, author of *I Never Rhymed for My Father*. The evening includes opening performances by poets **Vision** and **Linnette E. Lawson**. The Heart of the Arts series is supported in part by residents of Cuyahoga County through a public grant from Cuyahoga Arts & Culture.

If nature is your passion, be sure to check out the **Nature Center at Shaker Lakes'** Native Perennial Homegrown Sale from 11 a.m.-3 p.m. on June 6. Shop for native plants and shrubs donated by local gardeners, including coneflower, mountain mint, blue-eyed grass, ironweed, honeysuckle, spicebush, swamp rose, and more. *To donate plants, email [timothykalan@sbcglobal.net](mailto:timothykalan@sbcglobal.net).*

After transplanting your new

additions, join the Shaker Historical Society and the Doan Brook Watershed Partnership on June 13 for a hike through the **Doan Brook Gorge** to learn about the ecology and history of this unique area. The hike is presented as part of the America250-Ohio celebration of Ohio Outdoors: Exploring Ohio's Natural Resources.

Get ready for **Larchmere's Rock the Blocks Family Day** from 12-5 p.m. on Sunday, June 7. The annual celebration for children and families will feature activities throughout the boulevard, including food trucks, an ice cream social, a talent show, and more—all free.

This summer, turn the page on boredom and begin a new chapter. These local opportunities promise happy endings and a few plot twists along the way. Shaker Library and the Cleveland Association of Black Storytellers will present a **Toni Morrison Community Read-Out celebrating "Song of Solomon"** from 6:30-8 p.m. on Thursday, June 11. Part of "Ohio Celebrates Toni Morrison," the event invites readers to gather for shared readings, live performances, conversation, and refreshments while exploring the novel's enduring themes.

Shaker Library also invites readers

to join its **Summer Reading Program**. Read, record your books, and win prizes. Then attend the **Mid-Point Reading Party** featuring a magical performance by **Tada the Magician** from 3:30-5:30 p.m. on Thursday, July 16. And if you think reading programs are only for children, think again. Adult Reading Bingo offers grown-up readers a fun way to track books, celebrate reading adventures, and win prizes. Pick up a bingo card at the library or participate online.

Ohio Goes to the Movies™ is an unprecedented statewide celebration showcasing Ohioans in front of and behind the camera—actors, directors, writers, composers—as well as Ohio locations and stories. A signature event of America250-Ohio, the program runs through October 2026. Catch featured films at **Atlas Cinemas** at Shaker Square, then grab a bite nearby at **Sazani Oceana**, a contemporary seafood restaurant in the former EDWINS Too space.

Be sure to shop the **North Union Farmers Market** on Saturday mornings at Shaker Square and keep your ears open for me.

## Community picnic planned to connect neighborhoods with a shared history

*Continued from page 4*

on ambitious joint redevelopment plans. They aim to reimagine the Lee Road commercial corridor roughly from Miles Avenue north to Chagrin Boulevard. To quote the Shaker Heights city website, the goal of the project, titled the Lee Road Action Plan, is to create a more "attractive, walkable, bikeable and transit-friendly" area.

Treleven sees this new reparative vision as inextricably linked to local history with all of its vagaries. "The future is history," she said. Therefore, shared history will be a key theme of the planned picnic. Not only is the Shaker Historical Society

The two neighborhoods also are working together on ambitious joint redevelopment plans.

setting up the event but funding will come from Ohio History Connection, the statewide historical society. Some of the activities and exhibits will reference local history. And America 250-Ohio, a group established to celebrate this summer's anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, is partnering with the Shaker Historical Society in hosting the picnic.

Local organizer Charesha Barrett, of the Lee-Harvard Memorial Project, pointed to the longstanding connections between her neighborhood and Shaker Heights rather than the differences. "They both are part of historic Warrensville Township," she pointed out. "We're the same people."



The Lee Road Action Plan envisions a redevelopment of the Lee Road commercial corridor south of Chagrin Boulevard. Shown is an artist's rendering of potential street-level features. Details are available on the City of Shaker Heights website, [shakerheightsoh.gov](http://shakerheightsoh.gov). Rendering courtesy of WSP.



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## Larchmere PorchFest

# 30 bands take the stage on 30 porches

By Kevin McLaughlin

### 18th Larchmere PorchFest set for June 13

This summer, Larchmere will put on a little concert. Or, more accurately, 30 of them in one day.

Front porches become stages. Side yards fill with folding chairs. A map—part guide, part invitation—sends people walking the neighborhood to seek out the sounds. By late afternoon, you may have heard a folk trio under a shade tree, a brass band warming up on a side street, and a poet reading beside a storefront. No tickets. No gates. Just a neighborhood music festival open to all.

That is the idea behind Larchmere PorchFest, now in its 18th year, and set to return on Saturday, June 13, from 1-10 p.m.

"It's a free one-day music festival," Dawn Arrington said in a recent interview. "And when we say free, we mean free."

Arrington, President of the PorchFest board and Fundraising & Finance Committee Chair—though she is quick to shift attention away from titles—describes the event as "very grassroots," built and sustained by residents who volunteer their time—organizing porches, booking artists, knocking on doors, and, on the day itself, counting crowds and handing out maps.

### A neighborhood idea, scaled carefully

Larchmere PorchFest began, as many good things do, with a borrowed idea and a small gathering. In 2008, a few neighborhood residents returned from Ithaca PorchFest with a notion: why not try this at home? They met around a backyard fire pit and sketched out a plan—modest at first, about twenty bands and a shoestring budget.

The bones of that plan remain. Today's version still centers on "30 bands on 30 porches," as the organizers put it, with after-parties extending into the evening. In recent years, that number has held steady—about 30 acts across the neighborhood, not including the late-night sets organized separately by nearby venues.

What has changed is the scale of coordination. Performances run in overlapping 45-minute sets through the afternoon, allowing listeners to choose their own route—to linger or move on. The day begins with a single kickoff set at 1 p.m., builds into multiple simultaneous performances, then narrows again toward two finale acts in the early evening, before after-parties take over.

At any given moment, five or six performances may be happening at once—enough that even organizers can only sample the day in pieces.

"It's a lot of moving pieces," Arrington said, with a note of understatement.

Mike Bailey, a volunteer board member and head of PorchFest's music committee, came to the festival as a neighbor. He and his wife, Mariah Salhani, moved to Larchmere in 2019, began volunteering soon after, and hosted a band during the scaled-down "Tiny PorchFest" years of the pandemic. When the organization rebuilt for a full return in 2022, both joined the board.

### What you'll hear

PorchFest's range is part of its appeal. You might hear folk, Americana, jazz, blues, rock, hip-hop, or R&B in the span of an hour. The organizers make a point of avoiding repetition — no clusters of similar bands in a single time slot, or repeat acts from one year to the next. Variety is the spice of this festival.

And there's an emphasis on original music. "We don't really do cover bands," Arrington said. "This is original art."

The mix is shaped in part by who applies. Bailey said the festival reviewed



Hello! 3D headline this year's Larchmere PorchFest.



Jinari Kemet & The Black Jackets headline this year's Larchmere PorchFest.

roughly 120 band submissions this year for about 30 available spots, selecting a lineup that balances established local acts with newer groups still building an audience.

For 2026, two headlining acts anchor the evening sets: Hello! 3D, and Jinari Kemet & The Black Jackets. Their performances, scheduled after the afternoon rounds, will close a section of the street—a signal that the day's wandering has given way to gathering.

### The quiet work behind the scenes

What visitors see is the easy part. What they don't see is the infrastructure: permits, insurance, safety plans, coordination with the cities of Cleveland and Shaker Heights, and the steady logistics of staging dozens of small concerts at once.

"There's a lot of bureaucracy," Arrington said, describing the planning process. "A lot of logistics."

On the day itself, that work becomes visible in motion. Bailey spends much of the afternoon moving through the neighborhood by bike, checking on performers and making sure each porch stays on schedule.

There is also the matter of cost. Like most festivals, PorchFest has felt the rise in prices—for security, equipment, rentals, even basics like portable restrooms. Grants from groups such as Cuyahoga Arts & Culture, the Cleveland Foundation, and St. Luke's Foundation help cover those expenses, alongside individual donations and on-site fundraising like the beer garden.

One recent shift has been a renewed focus on artist pay. In the past few years, PorchFest adopted a sliding scale based on band size — a small adjustment on paper, but one that reflects a larger principle. Bailey said compensation now increases with the number of musicians in a group, rather than a flat fee, bringing the festival closer in line with other local events.

"We can't say that exposure is enough," Arrington said.

### A festival built on trust

If PorchFest has a mission, it is less a slogan than a set of habits: inviting neighbors in, supporting local artists, and letting the community shape the experience as it goes.

Arrington came to it that way herself—first as a visitor, unsure whether the event was meant for her, then as a volunteer, and finally as an organizer. The through line, she said, is trust.

"Trust and invitation and welcome are a process," she said.

That process shows up in small decisions. Volunteers follow up with residents who don't use online sign-ups. Organizers adjust sound levels when a neighbor complains. Bands are asked to keep performances family-friendly without being policed. Feedback comes not from formal surveys so much as from conversation—on the street, online, or in the weeks after.

Success, in that sense, is hard to predict or quantify. Attendance matters, as do funds raised. "And nice weather helps," said Bailey.

But the more telling signs are informal: a passerby who stays for a set, a visitor who signs up to volunteer the next year, a neighbor who feels the event is happening with them, not to them. Organizers do keep count—volunteers estimate crowd sizes at individual performances for reporting and grants, Bailey said. But the feel of the thing resists a tally.

### Come on out

On June 13, the map will go out—printed, shared online, or passed hand to hand. From there, the day belongs to whoever shows up.

"You can walk up on any concert," Arrington said. "That's the beauty of it."

In a city that often organizes its culture behind doors and ticket lines, PorchFest offers another model: music carried into the open, and a neighborhood willing to host it.

Housing

# Online auction ends Steiner foreclosure action

By Meg Weingart

A high-stakes auction for 15 distressed apartment buildings near Shaker Square concluded on April 22, with a \$5.5 million top bid, despite aggressive efforts by City of Cleveland officials, and neighborhood advocates, to halt the sale.

The buildings, totaling 308 apartment units scattered in the North and South Moreland corridor, went into mortgage foreclosure in federal court in September 2024. Fannie Mae held \$22

million in bad debt on the portfolio. The historic properties deteriorated under former owner Mendel Steiner (who died in early 2025). Currently, only 10% of the units are occupied and all are riddled with code violations.

The City of Cleveland, led by Mayor Justin Bibb's administration, attempted to block the auction to prevent the properties from being sold to another irresponsible investor. They filed a civil nuisance lawsuit, while attempting to intervene in the foreclosure litigation and threatening to

condemn two of the vacant buildings.

Fannie Mae resisted, arguing the city was overstepping its authority. Ultimately, a court-appointed special master ruled that the auction could proceed.

Cleveland's Director of Building and Housing, Sally Martin O'Toole, stated the city will perform a "needs assessment" and aggressively enforce building codes once the new owner takes control.

Local neighborhood advocate Morelands Group expressed deep

disappointment that Fannie Mae resorted to disposing of the portfolio through auction, instead of working with the city on a local solution, fearing that prioritizing debt recovery over local stewardship would lead to another cycle of neglect and decay for the neighborhood.

As of May 5, the identity of the winning bidder had not yet been disclosed. The new owner essentially "steps into the lender's shoes," gaining the right to finish the foreclosure and take ownership.

Larchmere Business

# Strongman Hite opens Misfit Wellness

By Michael E. Bennett

Fresh from competing at the vaunted Arnold Sports Festival in Columbus, Justin Hite offers strength coaching at his new Misfit Wellness training center in the Larchmere neighborhood. He describes it as a welcoming space for anyone who wants to improve mind and body connection through strength training.

"I enjoy helping someone become the best version of themselves," said Hite. "That can be someone who is beginning with little fitness experience to those who want to engage with fitness at higher levels."

Hite's own "higher level" of fitness culminated March 7, when he competed in the Arnold Masters Strongman World Championship segment of the sports festival.

He came in last in his division — but, as he sees it, that still means he's in the top 20 in the world. Besides, he said, just having qualified for the event showed he was among the strongest in the country.



Misfit Wellness opened on Larchmere Boulevard this spring.

"It proved that I can show up when I set my mind to something. That's an important part of what I want to do with clients — customize strength training to what they want to be capable of doing," Hite said.

Hite, 41, chose the gym's name because he was a self-proclaimed misfit in his earlier years — a non-athletic punk rocker. He didn't get into strength training until after seeing a documentary in 2017. He started competing, then started training a few friends in his garage-turned-gym

during the COVID shutdown.

This past February, Hite celebrated a soft opening of his storefront business (misfitwellness.org) in the former Lotus Blossom Candle Shop at 12617 Larchmere Blvd.

"Misfit is a space for people to feel at home in the gym and feel like they have a community," said Hite, referencing the positive psychology approach he takes. He is certified in trauma-informed coaching by the International Society of Holistic Counsellors and Coaches, and is a National Council of Health and Fitness-certified strength coach.

For now, the gym is a side gig to Hite's full-time job as an IT Solutions Architect for the Cleveland Clinic. He also spends his time with his wife, raising three



Photo courtesy of Misfit Wellness

Justin Hite

children [nearby] in Cleveland Heights. "We are excited to be in the neighborhood, and to have the opportunity to bring our gym culture and training philosophy to more people," said Hite. "If people are interested in getting stronger but haven't felt comfortable in traditional fitness spaces, Misfit Wellness may be the right fit." Reprinted by permission from the Heights Observer, May 2026 issue.



## Editor's Notebook

Story and photos by Andrea C. Turner

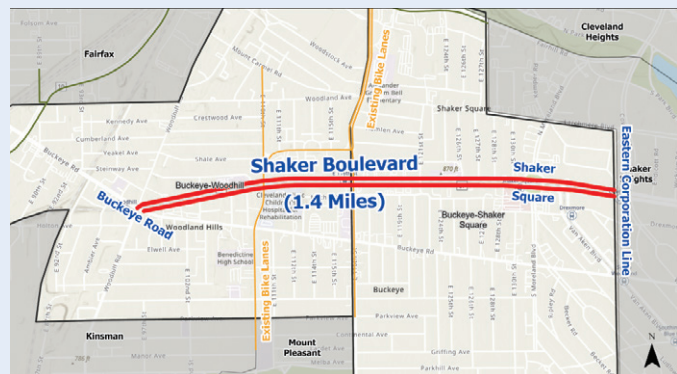
Continued on back cover

### Share Your Thoughts in Shaker Boulevard Safety Survey

The City of Cleveland plans to make changes to Shaker Blvd. between Woodhill Road and Cormere Avenue to address traffic safety concerns and improve the condition of the roadway.

The City is asking residents to share their thoughts by taking an online survey. (Scan the QR Code at right.) Share your input on safety and improvements along Shaker Blvd.

Over 50% of vehicles on Shaker Blvd. are traveling over the speed limit. Let's create a street that's safer for everyone who lives, works, shops, and goes to school along this route. Rest assured, there are no plans to close the busy thoroughfare.



This project aligns with the city's "Vision Zero" commitment to end crashes that result in fatal and serious injuries. There were 150 crashes on this section of Shaker Blvd. between 2021-25, with three of those crashes causing serious, life-changing injuries.

Shaker Blvd. is also on the city's bikeway vision network. Learn more about it online at bit.ly/ClevelandMoves.

Help us make a safer

## SHAKER BOULEVARD



Over 50% of vehicles on Shaker Blvd are travelling over the speed limit.



### TAKE THE PROJECT SURVEY!



Scan the QR Code or visit the website below to take the survey, submit a comment & learn more.

The City of Cleveland is making changes to Shaker Boulevard between Woodhill Road and Cormere Avenue to address traffic safety concerns and improve the condition of the roadway. We're working to create a street that's safer for everyone who lives, works, shops, and goes to school on Shaker Blvd.

[clevelandohio.gov/transportation-mobility/shaker](http://clevelandohio.gov/transportation-mobility/shaker)



## *Burning River Entertainment Group Exits Larchmere*

"It has been wonderful being a part of the Larchmere business community for the last seven years," said Gene Natale, Jr., Owner and Founder of Burning River Entertainment Group—formerly located at 12631 Larchmere Blvd. The emcee/DJ entertainment company relocated its offices to 10 Alpha Park in Highland Heights in May. Says Natale, "We do hope for success for all of the businesses and perhaps our paths will cross again in the future."

## *New Officers Elected to Larchmere Community Association (LCA)*

In April, the non-profit 501(c)(4) volunteer organization elected the following officers for 2026-27:

- President:** *Krista Cabrera*
- 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President:** *Andrew Guggenheim*
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President:** *Kenya Love*
- Secretary:** *Bluu Smith*
- Treasurer:** *Susan Price*

Officers are elected for one-year terms. Kenya Love and Bluu Smith are new board members. Interested in becoming an LCA member? Membership dues are \$15/year. Mail check to: Larchmere Community Association at Fairhill Partners, 12200 Fairhill Road, Cleveland, OH 44120. *To pay by card, go to: [bit.ly/LCA\\_Membership](https://bit.ly/LCA_Membership). Questions? E-mail [larchmerecommunity@gmail.com](mailto:larchmerecommunity@gmail.com).*



*The Larchmere Community Association held its annual plant sale at Our Lady of Peace Catholic Church on May 9.*

## *Join the Conversation with Morelands Group*

The Morelands Group invites tenants, other neighbors, and community partners to join in strengthening the apartment corridor around Shaker Square. Since 2021, the Morelands Group has connected with tenants across more than 80 apartment buildings in Greater Buckeye, including the North and South Moreland, Shaker Boulevard, and Van Aken apartment corridors. The group focuses on improving building conditions, strengthening tenant voices, supporting clean-ups and beautification, and enhancing neighborhood safety. Community participation is central to this work—and attending a meeting is a great way to learn more and get involved. Meetings are held on the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays of each month at 9:30 a.m. at the Shaker Square Welcome Center (SE Quadrant), located next to Captain Tony's Pizza. These gatherings provide updates on neighborhood issues, opportunities to connect, and a space to share concerns and ideas. All are welcome—whether you are a tenant, property owner, or simply interested in contributing to this effort. To learn more or join the email list, go to [morelandsgroup.org](https://morelandsgroup.org), email [info@morelandsgroup.org](mailto:info@morelandsgroup.org), or call 216.242.4046. Join a meeting—and be part of the work shaping our community!



## *City Ballet of Cleveland Launches Stars*

You never know if the next ballet star may have been trained right here in Shaker Square. City Ballet of Cleveland hosted its 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Sips & Nibbles fundraiser on April 11, for 100 guests at their studios in Shaker Square.



*City Ballet of Cleveland dancers prepare to perform in their Shaker Square studios*



*Adrienne Chan*



*A spring bounty was provided courtesy of LaShon's Catering*

A former student of Cleveland City Dance and 2025 graduate of Harvard University, Adrienne Chan, returned home from a burgeoning career in NYC to choreograph for the current pre-professional dance company members of City Ballet of Cleveland. Chan now dances with the Brooklyn Ballet.

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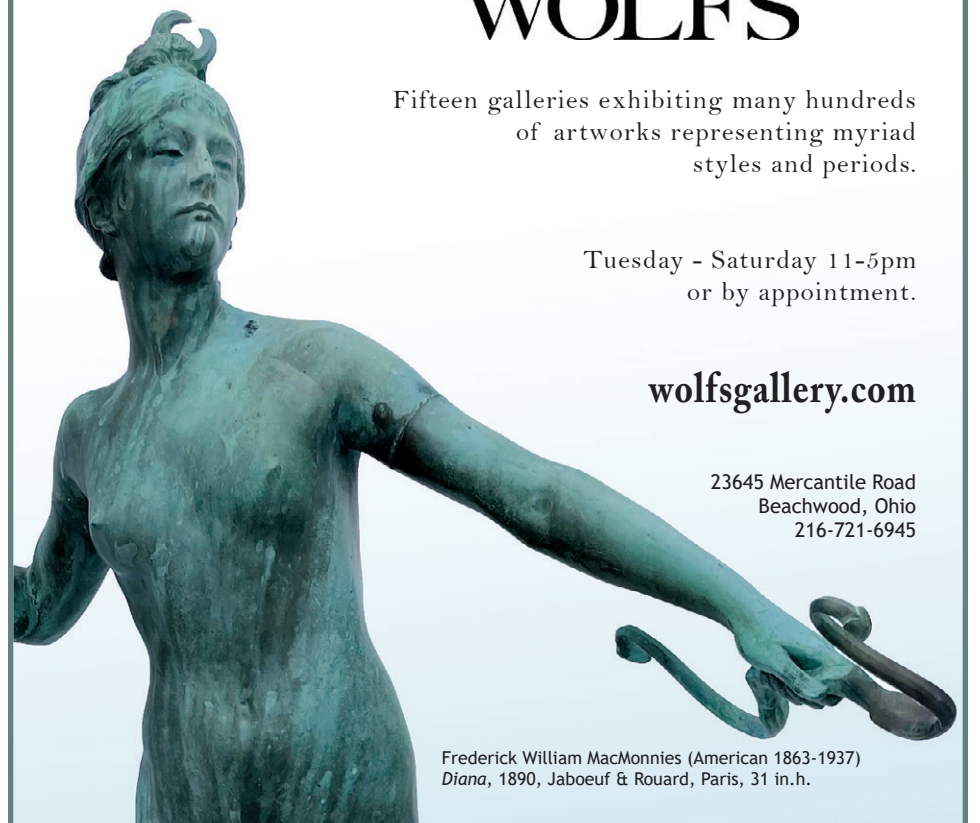
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