

FREE

# The WEDGE

June/July 2024 | Vol. 46, No. 3

Official Newspaper of the South Wedge Since 1982  
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## Clean Sweep 2024



Two groups of volunteers sponsored by the South Wedge Planning Committee spent part of a Saturday morning cleaning up parts of the South Wedge during the city's annual Clean Sweep, hosted on May 4. Workers filled five garbage bags (and made several large piles of debris) while cleaning up trash and overgrowth around the top of South Avenue — the gateway to the Wedge — including underneath I-490 and on expressway berms. "This one is quite a quandary since some of the street ramps are state responsibility, some city, so no one cleans the berm," volunteer coordinator Lisa Reagan said. Top photo: Volunteers work near an expressway ramp. Bottom photo: A separate group removed invasive swallow-wort (roots and all), replacing it with mulch, along a portion of the Genesee Riverway Trail. South Wedge residents Milli Piccione and Cass Fino Radin helped with volunteer coordination. Clean Sweep was first held in 2006. (Photos by Lisa Reagan.)

## CITY UNVEILS 2024-25 BUDGET AND TAX RATE

Mayor Malik Evans and City Council in May announced a city-wide residential property-tax rate decrease of 37.7%, from \$17.84 to \$11.11 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation. The new rate includes a \$4.06 city property-tax rate and \$7.05 city school-tax rate.

The mayor proposed keeping the tax levy flat (achieved due to increases in property assessments) for the third straight year. According to the city, residential property owners seeing a 60% or lower increase in their assessed value will realize a decrease in total property taxes. Property owners experiencing a higher than 60% increase in value might see a hike in taxes.

"As we have promised from the start, the increase in property values across the city is a good thing for our residents, business owners and Rochester as a whole," Evans said. "We

are experiencing increased property values, an historic decrease in our property tax rate and an increase in available tax credits from New York State."



Mayor Malik Evans

The city's \$697 million 2024-25 fiscal-year budget proposal was unveiled May 10. It is 1.4% higher than the current budget.

City Council members, including Mary Lupien (D-East District), have scheduled a second public meeting on the reassessment process. It will be held at 6 p.m. June 4 in City Council Chambers, 30 Church St.▲

Michael Saffran  
msaffran@swpc.org

## Rochester is 10th in U.S. for Floral-inspired Events

Despite hosting annual events such as the recently concluded and internationally known Lilac Festival, in Highland Park, and the Maplewood Rose Festival, Rochester ranks only 99th, out of 500 U.S. cities, among top locales for local flowers, according to a recent study.

Cities were judged on factors including access to flower shops and delivery, vendor quality, local demand, consumer ratings, number of flower festivals/shows and other measures.

Larger cities, including top-ranked New York City, Miami and San Francisco, scored high in access to delivery services and flower shops.

Although it just made it into the top 100 overall, the Flower City fared better in the ac-

tivities category: Rochester ranks as the 10th best American city based on floral-related events (such as festivals and shows).

According to the study, up to 80% of the cut flowers purchased in the United States are imported from other countries, such as Colombia, Ecuador, Kenya and the Netherlands.

"The easiest way to find the most local, fresh flowers is to frequent farmers markets," Melinda Knuth, assistant professor of horticultural science at North Carolina State University, said.

San Diego-based Lawn Love conducted the survey.▲

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## Farmers Market Ready for New Season

The annual South Wedge Farmers Market is back for summer, starting June 13.

The market will be open 4–7 p.m. Thursdays (through Sept. 12) in the Odd Fellows Lodge parking lot, 357 Gregory St.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program — commonly called SNAP — benefits are accepted.

The market is organized and sponsored by the South Wedge Planning Committee, with support from RG&E. For more information, go to swfm.org or email info@swpc.org.

### Annual South Wedge Fest planning continues

Organizers continue to plan for this summer's third annual South Wedge Festival, which will be held 11 a.m.–6 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 17.

The free event will feature music, food trucks and vendors on South Avenue between

Averill Avenue and Gregory Street. It kicks off with a pet parade from Marie Daley Park to the South Avenue stage.

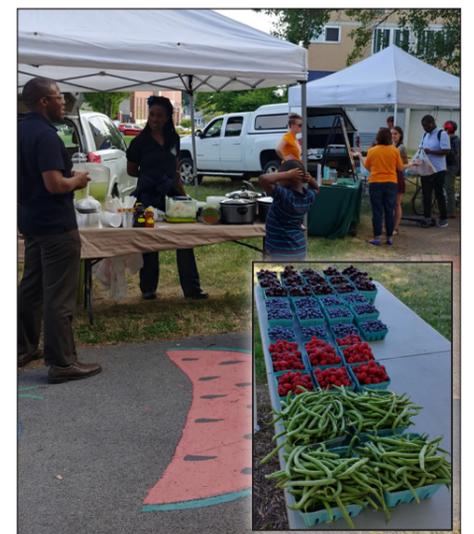
The line up of music acts will be announced at a later date.

Vendors, sponsors and volunteers are still sought. Contact Glynis Valenti at gvalenti@swpc.org for information or an application.

Last year's fest drew an estimated 3,000 attendees. In addition to benefiting the quality of life in the South Wedge through a fun event, proceeds from the festival also support other South Wedge Planning Committee initiatives, including the Farmers Market, community gardens and more.

For more information, go to swpc.org and follow South Wedge Planning Committee on social media.▲

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Above (and inset): Scenes from a past South Wedge Farmers Market.

South Wedge Planning Committee  
224 Mt. Hope Ave.  
Rochester, NY 14620

The WEDGE Gets Read!

# In Brief

## Bridge work begins

Work began May 13 on a \$5.3 million preventative-maintenance painting project of Rochester's iconic Frederick Douglass-Susan B. Anthony Memorial Bridge. Traffic in both directions will stay open throughout the project (expected to be completed by fall 2025), with most work during nighttime hours to minimize impact. There will be short-term ramp closures and pedestrian detours. The first major upgrade to the span since it opened to traffic in 2007, the project is partially funded by the federal government's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

"This bridge improvement will complement our ROC the Riverway projects along the riverway as we continue to create a safe, equitable and prosperous city that inspires hope and delivers opportunity for everyone," Mayor Malik Evans said.

## New MCC scholarship

City Council Vice President LaShay Harris (D-South District) on May 22 announced City Council funding for the Suki Regoni Memorial Paramedic Scholarship, to be granted to students pursuing a paramedic degree or certification at Monroe Community College. An annual \$1,500 scholarship will be awarded to a student each of the next four years, with preference given to applicants living in certain ZIP codes (including 14620).

Regoni, who died in 1993, was for years a National Ambulance paramedic and Mount Morris, Livingston County, ambulance volunteer. "Suki's legacy inspired me to become the paramedic and educator I am today," Harris said.

For more information, go to [monroecc.edu/go/scholarships](http://monroecc.edu/go/scholarships).

## Find healthy grocers

In a May 1 City Hall announcement, Mayor Malik Evans, City Council members and local store owners launched the city's Healthy ROC Grocer program. As part of the initiative, the city provides qualifying stores with free in-store signage, point-of-sale materials and an advertising campaign and website, with a goal of increasing awareness of city-neighborhood small grocers offering nutritious foods. Currently, two dozen stores city-wide are participating, including in the South Wedge and nearby: Abundance Food Co-op, 571 South Ave.; Highland Market, 830 South Ave.; 999 Market, 709 S. Clinton Ave.; and Alice's Market, 1477 South Ave. For the complete list, go to [cityofrochester.gov/healthygrocer](http://cityofrochester.gov/healthygrocer).

## Job-search help

The state Department of Civil Service in May announced the launch of the New York Hiring for Emergency Limited Placement Statewide (or NY HELPS) program. The temporary initiative aims to help fill thousands of vacancies by streamlining the appointment process and allowing state agencies to hire permanent employees without examinations. To view job postings, go to [statejobs.ny.gov](http://statejobs.ny.gov).

The fourth annual series of ROC the Block Community Employment Fairs, featuring about 80 employers, will be held 11 a.m.-2 p.m. on four Wednesdays between June 12 and Sept. 25 at various locations. For more information, go to [cityofrochester.gov/workforce-development](http://cityofrochester.gov/workforce-development).

## RPD gets grant funds

New York state police agencies, 378 in total, will split more than \$127 million in law-enforcement technology grants from the state Division of Criminal Justice Services. Among the recipients, the Rochester Police Department will receive \$10 million and the county Sheriff's Office will get \$11.7 million. According to a news release, grants will support the purchase of computer-aided dispatch systems, gunshot-detection devices, license-plate readers, unmanned aerial vehicles, and mobile- and fixed-camera systems.

## City, RCSD make appointments

Harriet Fisher has been named the city's chief technology officer, effective June 1. Previously director of the city's Project Management Office, Fisher has worked for the city since 1998. A Rochester City School District and SUNY Brockport graduate, she replaces William Boudreaux, who left for an out-of-state position.

Rochester City School District Deputy Superintendent Demario Strickland, 39, on May 23 was named interim superintendent, effective July 1. Strickland, who has been with RCSD since 2021 and in his current position since March 2023, will succeed Carmine Peluso, who is leaving to become superintendent of the Churchville-Chili Central School District.

## St. Joe's fundraiser

St. Joseph's Neighborhood Center's 30th anniversary tasting and auction, "Rooted in Community," will be hosted at 5:30 p.m. June 5 at Temple B'rith Kodesh, 2131 Elmwood Ave. The organization's only fundraiser supports providing healthcare to the uninsured and under-insured in the community. For more information, go to [sjncenter.org/annual-event](http://sjncenter.org/annual-event).

## Highland Park fests

Writers & Books and Ampersand Books, 740 University Ave., will host Poetry in the (Highland Park) Bowl, featuring poets and musicians, June 12-14. The event will be ASL-interpreted, and attendees are encouraged to bring blankets or lawn chairs. In case of rain, activities will move from Highland Bowl to Asbury First United Methodist Church, 1050 East Ave. The event is sponsored by Highland Park Conservancy and RIT's National Technical Institute for the Deaf Dyer Arts Center. For more information, go to [wab.org/poetry-in-the-highland-park-bowl](http://wab.org/poetry-in-the-highland-park-bowl).

Rochester's annual Pride Festival will be held 11 a.m.-6 p.m. July 20 in Beikirch Park, Highland Park, beginning with a parade starting at the intersection of South Avenue and Science Parkway. There will be live music, games, vendors, food, wine and beer. Admission is \$5. For more information, go to [rochesterpride.com](http://rochesterpride.com).

## City music events

Rochester's Bands on the Bricks opens at 5:30 p.m. July 5 at the Public Market, 280 N. Union St. It continues every Friday through Aug. 9. The city's Party in the Park concert series kicks off at 7 p.m. July 13 in Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Park, 353 Court St., and continues Thursdays through Aug. 15. General admission is \$7. Gates open at 6 p.m. Each series features different weekly performers.

## Nonprofit moves in

Rochester Ecology Partners has relocated to the South Wedge. In early March, the nonprofit organization moved into leased first-floor space at 224 Mt. Hope Ave. (sharing the building with owner, the South Wedge Planning Committee).

Rochester Ecology Partners offers nature-based experiential learning and activities for youth (in partnership with schools and community organizations) and community-building activities seeking to connect people to their environment. The organization previously was in the Montgomery Neighborhood Center, in Corn Hill, and SPOT cowork, 104 East Ave. For more information, go to [rochesterecologypartners.org](http://rochesterecologypartners.org).

## New library hours

The Central Library of Rochester and Monroe County (comprising the Rundel Memorial Library, 115 South Ave., and the Bausch & Lomb Public Library Building) announced modified hours: 9 a.m.-7 p.m. Monday through Thursday; 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Friday; and 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturdays (closed Sundays). ▲

Michael Saffran  
msaffran@swpc.org

**Assemblymember**  
**Harry B. Bronson**



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**Merriya Valleri**  
merriya@stuartsspices.com

**Candied Sweet Honey Bacon**

**D**id you know we here at Stuart’s Spices grind and blend everything right in the shop? It’s true! All of our blends are specialized recipes, carefully crafted by us over time, like little love letters to cooking. And while our Sweet Honey Rub has been around for years, this recipe is brand new! Why we didn’t think of candying bacon before is a mystery, but we can genuinely say this is the best bacon we’ve ever made. You can also use different types of bacon — turkey or seitan would work deliciously well, too!

**Ingredients:**

- 1 pound your favorite thick cut bacon (we recommend hickory smoked)
- 2 tablespoons Stuart’s Spices Sweet Honey Rub
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- Butter or olive oil for searing

**Instructions:**

Lay out bacon side by side with no overlap and sprinkle with Sweet Honey Rub. Next, sprinkle on brown sugar, then rub spices and sugar into the bacon.

In a large skillet, melt butter or olive oil on medium-high heat.

While bacon is cooking, season the up-right sides before flipping.

Once bacon is golden brown, flip to the other side and cook, making sure none of the slices stick to the pan.

Remove and transfer to a lightly oiled plate (to prevent sticking) and let rest for a few moments so the slices become jammy.

**Extra tip:**

How’d we do it? We served this bacon on a toasted onion roll with a sunny-side-up egg, sliced avocado and hot honey!

Then, the only thing left for you do to is: Enjoy!

*Long-time baker and amateur chef Merriya Valleri is a spice merchant and social-media manager at Stuart’s Spices, 754 S. Clinton Ave. In her spare time, she enjoys trying out new recipes, writing on rainy days and going for walks with her family.*



*The*  
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Jennifer Posey  
Robert Marvin

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Mitchell Dannenberg, John Dennis,  
Joe DiDonato, Cheryl Stevens

**Staff**

Glynis Valenti, executive director  
Bridget Portune, market manager  
Construction manager (position to be filled)

**The WEDGE Newspaper**

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The WEDGE Newspaper is published by the South Wedge Planning Committee, a non-profit community development organization. Its mission is to provide accurate coverage of community news and local people and places. Printed bimonthly (February/March, April/May, June/July, August/September, October/November and December/January), The WEDGE reaches a wide readership (print and online at swpc.org).

Send story ideas or news to: The WEDGE, 224 Mt. Hope Avenue, Rochester, NY 14620 or email to: thewedge@swpc.org. Advertising deadlines and rates are available online at swpc.org or by calling 585.256.1740, ext. 4.

**Statement**

*SWPC builds community in the South Wedge, encourages a full range of housing opportunities and promotes a diverse, historically significant, commercially sustainable urban village.*

**Join SWPC in Community Building**

The South Wedge Planning Committee (SWPC) invites you to help us make a difference in southeast Rochester by joining our board of directors or serving on a committee. Founded in 1978, SWPC, works as a conduit for federal or state repair grants that help keep people in their aging homes. It builds community through the South Wedge Farmers Market, South Wedge Victory Gardens on Hamilton and Cypress streets and The WEDGE newspaper that publishes six issues a year.

Your time, talent and commitment can help us to continue SWPC’s work. If interested, call 256-1740, ext. 4, or contact Executive Director Glynis Valenti at gvalenti@swpc.org or 224 Mt. Hope Ave., Rochester, NY 14620.

**South Wedge Planning Committee Meetings**

The community is invited to attend all SWPC meetings held at 224 Mt. Hope Ave. (Hamilton Street entrance)

**June/July Calendar**

SWPC Board 6 p.m. Wednesday  
June 19 and July 17

**Community Engagement (Neighbors & Block Clubs)**

5:30 p.m. Wednesday  
June 26 and July 24

For info, email:  
gvalenti@swpc.org

**Articles, columns and essays in The WEDGE do not reflect the views and/or opinions of the South Wedge Planning Committee.**

**Get The WEDGE!**

For 42 years, *The WEDGE* has chronicled the lives and times of the vibrant South Wedge neighborhood — and beyond.

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**WEDGE**  
GETS READ!

# Business & Neighborhoods

## BOOK-LAUNCH PARTY SET FOR JULY 28 AT CHESHIRE

Cheshire, resplendently renovated and relocated in Swillburg at 693 S. Clinton Ave., will host a book-launch party for local author Christine Green noon–3 p.m. July 28.

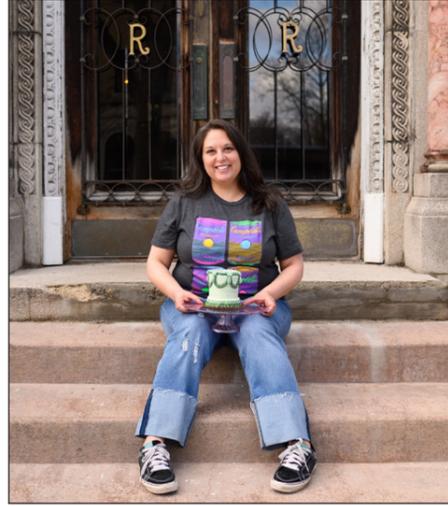
Green, managing editor of *585 Magazine*, *Kids Magazine* and *Upstate Gardeners' Journal*, will sell and sign her memoir, *Sweet Tooth*, during the event.

The San Jose, Calif., native holds a bachelor's degree in anthropology from UC Berkeley and an M.A. in anthropology from the College of William and Mary. Her essays, articles, poetry and creative nonfiction have appeared in several literary journals and magazines. She was also the founder and host of a popular reading salon, *Words on the Verge*.

"I didn't set out to write a memoir," Green said. "For many years I wrote short essays and poems. I'd write something and submit it to journals. Then they started to pile up."

During the pandemic, Green networked with

local writers, and one suggested "it was time to put them together."



Christine Green

"I'd began to send [the manuscript] out to publishers in 2020, and I'd get great feedback, but [they] would say 'no, not right now.'"

A writer friend told her to check out a local Small Press Book Fair, and from there Green began "Google hunting." She discovered that publisher Dan Varenka of Zoftig Press was taking proposals, and in fall 2023 he accepted her manuscript.

Varenka acts not only as publisher of *Sweet Tooth*, but he's also drawing artwork for the book's cover.

She describes her memoir as "a hybrid — a nonfiction collection of lyric essays and poetry about [my] life as a child, young adult and then mother of two."

*Sweet Tooth* will be available June 11 from Zoftig Press. To learn more, go to [zoftigpress.com](http://zoftigpress.com).

► Nancy O'Donnell Hale  
[nodonnell@swpc.org](mailto:nodonnell@swpc.org)

## Introducing: 'Book Notes' with Hipocampo Children's Books

Hello from Hipocampo Children's Books! We are excited to contribute to *The WEDGE*, the official newspaper of the South Wedge, and share our love of books with the community.

This column will always revolve around literature and books in some way. We think of books and literature as vehicles to help make sense of the world, teach new things, take us on adventures, take us out of our day-to-day; the range of ways that books affect us is vast.

Picture books for kids can be a complex mix of art, storytelling and teaching. We'd

like to share one of our favorite new releases about nature! Spring is here and we anticipate new life emerging after the end of a long winter. Even with a mild winter like this last one, the bursts of flowering trees, daffodils poking out of the dormant earth and tiny leaves unfurling are all exciting signs that the new season has begun. And it's a perfect time to teach young children about the wonders of nature.

To celebrate the natural world, Amy Hevron wrote and illustrated *Log Life* (Beach Lane Books, 2024). This picture book explores the complex ecosystem found in

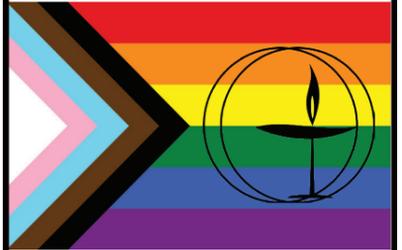
a fallen log and is fun and accessible for children. The delightful and colorful illustrations highlight the wildlife community that forms around a fallen log in the forest. Aptly called a "nurse log," the log itself is the caregiver for the community and helps keep the forest healthy.

One thing we love about this book is the mix of facts and whimsy. Hevron works in acrylic on wood, and each page could really be a piece of artwork unto itself. She has taken liberties with the plants, animals and fungi — some talking to each other — or  
"Book Notes," p. 8



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SOUTH WEDGE  
PLANNING COMMITTEE

# Neighborhoods



## Veterans Outreach Center Sets Events

Veterans Outreach Center, 447 South Ave., is sponsoring the following upcoming events:

In honor of Flag Day, various businesses in the Rochester region will be passing out American flags to the community June 13 to 16. If you see them out there, stop and say hello!

The 31st annual “Golf Fore Vets” will be hosted July 22 at Midvale Country Club in Penfield. All proceeds support critically-needed services for local veterans.

A 5-K walk/run, “Pound the Ground,” will be held Aug. 22 at Mendon Ponds Park.

For more details on all events, go to [veteransoutreachcenter.org/events](http://veteransoutreachcenter.org/events). ▲



Laura Heltz, Veterans Outreach Center executive director and a U.S. Army Veteran, greets guests May 30 at the opening of the Steve Preston Peer Connection Center.

## RiverWatch Cleanup



Volunteers from Genesee RiverWatch on April 13 cleaned debris from a portion of the Genesee River's east bank (in the area of Genesee Gateway Park in the South Wedge neighborhood). Workers collected years' worth of tires, wood pallets, a variety of plastics and other trash. Above, Steve Orr (left) and George Thomas work near the park's playground. Genesee RiverWatch was created in 2014 to improve the river's water quality. For more information, go to [geneseeriverwatch.org](http://geneseeriverwatch.org). (Photo by Mike Haugh.)



### Swillburg Shoutout

Mike Henry  
swillburg1@aol.com

## Friendships cultivated, area tidied during Clean Sweep, Day of Caring

I love spring in our fair city — this year's seemed early with especially fragrant and colorful flowering trees and bushes!

Celebrating this wonderful season, Swillburg neighbors participated May 4th in the annual city-wide Clean Sweep, held at the Bloom Garden — wonderfully adorned with beautifully blossomed lilac bushes — at Field Street and Monroe Avenue. Some 30 volunteers were led by neighbor Megan Critelli. Despite a drizzly forecast, the precipitation held off and it was a mild spring morning. Thanks to folks' hard work and the city's support (at one point we ran out of orange yard bags, but the city quickly delivered additional), we accomplished lots of raking and bagging of garbage and leaves and trimming and pruning of bushes and trees. It was a great collaboration and community effort. Besides refreshing the garden for planting, we also refreshed old acquaintances and cultivated new ones!

On May 23rd, as part of the United Way Day of Caring (something we've participated in for many years), several neighbors were joined by volunteers from the University of Rochester library staff to prepare Swillburg gardens for the growing season. A dozen or so volunteers weeded and trimmed the beautiful Labyrinth Garden, on Henrietta Street, and later moved to Otto Henderberg Square Park for lunch and to continue work there (weeding, clipping and raking). In both locations we've enhanced the beauty of our neighborhood. We were well-coordinated by Sarah Keyes, to whom we give a sincere shout-out of thanks! Gratitude also goes to Wegmans for its donation of delicious boxed lunches, and, of course, to the University of Rochester librarians for helping us again this year! How cool is Rochester: four local institutions working collaboratively to enhance urban beauty and community building!

Our Swillburg Neighbors Lunch Bunch events continue monthly. Being overjoyed to hear that Pat's Coffee Mug reopened, 11 of us gathered there in April and had lots of good cheer and food. In early May, the same number gathered at White Swans

Asia Cafe. If you're interested in attending, please email me and I'll include you in our announcements.

I reported in our prior column that we're organizing our annual picnic to be held noon-3:30 p.m. June 15th at Otto Henderberg Square Park. Please watch for announcements to be distributed door to door in couple of weeks. We're arranging to have live music, ice cream, barbecue, lots of Swillburg swag and games. Also, the fire department plans to come by for the kids to explore their trucks and the RPD Mounted Patrol Unit will join us as well.

Before closing, I want to mention that our friend George Ruiz is on the mend and has re-opened Georgie's Bakery on South Clinton Avenue. He and Liz are again offering their delicious platos de Puerto Rico and pastries. Stop in and enjoy their menu!

Thanks to *The WEDGE* for allowing space for this column! Happy final days of spring and enjoy the summer ahead! ▲

*Mike Henry, a retired Monroe County social worker, has lived in Swillburg for 32 years and been intermittently active with the Swillburg Neighborhood Association since 1993.*



From left, Dave Fergusson, Ameer Owen and Judy Hay at Clean Sweep on May 4. (Photo by Sara Cerame.)

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## K-9 explosive-detection training



The Rochester Police Department was one of more than two dozen New York state police agencies attending week-long canine explosive-detection training, April 29–May 3, in Oriskany. Two RPD canine teams participated in preparedness exercises, conducted by the state Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services and involving 54 law-enforcement canine teams, that allowed handlers and their canine partners to practice responding to a variety of real-world scenarios involving explosive devices. Above, State Trooper Kylie Black, with K-9 partner, Loni (a 3-year old Belgian Malinois), in training exercises.

# Viewpoints

## Readers' Forum: Writers Weigh in on Wedge Housing, QR-code Lots

### 'Aging in place' in South Wedge

Thank you to Lisa Reagan for addressing concerns of aging residents in the South Wedge's Naturally Occurring Retirement Community, or NORC (*The WEDGE*, April/May). In the summer of 1976, when my husband and I bought a small fixer-upper, we never thought that our efforts would lead to gentrification or pricing ourselves out of our own neighborhood.

Thirty years ago, we paid \$64,000 for an American Four Square and, adjusted for inflation, it would be worth \$142,000. We recently received a letter from a realtor to buy it for \$275,000. This year we downsized to another small house. In the first three months, fixing it has involved painters, roofers, and heating and insulation contractors. The costs have been surprising.

For me, aging in place involves good diet, exercise, naps, friends and staying plugged in by writing articles for BASWA's *The South Wedge Magazine* and my local history projects. I like walking to the branch library, the credit union, Abundance, Family Medicine and Highland Hospital. I enjoy walks in Highland Park, Mount Hope Cemetery and the Genesee Riverway Trail. As for taxes, I was brought up with "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's" and do not begrudge paying for city services.

I don't see a quick fix for the lack of living wages and high rents. I've watched some neighbors get priced out of our South Wedge NORC. Solutions to the need for affordable-housing units could be Habitat for Humanity duplexes so qualified owners could have a steady source of income, and tiny-house complexes.

*Rose O'Keefe, Gregory Street*

*A longtime South Wedge resident, O'Keefe and her husband, Bob Meadows, have lived in three Gregory Street houses (two 1860s cottages — one of them their current home — and a 1913 American Four Square). She is author of several history books, including Rochester's South Wedge (2005) and Southeast Rochester (2006). She was a contributing writer and, from 1996 to 2006, production editor of The WEDGE.*

### City's QR-code parking woes

I'm glad to see parts of Rochester, such as the South Wedge, still have plenty of free and limited-hour parking. But when pay-by-QR-code parking lots started popping

up around other parts of the city, and after seeing friends, fans and co-workers being bamboozled, but no one taking a stand, I decided to be the voice of reason.

On a weekly basis I witness people pay parking fees through a QR code, but still have their cars towed! Other people use the QR code and receive a scam alert on their phone — so they don't go forward with payment. In some cases, signs go unnoticed due to poor placement. For example, signage for a parking-lot entrance on Union Street is tucked behind some trees (a sign is seen only when driving by on Monroe Avenue).

Recently, a friend had three hours of parking time remaining (he sent me screenshots to prove it) and still had his car towed! He was forced to pay \$150 to get his car out of the impound. On weekends, people are charged more because impounds are closed, and to add to the problem the information on the signs often is incorrect, leaving victims confused about who to contact. It happens constantly.

QR-code parking lots have been hurting many nearby businesses, including the Bug Jar, Marshall Street Bar & Grill, The Owl House, Rella and Rocco and our newer neighbors, Nine Spot Brewing and Vinalia Urbana. Instead of paying to park, or parking on the street and walking to destinations, people are choosing to go to other venues with better parking situations.

I understand these lots are privately owned and they can do as they wish. But tow-truck companies and/or lot owners are taking advantage of patrons. Someone should be held accountable for the towing of vehicles belonging to people who have paid to park, and someone needs to make certain that tow-truck companies are not profiting off cars that never should have been towed to begin with.

I'm not opposed to reasonable paid parking, but I believe there is a missed opportunity for hiring lot attendants. There are people who are desperately searching for employment. This would be a more honest way manage lots with paid parking instead of taking advantage of people trying to patronize local businesses.

*Oz Osborne, Rochester*

*Osborne plays in the band Necrostalker, is a concert promoter and works security at the Bug Jar on Monroe Avenue.*



Mary Lupien

Rochester City Council, East District  
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## Budget Time: Taking a Closer Look at Rochester's Funding Priorities

I know I don't speak only for myself when I say I'm so relieved spring is finally here. The sun and new life we are seeing is the most amazing contrast to the cold and dormant winters. Spring is also the time each year where the mayor puts forth a plan to spend public money in the coming year. You can view the budget for yourself at [cityofrochester.gov/city-budget](http://cityofrochester.gov/city-budget) and watch City Council ask questions about it on our YouTube channel. There is still time to submit your own questions and offer feedback via email and in person at our June 13th Speak to Council meeting.

My focus when examining the budget is how well we are providing for the needs of our residents, especially in the areas of public safety and housing. I'm focusing this article on this year's budget's investments and disinvestments in the Community Response Model we started in 2021 with the Person in Crisis Team.

We've all had moments in our lives where we've needed support to navigate challenges and asked for help. Sometimes, challenges are so overwhelming that others seek help on our behalf. During these crises, the best outcomes for everyone involved are tied not just to the response in our moment of immediate need, but also to the experience and perspective of the people providing help.

This is the essence of community-based emergency response, where service is centered on the individual and providers have specific training designed to stabilize and provide care in a moment of crisis. This idea of communities providing focused crisis intervention has its roots dating back to pioneering projects like Pittsburgh's Freedom House ambulance service in the late 1960s.

Freedom House was born out of the urgent need for improved emergency medical services in Pittsburgh's predominantly Black communities. Recognizing a necessity for providing life-saving care and transportation for injured residents, Dr. Peter Safar, a critical care pioneer, collaborated with local leaders to establish an innovative ambulance service. The project trained community members as para-

medics. This initiative not only revolutionized emergency response in Pittsburgh and saved hundreds of lives, but also set a national standard for paramedic-training programs.

The success of the Freedom House program is a perfect demonstration of the transformative potential of community-driven care programs to meet unmet needs. Locally the Person in Crisis (or PIC) team was created to provide a law-enforcement alternative response to

**"We've all had moments in our lives where we've needed support to navigate challenges and asked for help."**

address mental and behavioral health crises occurring in the City of Rochester.

As a society, we have asked the police to be everything to everyone, all the time. We've placed an

unfair burden on them to address all of our social ills. I think we can all agree that we'd like the police to focus on violent crime and the issues that utilize their specific skill set to immediately neutralize threats and enforce the law. Alternate responder programs take the burden off our police force while providing a team of professionals who specialize in handling specific crises from a humanistic perspective, ensuring that people receive the right help at the right time, fostering a safer, more compassionate community.

### Reduced funding for PIC team

In 2021, Rochester formed the Person in Crisis team to send trained clinicians to respond to mental and behavioral health crises. The team has been successful in many ways and there is still room to grow to meet the needs of our residents. I am disappointed that in this year's budget, the Crisis Intervention Services department is being (incorrectly) "right sized" and there is a reduction of about five full-time equivalent employees, including their Peer Advocates.

Peer Advocates, with their lived experience, play a vital role, drawing from personal understanding to connect with individuals in crisis and help them navigate systems effectively. Calls for help like mental-health crises, substance-use issues, non-violent disputes, homelessness and welfare checks require compassionate, patient intervention and de-escalation.

*Lupien, p. 8*

The WEDGE invites readers to submit letters to the editor. Letters should be civil in tone, concise and to the point, timely and signed by the author.

Contact Michael Saffran, editor, at [msaffran@swpc.org](mailto:msaffran@swpc.org).



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## What services does the Rochester Outpatient Program offer?

- 1 Outpatient substance use services
- 2 Low Threshold Buprenorphine Program
- 3 Screening, assessment and diagnosis, including risk management
- 4 Health screening and collaborative care/referrals to primary care
- 5 Peer support, counseling services and family support services
- 6 Connections with other providers and systems

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# Perspectives



## Sparklin' in the Wedge

Michele H. Martell  
MHMartell@outlook.com

### Inspired by Rock Band Sister Hazel

*If you wanna be somebody else  
If you're tired of fighting battles, baby,  
with yourself  
If you wanna be somebody else  
Change your mind, yeah  
Change your mind, oh yeah, yeah...*

Sister Hazel

I love these lyrics by alternative-rock band Sister Hazel from the song, released in 2000, "Change Your Mind." As a music-lover of all genres, I first discovered this artist while living in Texas. Sister Hazel was formed in Gainesville, Fla., in 1993 and was named for Sister Hazel Williams, a local missionary who ran a homeless shelter.

On the day I'm writing this piece, I learned of a longtime friend's passing while I was on my way to visit her. Today, as this song popped up on my Alexa, I surmised that there was some synchronicity here, and I accepted it as a message to write on this topic.

Everyone can wake up some days with the emotions that may evoke, "Oh My God, get me through this day," or perhaps "Another day, bleh" or, more sadly, "Why am I even still here?" Every one of us can have these days and moments at sometime during life. It is during these days that we can strive to seek wisdom and strength for how to change the mind, which has the power to change the course of the entire day.

I think the best way to change our minds is to make the decision that we simply just want to change our minds, and then to be open to learn about ways to change it. It's not easy ... but just making that decision can make a difference, one day at a time. We are never too young or too old to change our minds. I had mentioned in a previous column about my 11-year-old self's library escapades to read Dale Carnegie and Norman Vincent Peale in efforts to find any way possible to change my mind, circumstances and life trajectory. Currently, I find myself returning daily to *Jesus Calling*, by Sarah Young. Regardless of your own personal beliefs that we each respectfully have, a daily reference to deep inspiration that speaks to you is transformative in changing the mind.

Just do it. The way to do it is plainly to decide to shift the mind, look for ways to create that change, and then implement them. It is progress and not perfection. When our environments and life history and circumstances are less than

positive, we are not powerless; we can change our minds, and that is where the sustainable power is. Along those same lines is changing our influences — letting go of what and who is taking away from our best selves, and spending more focus with those who lift us up. We still undeniably have the ability to change our own minds regardless of how those circumstances may or may not change.

**"The best way to change our minds is to make the decision that we simply just want to change our minds."**

We assuredly have the power to change our minds, and with that our lives and those who come after us are also changed.

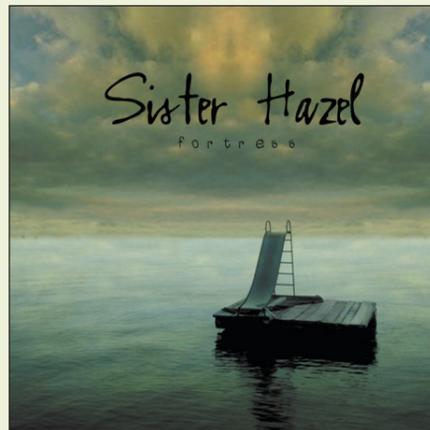
I lovingly dedicate this piece to my sparkling dear friend Barb, who is now physical-

ly gone but definitely never forgotten. Barb's cheerful spirit always had a way of uplifting others, and she undoubtedly had helped me to change my mind in a positive direction when I needed it. How I would love another moment with her.

I will conclude with these relevant Sister Hazel lyrics:

*Did you ever think there might be another way  
To just feel better, baby, just feel better about today...  
And yeah, you look much better  
Look much better when you glow ...  
We all go and seize the day  
What's your hurry  
What's your hurry anyway ...  
If you've had enough of all your tryin'  
Just give up the state of mind you're in. ▲*

Michele H. Martell (MBA Walsh College, Rochester, Mich.) works at Veterans Outreach Center and is an independent consultant with Mary Kay Cosmetics. She volunteers at Rochester Animal Services and enjoys her kids, rescue dogs and everything that sparkles.



Album cover from Sister Hazel's "Fortress."



## From the Editor's Desk

Michael Saffran  
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### Love for Writing, Reporting Stoked in H.S. English, Journalism Classes

In my previous column, I began sharing the story about how heading into last fall I became editor of *The WEDGE* — taking readers back to last May and my first unplanned, *providential* meeting with South Wedge Planning Committee Executive Director Glynis Valenti. But for more of the story about how I landed, seemingly "out of the blue" (or *serendipitously*), at 224 Mt. Hope Ave., we need to go back to earlier in 2023.

By the first months of last year, I already had plans to "semi-retire." If you've been paying attention to what's been happening in American culture since, say, early 2020 (gosh, what occurred then?), you already know that we live in turbulent times (to say the least). Working as I was at the time in higher education afforded me a "front-row seat," you could say, to some of the chaos (witnessed anew this spring in more recent campus unrest across the nation).

In fact, ready for change by mid-2022, I began exploring, in earnest, my "next chapter." Taking it to prayer (more about this later), I sought my "dream job" (probably involving *writing*: I touched on this "first love," originally discovered as a kid creating pretend radio newscasts, a couple columns ago).

My passion for writing was stoked in a freshman high-school English I class (shout-out to Mr. Musgrave, then at Brighton High School) and a separate journalism course (I still have the book, *Newswriting From Lead to "30,"* used in the class). The interest carried over into college and post-college (with increased focus on broadcast journalism). In a radio segment a few years ago, I explored possible origins for my love, from an early age, of journalism (listen at: [soundcloud.com/mike-saffran/commentary\\_031420/](https://soundcloud.com/mike-saffran/commentary_031420/)).

So, I always enjoyed writing and the excitement of news reporting. But it wasn't until graduate school (attended later in life) when

I realized something else. Taking a week's leave from my full-time job to finish my master's thesis (see at: [bit.ly/saffran-ms-thesis](https://bit.ly/saffran-ms-thesis)), upon my return I was greeted by co-workers with the usual question: "How was your vacation?" (Some didn't know it had been a "working vacation.")

I replied: "I didn't leave the house for an entire week, except to go to the mailbox once a day ... and I loved every minute of it!"

That was when I realized that writing from home was my "dream job."

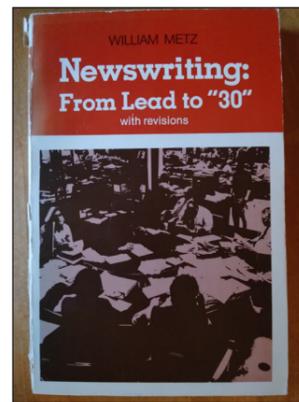
Some years later, if the pandemic (despite all its negative effects) taught us anything, it was that "WFH" — or "work from home" — was more viable (for certain jobs) than many people might've thought beforehand. So, by early 2023 it became my quest.

As mentioned, I took it to prayer (I'm Catholic, by the

way — there's a South Wedge connection to this that I'll share later). And now, some months later, I find my prayer was not only affirmatively answered (as I do get to write from home; in fact, it's where I'm writing this), but God did me one better in leading me to a wonderful neighborhood organization (with a noble mission), in a quaint, convenient building, just a short drive down the road from where I live (my work commute went from 45 minutes to under 10 — and I even got a nice little office).

So far, I've described events from around mid-2022 leading up to that *serendipitous* meeting, last May, that ultimately brought me to 224 Mt. Hope Ave. But the narrow road actually started a few years earlier. I'll share more about that in my next column. ▲

The *WEDGE* Editor Michael Saffran is a SUNY communication lecturer emeritus. Among the college-level subjects he has instructed are broadcast newswriting, media management, public-relations writing, and radio-and-audio-media production.



A wonderful book (that I still have) used in a high-school journalism class in 1981.

PART TWO



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Lupien (from p. 6)

While we address poverty and its impact on our community to reduce the likelihood of crisis in the future, we need to address the unmet needs in our community now. We should be expanding the peer-support program rather than cutting it; we require more teams, not fewer.

**Added funding for Community Responder Model**

I'm pleased to say that in this year's budget there is funding for recommendations of Community Responder Model study from the Law Enforcement Action Partnership (or LEAP). I worked across the aisle with former council member Jose Peo to advance United Christian Leadership Ministries' idea of a Public Safety Community Response Corps and successfully advocated for this study to examine our 911 call volume and advise us on how we might expand our community response to include other non-violent calls for service such as neighbor disputes, family trouble and noise complaints that would best be addressed through mediation and conflict resolution. This team could also respond to accidents and write reports, do proactive homeless outreach and connect people to housing and recovery resources.

Investing in community responder programs is not only imperative to improving public safety outcomes, but also an economically sound decision. Providing the right help at the right time, means that these programs reduce the need for more expensive, reactive measures. Early intervention and appropriate care lead to fewer hospitalizations, reduced incarceration rates and less strain on the judicial system. Furthermore, connecting individuals with necessary resources and services promotes long-term stability and well-being, benefiting the entire community.

I will continue to strongly advocate for investing in the PIC team and future community responders as public-safety professionals on par with fire, police and EMS counterparts. My vision entails unifying our community-responder teams as well as our violence-prevention credible messengers, another form of peer support, within a single department of Community Safety. This department would alleviate the burden on law enforcement, allowing them to focus on addressing violent crime and utilizing their specialized skill set. By adopting a public-health approach to community safety, we can provide holistic support that addresses people's needs before, during and after crises.

Before Council votes on the budget, it holds hearings to ask questions of each department about what they plan on spending in the coming year, and how they made use of funds in the last budget cycle. You can view these hearings on the Council's YouTube Channel, at youtube.com/user/RochesterCityCouncil. The full budget is available online at CityofRochester.gov/citybudget. There is still time to submit questions and offer feedback via email and in person at our June 13th Speak to Council meeting. I hope you will support these important public-safety initiatives.

If you or someone you know needs support now, call 911/211 for the PIC team and 988 to provide suicide-prevention services. You are not alone.▲

Mary Lupien serves on the Public Safety and People, Parks & Public Works committees. She is passionate about fighting poverty, institutional racism and climate change; and advocating for housing rights and improving the quality of life for all Rochesterians.

Columns, essays and letters in *The WEDGE* do not reflect the views and/or opinions of the South Wedge Planning Committee.

**Somewhere in the Wedge...**



Do you know where this is/was? (Email [thewedge@swpc.org](mailto:thewedge@swpc.org))

**April/May photo:**

Last issue's "Somewhere in the Wedge ..." showed 638-642 South Ave. — which today is home to Hipocampo Children's Books LLC, 638 South Ave.; FashionFitted, 642 South Ave.; and upstairs apartments. The building is owned by South Wedge Properties LLC, 268B Sanford St. According to an edifice marker, it was built in 1870.

In the photo (left), from 1982, the structure's first-floor business signage was for White TV and K Lee Strassner Refinisher/Furniture/Antiques (though a window indicates "Store For Rent").

"Before us, there was a tattoo shop in our building, and I think a convenience store at some time," Pamela Bailie, co-owner of Hipocampo, wrote in an email to The WEDGE.

"Henry [Padrón-Morales] and I imagine Frederick Douglass and Susan B. Anthony walking down the street right by our building. There must be so much history in here!"

Credit (both photos): Ira Srole/City of Rochester



"Book Notes" (from p. 4)

mushrooms with cute little faces. And at the same time, the facts are accurate; she names the animals and fungi so specifically that it will delight a child to remember them!

Literature and books can be a bridge to learning new things. *Log Life* offers one of those opportunities — reading the book inside your house will just not be enough. After reading this book, both child and adult will be thrilled to go into the forest and look for fallen logs and the surprises they will find there.

La lectura es un proceso fundamental en el desarrollo del lector: Conectar las palabras y las ilustraciones es un proceso natural en libros para lectores jóvenes. Ver las palabras ilustradas amplifica el impacto en la imaginación. Leer los dibujos puede ocurrir antes de leer las palabras y crea un puente importante en el proceso.▲



Henry Padrón-Morales and Pamela Bailie

Hipocampo Children's Books, 638 South Ave., is a women/Latine-owned independent bookstore. Our mission is to reflect the cultures and languages that make up our diverse region.



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