

NORTH NEWS

February 23, 2024

Serving the neighborhoods of North Minneapolis

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Taking his shot:

Northsider Trejuan Holloman runs the point for Michigan State University.

INSIDE

How does Lorraine B. Smaller Park sound? [Page 4](#)

Pep rally celebrates the life of D-Hill [Page 12](#)

North Minneapolis's Trejuan Holloman is now a guard for the Michigan State University basketball team.

Photo by Azhae'la Hanson





David Pierini,
Editor

Outside meeting chambers, rallying teachers protested the lack of progress in contract talks. Public comment time, save for a couple of warm wishes, was a long line of grievances – a complaint about cafeteria food, staff shortages, middle school fights and a somber group of Asian-American students talking about hate for them in their hallways.

Then it was Gary Marvin Davison's turn at the podium. A gadfly with an impressive attendance record for board meetings, Davison began to blviate about his PhD. He insinuated that the educational doctorate held by Sayles-Adams was somehow less, and as he started to criticize her dissertation, school board chair Collin Beachy cut the podium microphone and told Davison to sit down. "No identifying characteristics," Beachy said of a cardinal rule for public comment time. "You're done, Gary."

Before he sat down, Davison charged toward the board dais to finish his thought. Sayles-Adams shook her head and said, "I'm not doing that."

Adding to the night was a sobering report from senior finance officer Ibrahim Diop, reminding the board that

"everything must be on the table" when considering how to address a multi-million-dollar budget gap for the year ahead.

Sayles-Adams is familiarizing herself with the budget forecasts, statistics and unique challenges to the district.

MPS has a distressing achievement gap between white and Black students and problems retaining teachers of color. There's declining enrollment, staff shortages, pandemic-related learning struggles, and painful budget cuts loom. A powerful teacher's union is growing increasingly anxious about the next contract.

The first meeting introduced her to the many emotions and opinions held by teachers, parents, students and the resident contrarian on the state of local schools.

The beaming Sayles-Adams spoke of is not just a light she basked in after a good first week. It is also the power of that light to inform her leadership and send her, and all of Minneapolis, in a positive direction.

"This feels like this is a chance to come home and that is heartfelt. I mean

that to my core," Sayles-Adams said to open the meeting. "I want you to know that I will approach this work with Minneapolis Public Schools like it is my home, and I will lead as if the students, staff and community are my own family."

Sayles-Adams is convinced MPS has the pieces to set a standard for education across Minnesota. She sees her job as bringing the pieces together. She said she invites accountability.



North Minneapolis at a glance

Wilson's Image includes 'Swank Eatery'

Northside barber Teto Wilson plans to make the cut as a Northside developer.

His Swank Eatery concept recently received a \$500,000 grant through the Affordable Commercial Incentive Fund, which was created to fund viable projects planned near the proposed Blue Line light rail extension project.

Wilson will buy and renovate the 4th Street Saloon, 328 W. Broadway Ave. Willson is lining up other local businesses to secure investment in 13,000-square-foot commercial space for retail, restaurants and community events.

"This project will become a welcoming landmark to the cultural and commercial heart of North Minneapolis," said Wilson, owner of Wilson's Image Barbers & Stylists. "Our goal is to create a beautiful new space where community members can work, enjoy quality food from local business owners, and build lasting relationships with family, friends, and other community members." Wilson hopes to break ground along West Broadway on the \$11 million project by this fall.



Pulling together

First-grader Noviah Prince gave a spirited shout during an all-school harambee at Hall STEM Academy on Feb. 12. Hall celebrated African-American Parent Involvement Day with lunch for parents and caregivers. They were also invited to sit in on home room and were treated to the harambee, which is Swahili for "pull together."

Photo by David Pierini

Wyatt signed with Bemidji State, while Downs and White signed with Iowa Central.

News about North News

North News recently received six awards at the Minnesota Newspaper Association's annual Better Newspaper Contest.

The newspaper grabbed first place for its use of photography in its circulation class. The staff of Azhael'a Hanson and David Pierini are responsible for the photography and Thomas Toley creates the page designs for the paper.

Hanson and Pierini also won honors for individual photos. Pierini received first place in news photos, and Hanson placed second in feature photography. Hanson also placed third for profile writing.

Pierini received first-place honors for news feature and hard news reporting.

Patriot football players sign with college teams

Three Henry High gridiron standouts signed letters of intent to play college football.

Rory Wyatt, Amir Downs and Traevon White put their names to binding national letters of intent on Feb. 7, National Signing Day. Held around the same time each year, National Signing Day is the first day a senior can officially commit according to National Collegiate Athletic Association rules.

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North News is an enterprise of:



Farwell Park may get renamed to honor 'matriarch of the neighborhood'

By David Pierini, Editor

They lined up at the lectern with their stories, pulling tissues from a box as they spoke. Where would they or their children be but for the grace and love of Lorraine B. Smaller?

Northside residents, including members of Smaller's family, attended a public hearing of the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board on Feb. 7 to support the renaming of Farwell Park after the late educator and youth advocate many called "Mama."

Smaller founded the alternative school Hands-on Childhood Development Center, which later became Cedar Hill Academy,

graduating some 2,000 students. When she retired at age 70, Smaller started the We Care Performing Arts Program at Farwell to give neighborhood kids free programs in voice, drumming, martial arts, dance and more.

"She was my best friend," Stayci Bell told the board. "She made me feel proud of myself as just who I was, that I was enough and that I was good"

"So many things in this world that are traumatizing are on street names. There are things named after people who stole, raped and pillaged. She built up this community, our spirits, our lives, our children. She is with me every day. To name a park after her would give us a place of calm to remember her, to praise her (and) to be in peace with her."

The testimony was a case for sainthood as much as it was a preliminary step in a two-year process required by the board for renaming a park or facility. In December, MPRB renamed the chalet at Theo Wirth Golf Course after Northsider Eddie Manderville, who desegregated the clubhouse and went on to introduce the game he loved to other African Americans.

The renaming petition was filed in November 2023 by family members.



The family of Lorraine B. Smaller has petitioned the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board to rename Farwell Park after the late community leader. Photo courtesy of Martine Small. Farwell Park photo from KARE 11/YouTube

Smaller's son, Gayle Smaller, asked that the board consider a sped-up process so that his mother's name could be on the park this spring when it is set to celebrate various park improvements.

Unless the board votes to expedite the name change, a second public hearing won't occur until September 2025. The board would then schedule a vote for the end of the year.

Cynthia Fernandez told board members Smaller is an icon and an African-American leader who belongs in the same conversation as Frederick Douglas and Fannie Lou Hamer. Smaller's picture hangs next to her mother's in her home, she said. Kristel Porter cried, remembering how

Continued on page 19

Music school taps new director with deep Northside roots

By David Pierini, Editor

Alfred Sanders got his ideal job in January when the Northsider was named executive director of Hopewell Music School. But Day 1 came with a crisis.

Before his start date, Hopewell received an order to vacate its more-than-decade-long home at North United Methodist Church in Camden. Another church bought it and had other plans for the space.

Instead of viewing the search for a new home as an emergency, Sanders sees it as an opportunity.

"There's a level of pride with being

the only music school on the Northside," he said. "Let's make sure we're intentional. Let's not do things just to do things. Let's set ourselves up to really support the arts and hold lessons for people of all ages."

Sanders has room to breathe. Hopewell and its roughly 100 students have temporary lesson space at Christ the River of Life Lutheran Church on Fremont Avenue North. And Hopewell's board can also breathe a little easier, knowing the new school head keeps his head calm and forward-looking.

Sanders replaced Andrea Myers, who stepped down in August to pursue other interests. Sanders grew up in the Camden neighborhood and brings to the job a mix of vocal training, songwriting, arts programming and youth work. Prior to joining Hopewell, Sanders co-founded a Black arts organization in South Minneapolis.

"In a competitive search for the next leader, Alfred stood out," said board chair Jeannine Burnette. "His stories growing up in North Minneapolis, his commitment to helping underserved youth, love for music education, experience leading non-profit business operations and his all-around warm personality is what drew us to him."

Growing up, Sanders' music education

came from singing in his church choir and signing up for various music programs at the time at Oak Park Neighborhood Center. When he was older, he returned to Oak Park for a year-long program in non-profit leadership known as Public Allies.

He holds a bachelor's degree in business, marketing, and sociology from Metro State University and received training at the Musicians Institute, which includes artist development, songwriting, and audio engineering.

Sanders has conflict resolution training, having worked as an educational specialist for Robbinsdale schools and as youth wellness advocate for Simpson Housing Services.

Where Myers, his predecessor, played and taught flute, Sanders sees himself for now as more of a program builder than classroom teacher. Sanders said he would like to cover other aspects of the music business and build career pathways if he teaches.

"I'd like to see some of our programs as a form of healing in the community and form an artist space where young people can feel like themselves," he said.



Alfred Sanders

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Jamal Abdur Salaam's legacy

Jamal Abdur Salaam, who founded JJ Legacy School with his wife, Tonicia, summoned what strength remained in his failing body. Homebound with a terminal illness, Salaam insisted on visiting the school on its final day of class on Jan. 12. He rose from his wheelchair to deliver a lasting piece of his own legacy to heartbroken students.

"My career is ending here in the gym. The doctors told me I would never work again," he said. "Now I'm dependent on what you do in school; I'm depending on you to carry on the legacy. It will not matter where you go. You take what you learn and who you are with you. Take the love with you. Take the legacy with you."

Some two weeks later, Abdur Salaam passed away, another blow to a small, tight-knit school community forced to shut down due to a financial crisis. He and his wife named the school after Minnesota civil rights icon Josie Johnson, providing a Montessori education with faculty and programming that reflects the diversity of North Minneapolis.

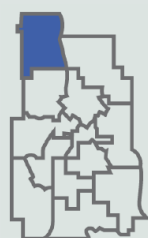


This was on JJ legacy's last day of school after being shut down in January. He came during the school's last lunch together to eat amongst students and staff. Jamal Abdur Salaam and his wife Tonicia founded the charter school together in 2020. Photo by Azhae'la Hanson.

catch up with our Council Members

WARD 4:

LaTrisha Vetaw



Hello, Ward 4. I am closely tracking three policies working their way through the council process. According to the authors (Council Members Chughtai, Chavez, and Chowdhury), these policies will regulate and legalize encampments. I am very concerned about what these policies could mean for our city and neighborhoods.

The first proposed ordinance (#2024-00112) authored by Council Member Chavez and co-authored by Council Members Chughtai and Chowdhury would create "safe outdoor spaces" or "individualized outdoor sheltering options for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness." This one was heard in the Business, Housing, and Zoning Committee on Feb. 13, where it was referred to city staff. At this time, there are no further details about exactly what this ordinance would do or how it would happen.

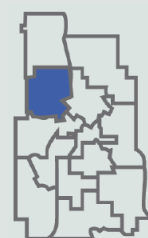
The second proposed ordinance (#2024-00114) authored by Council Member Chowdhury and co-authored by Council Members Chughtai and Chowdhury would "establish provisions mandating regular reporting – including, but not limited to outcomes for individuals experiencing homelessness – related to encampment removals delegated by any ordinances or other City policies relating to homeless encampment removals." This was heard in the Public Health and Safety Committee on Feb 14, where it was referred to city staff. There are no further details at this time.

The third proposal ordinance (#2024-00113), authored by Council Member Chughtai and co-authored by Council Members Chowdhury and Chavez would amend "Title 11 of the Minneapolis Code of Ordinances relating to Health and Sanitation, adding a new Chapter 237 establishing provisions of a humane encampment response policy." This was heard in the Public Health and Safety Committee on Feb 14, where it was referred to city staff. There are no further details at this time.

I am very concerned about these ordinances for a variety of reasons. A few weeks ago, I visited a large encampment in the Phillips Neighborhood on the Southside. What I saw there was not okay. I saw a lot of active drug use, dirty needles, feces, and sex trafficking. The air quality was measured like that of a forest fire from all the wood being burned to keep warm. Neighbors of the encampment couldn't leave their homes without suffering asthma attacks. What I saw inside the encampment was addiction – it was not homelessness. I plan to work with the Native community to secure funding for culturally specific treatment options – just like I did with the Black community and Turning Point. I would love to hear your ideas about how you would like to see the city move forward. You can reach me by email at latrisha.vetaw@minneapolismn.gov or leave me a message at 612-673-2204. Be well and take care.

WARD 5:

Jeremiah Ellison



Happy Black History Month, Northsiders! I hope you have the chance to celebrate the brilliance, creativity, and vibrancy of the Black community this month by spending time with family, in community, and at local celebration events. The City of Minneapolis is offering free public events under the theme African Americans and the Arts.

Here are a few events coming up:

- History Makers at Home will be hosted by the Minneapolis Civil Rights Department and will recognize leaders in business, criminal justice, education, economic development, health, housing, and government. It will be taking place on Thursday, Feb. 22 from 11 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. at the Capri Theater, 2027 W. Broadway Avenue. This year's honorees include Nothando Zulu, a master storyteller, author, and beloved community member who passed away in September 2023. Nothando was an incredibly gifted, warm, and loving community leader who inspired many generations of artists on the Northside and beyond. I hope you all can join in celebrating the brilliance and life of Nothando Zulu at this event.
- Rock Your Crown is the event where hair rules! With the State of Minnesota signing the Crown Act into law, we will celebrate the history of Black hair and the art of styling it. This event will take place on Wednesday, Feb. 28, from noon to 1:30 p.m. at the City of Minneapolis Public Service Building, Conference Room 100, 505 Fourth Ave. S.

As we look into the year, what a wonderful time to start thinking about summer internships for our young people. The Urban Scholars Program at the City of Minneapolis is a summer internship program that intentionally connects college students, graduate students, law students, and organizations in pursuit of an equitable workforce and diversifying our leadership in local government. One of my staff members is an Urban Scholar alumna and our office has hosted two Urban Scholars in the past two years. I am excited for this program to return this summer and encourage Northsiders to apply. The application is open from now until March 4th, 2023. If you have questions, please visit the Urban Scholars page on the City website for more information.

Our office hosts weekly Open Coffee Hours on Mondays from 12:00 PM - 1:00 PM. These are informal and a chance for me to hear directly from you while we share coffee or a meal (virtually). Office hours are on a first come first served basis. Please try not to call in past 12:50 p.m. as we want to leave enough time to chat about what you'd like to discuss. Please RSVP at www.minneapolismn.gov/ward5, and my staff will follow up with the call-in details. If you have any questions or concerns, reach out to Dieu Do, Policy Associate, at dieu.do@minneapolismn.gov. If there's anything our office can help with, please feel free to contact my staff via email or call our office at (612) 673-2205.

Minneapolis City Council members LaTrisha Vetaw (Ward 4) and Jeremiah Ellison (Ward 5) were inaugurated in January 2022 and January 2018, respectively. We have invited them to keep in touch with the community through this monthly column in our newspaper.

Non-motorist bridge over Mighty Miss would connect North with Northeast

By David Pierini, Editor

At the end of 26th Avenue North is a scenic overlook. Visitors can gaze at the Mighty Mississippi River and glimpse Northeast Minneapolis hugging the opposite bank.

That concludes the experience. Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board planners hope to enhance your river visit in a few years with a foot and bicycle bridge that connects the Northside to a new park in Northeast Minneapolis. The bridge plan on the North Minneapolis bank includes completing a trail connecting to Ole Olson Park.

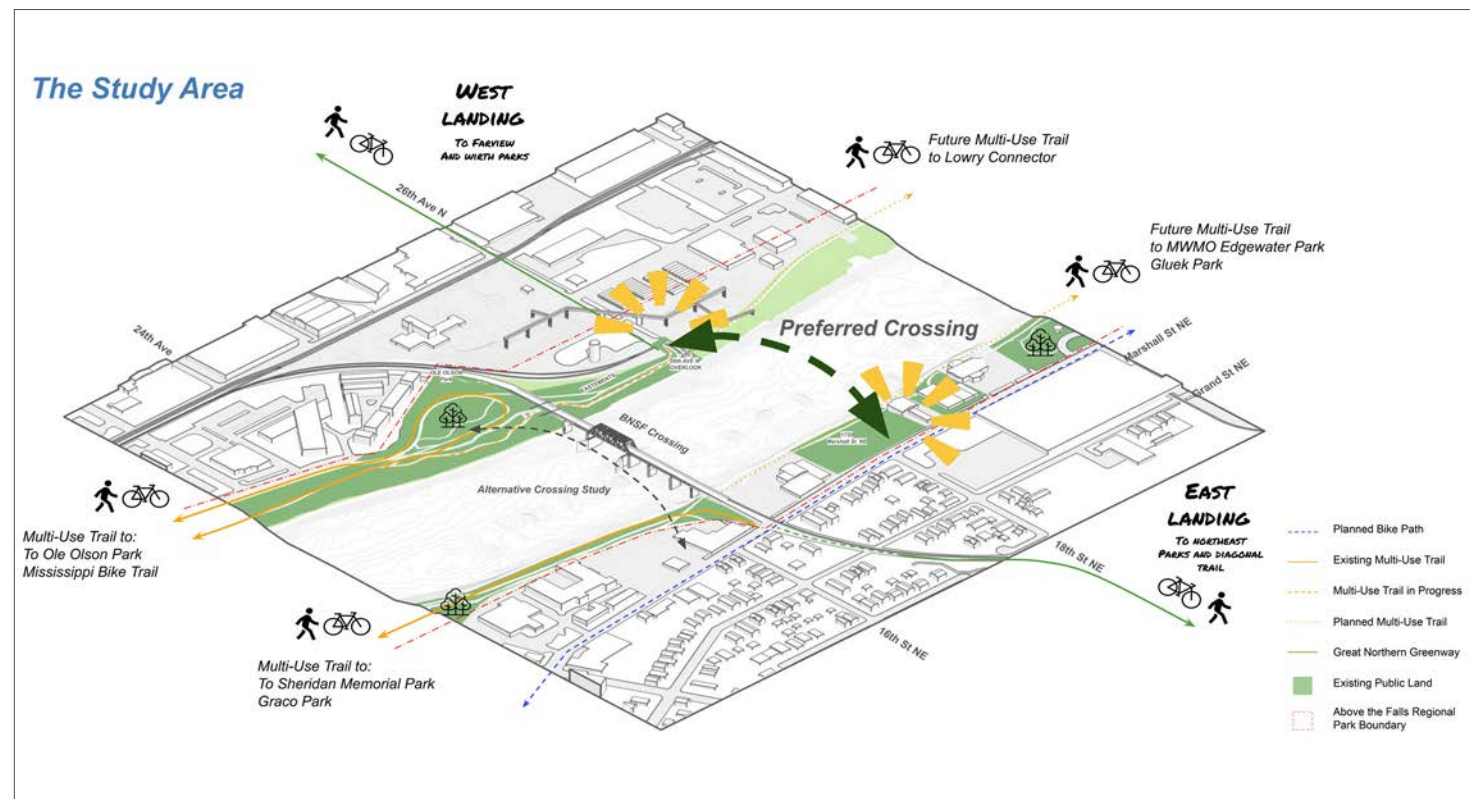
Project planners hosted community engagement events in early February, one for each side of the river, to get ideas from residents. There were a variety of opinions, but attendees said they were excited about a non-motorist bridge connecting North and Northeast.

"I'm a community person," said Northsider Georgianna Yantos. "I want the communities of North and Northeast to be connected. This is not a river that separates us. This is a river that brings us together."

A design concept based on the feedback will likely be presented to the board sometime this spring. The roughly 640-foot bridge will cost an estimated \$30 million. The Northeast end of the bridge is currently a 1.9-acre vacant property at 1720 Marshall St. NE. The park board plans to spend another few million dollars in developing the Marshall Street property into a park.

The bridge would complete the Great Northern Greenway, which runs through North and Northeast and is split by the river. Cyclists currently take a 1.8-mile detour to cross at Broadway Avenue.

For nearly 20 years, park planners initially hoped to modify an unused train bridge south of the 26th Avenue Overlook. But the railroad, Burlington Northern



The dotted arrow shows the spot MPRB planners would like to place a non-vehicle bridge across the Mississippi River to join the North and Northeast parts of Minneapolis. Map courtesy of Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board.

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Holloman comes down from a rebound against the University of Minnesota. He leads MSU in 3-point shooting, hitting 42.1% of his tries. Photo By Azhae'la Hanson

'Home grown' Trejuan Holloman brings a big game to the Big 10

By Azhae'la Hanson, Reporter

Trejuan Holloman came home to play for the first time since he started at Michigan State University when his Spartans came to town in early February to face the University of Minnesota.

Holding giant cardboard Holloman heads and wearing shirts that say 'Home Grown,' a group of more than 30 family, friends, and coaches cheered on the Northsider against the sea of maroon and gold during last week's game.

Holloman has participated in many

programs throughout his athletic career from his hometown of Minneapolis. He went to Franklin Middle School, where he played basketball in championship tournaments for North High School, and then went on to graduate from Cretin Derham High School as a standout football and basketball player. He started his freshman year at Michigan State University in 2022 and is now in the middle of his sophomore year.

The game against the U-M kept fans on the edges of their seats. Holloman appeared calm against the roar of Gopher



Friends and family of Trejuan Holloman showed up by the dozens to cheer him on against the University of Minnesota. Photo by Azhae'la Hanson

fans at Williams Stadium. Minnesota beat MSU 59-56.

Although the Spartans fell short of bringing home the win, Holloman's fans got to witness him in the middle of his breakout season as a steady and reliable contributor for the Spartans.

Holloman leads MSU in 3-point shooting, hitting 42.1% of his tries. He averages 20 minutes per game this season, almost tripling his gameplay from the year prior, averaging 5.6 points and 2.8 assists, and his assist-to-turnover ratio is considered among the best in the country.

Right: Although the Spartans fell short of bringing home the win against the Gophers, Holloman's fans got to witness him in the middle of a breakout season. Photo by Azhae'la Hanson

Below: A fan approaches Holloman after the game for an autograph. Photo by Azhae'la Hanson



MPS may sell a chunk of school property for Willard Park expansion

By David Pierini, Editor

The school district and park officials in Minneapolis are negotiating the transfer of a piece of land near a vacant Northside school to help planners rehabilitate Willard Park.

The Minneapolis Board of Education on Feb. 13 voted to authorize MPS to subdivide land at 2310 16th Avenue North while officials negotiate with the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board to prepare for a sale or transfer gets underway. The address is the site of two former schools, Willard and Gordon.

Any deal would not include school

buildings, just enough land for the park board to rehab Willard Park, supported by a federal grant. The land sought by MPRB is north of the former Willard School.

The subdivision of the property passed as part of a consent agenda with no discussion. But the vote caught the Willard Hey neighborhood off guard. For years, residents have pressed the school district on its intentions for the schools, saying any use should meet community approval.

In the summer of 2020, a pair of votes were scheduled to turn the former Gordon Center into a women's shelter. Strong opposition from area residents forced the city and Hennepin County to consider other locations.

The Willard and Gordon schools "are beloved and coveted by the community not for merely sentimental reasons but because they are community assets paid for by our tax dollars," said Martine Smaller, executive director of the Northside Residents Redevelopment Council. "(Any) developments proposed for these properties need community support in order to be successful."

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At the close of the pep rally, students and staff engaged in the call-in-response creed written by Noah Tietjen. Photo by Azhae'la Hanson

This remembrance of D-Hill was about joy

By Azhae'la Hanson, Reporter

A sad anniversary was an intentional day of celebration for the North High

School classmates of Deshaun Hill, who was fatally shot two years ago.

Students gathered on Feb. 9 for a pep rally to remember their late classmate. As the 6th-hour bell dismissed class, the auditorium at North filled with Polars wearing green and holding pamphlets. On it was a creed written by Hill's former teammate Noah Tietjen, who caught his first touchdown pass from Hill when they were both freshmen.

Who's this for?

9
Dear Lord
We lost a true king

*Taken from us
With no Mercy
So as we play
We play for something bigger
Through blood, sweat and tears
We do it for him
Who's this for
9.*

Dances choreographed by friends were performed to an excited audience. Competitions between students and staff were full of friendly banter. A speech by alum Khadija Ba gave seniors pause.

"We have bid farewell to classmates whose laughter once echoed through

these halls. D-Hill... and so many others whose presence illuminated our lives like stars in the night sky." Ba said. "Yet even in our sorrow, there is a love that transcends boundaries, defies despair, and binds us together in a tapestry of shared humanity. Let us honor the memory of those we have lost by living lives of purpose, passion, and unyielding determination."

The students purposely created an environment to bring joy on a somber day.

"Students have been grieving for so long, and they're tired of it. Instead of grieving the death of Deshaun Hill, we will celebrate his life and show him how far we've come," said North High School

Principal Mauri Friestleben.

Last month, Friestleben turned to experts to see how to handle the anniversary of his passing.

She was told to host an assembly for the school. She decided to consult the teaching staff, who then said the decision should be up to the students.

"Eight students showed up after and said we do not want an assembly, we do not want to sit in a place or space where we're sad or watch a slideshow, or listen to sad music," Friestleben said.

They told her what they want is to come together, be joyful, and celebrate.

Senior Taylor Butler was one of the many students who had known Hill since early elementary school. She was one of the eight who stepped up to plan the pep fest.

"Half of the people in my grade I grew up with," said Butler. "D-Hill was one of those people. I'd always imagined us getting ready for prom and seeing everybody walk across the stage, and he can't be here to do that with us."

But Butler and many students who knew and loved Hill will carry his memory wherever they go. Whether Butler has a hard day, does well on a test, or walks across the stage in May, she'll look down at her wristband that reads Hill's jersey number, 9.

"He'll be there in all of our success," Butler said. "I just know that we want us to continue to be happy and push to our goals."

At the assembly, teachers could be seen holding their students, saying how proud they were. Staff from Lucy Craft Laney, Hill's former elementary school, showed support as they reunited with former students.

"You can still feel him around in everything and especially in places like this," said Morgan McDonald, staff member at Lucy Laney. "His smile was one of the things that everyone will remember about him, he reminds me to do that as much as I can."

Above:
Noah Tietjen, yells at the creed he created in honor of Deshaun Hill Jr. with the North High football team at the end of the day.
Photo by Azhae'la Hanson

Right:
A necklace, worn by a North high football player, holds a photo of Deshaun Hill Jr.
Photo by Azhae'la Hanson



Her catering business started with a little Miracle

By Azhae'la Hanson, Reporter

While cooking a meal, Shantae Braxton takes breaks to chase her daughter around their kitchen and answer any questions her 4-year-old might have about the food and cooking.

"My sweet baby, I love you," Braxton said to her daughter. "She's so sweet, I could never be mad at her. I see myself in her," she said. "I want to give her the life we can both be proud of."

And Braxton, 21, is doing that. She runs a full-time catering business and recently launched her website, Itsgoodfoodbybraxton.com, to draw more customers.

The Henry High School grad did it to forge her own path and provide a good life for her daughter, Miracle.

It is a name inspired by her surprise birth following a basketball game her mother played when she was 17.

Braxton was in a high-stakes game against neighborhood rival North High. Throughout the game, she felt stomach pains unlike any she'd had. Afterward, her family took her to a hospital, and in an elevator, she gave birth to a full-term baby girl.

"I didn't speak," Braxton said. "I had no idea I was pregnant."

Braxton said she didn't know she was pregnant because her stomach wasn't showing a growing baby. Doctors call this a cryptic pregnancy, and it happens, according to the National Institute of Health, in 2,500 women.

"I always thought I was a thicker girl," she said. "I didn't know."

She recalled sitting in the hospital bed, unable to speak. She was in shock. Her late father, Shuan Stafford, helped her decide on the name. What happened to Braxton was nothing short of a miracle.

"It fit perfectly," she said.

Braxton remembers the swirl of thoughts in her head while in the hospital. She had prepared for her future so meticulously. That night, she scored 16 points, and a college coach came to watch her play.

Although Braxton's life abruptly changed direction, she said she wasn't



Shantae Braxton, right, shows her daughter Miracle how to layer baked mac and cheese. Photo by Azhae'la Hanson

derailed from her goals. She was motivated to succeed. She leaned on her many talents to pivot as she navigated motherhood.

"I didn't know what was going to happen," she recalled. "But every day until that point, I thought about how I could get up and do something for my future, and now that I was holding my Miracle, I immediately started to think about that for the both of us."

She was a leader in high school, and she wore many hats. She was an honor roll student and a standout basketball player. After practice, she would head to her job, an hour's bus ride from her home, and work until 1 a.m.

"The stuff I had to go through to find ways to eat food sometimes was exhausting," Braxton said. "But I had to do it. I was very focused. I had a routine, and I would do anything I could to get ahead or help out. I didn't care what it was."

Braxton has always had a strong work ethic that stems from being motivated to change the circumstances around her. She was taught to hustle both in school and at work. She had to grow up faster than most.

This work ethic set her on a path

Continued on page 19



Braxton sits with Miracle and talks about her late father, Shuan Stafford, who named Miracle. Braxton says he inspired her love for cooking. Photo by Azhae'la Hanson

Olson Memorial Bridge displays history and community through art

By Kiya Darden, North High School

A colorful new addition to the Olson Memorial Highway bridge across I-94 draws inspiration from a beautiful mural long lost to a wrecking ball.

The new colorful addition to the bridge is covered in 300 handpainted, glass enamel panels and stands as a love letter to North Minneapolis and as a tribute to a project by artist John Biggers, a major 20th-century African American artist.

The original John Biggers "Celebration of Life" project was a mural Biggers designed near the bridge that was torn down in favor of the 2000 Heritage Park housing project. He passed away two years later.

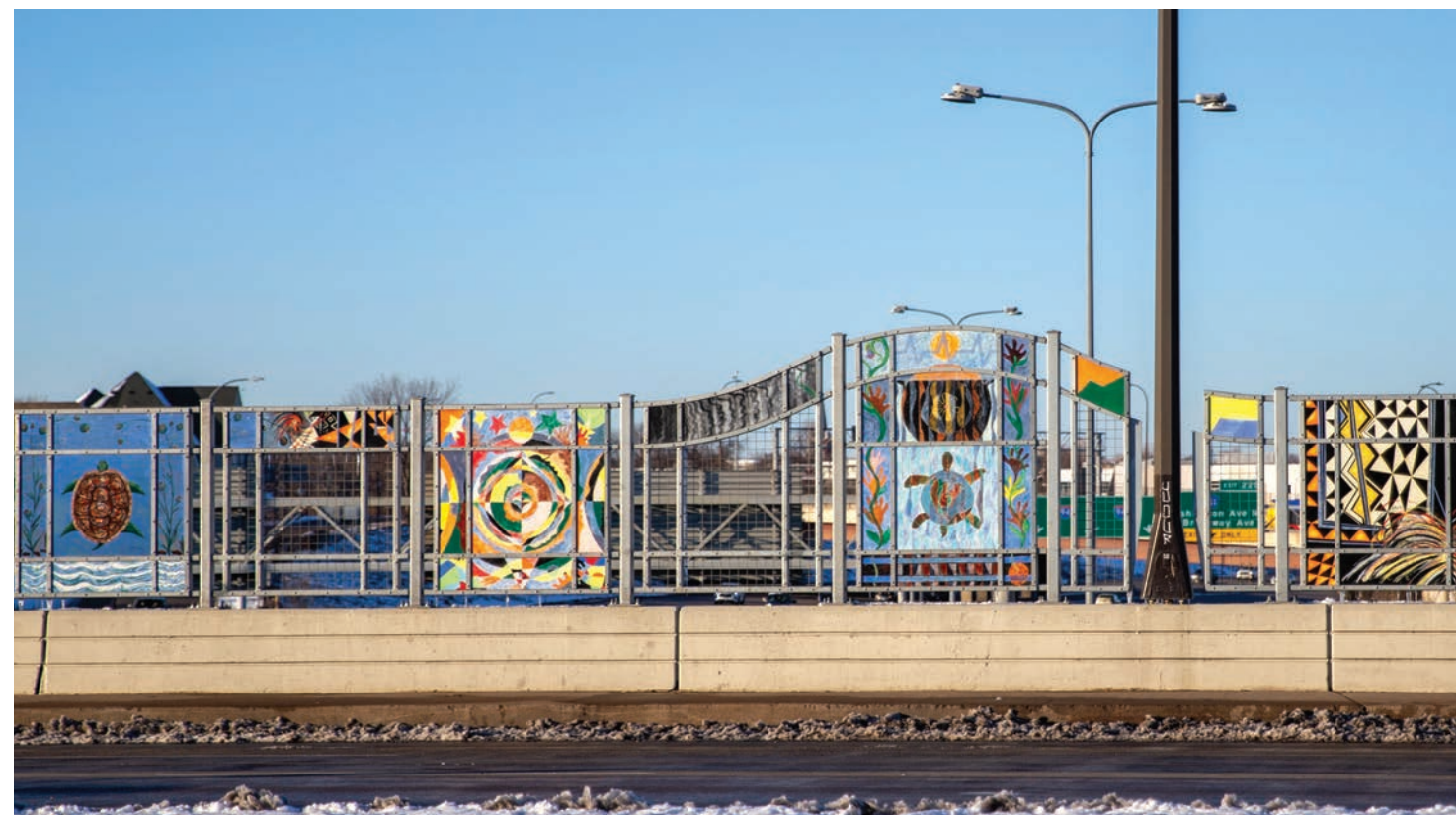
Instead of being lost to memory, the John Biggers Seed Project was founded in 2014 by a group of artists from all over Minneapolis to pay homage to the artists, some of whom were also present to paint Biggers's original mural.

The entire bridge is full of panels as a tribute to the original mural. Each contributing artist was able to add their own unique touch to a piece of the big picture.

From brainstorming, and planning with the city of Minneapolis and then to its execution – painting with metal enamel and firing it in layers over the course of 20 years, the dedication never faltered.

The sentiment for this project goes far beyond a memorial. It represents the creativity that is poured into North Minneapolis in an effort to bring residents closer together. It's something artists hope can be seen for years to come.

Roger Cummings, contributing artist and a mentee of Biggers, designed all of the backside panels facing the highway and a few front ones. Each panel depicts symbols and paintings in John Biggers's original mural, including a red crab holding up a stool representing the community.



The John Biggers memorial project, pictured, lines both rails of the Olson Memorial Highway bridge. The project consists of over 300 hand-painted glass enamel panels. Photo by Kiya Darden

"After that mural got torn down I used the crab to symbolize a kind of upholding the community in the city again," said Cummings, the director of Juxtaposition Arts.

He was also able to call back the original mural by using Adinkra symbols on all of the back- panels facing the highway.

Christopher Harrison, another contributing artist, was able to elaborate on the symbolism of Adinkra symbols in the bridge.

"Each one has kind of, over the centuries, been metamorphosed into different philosophies and principles," he said.

Adinkra symbols are West African symbols used in a mix of different African cultures. Each of those cultures then added to the creation of an adinkra symbol language-like system of communication.

The Adinkra symbols on the bridge represent principles like peace, hope, and family.

"It's about you ancestors, it's about legacy, and it's about keeping people's memory and their endurance and their contributions around for many years," Cummings said.

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Northside non-profit has community taking books by the bag load

By Azalea Petry Towns, North High School

Stepping into a bookstore and finding a really good book is one of the best feelings in the world. Story Orchard is a non-profit located in North Minneapolis where community members can come to enjoy and have access to thousands of books. The best part is that they are all free.

Leslie De Paz, the owner, started the non-profit Story Orchard in 2017 and landed a storefront in 2021 at the corner of 39th and Thomas Avenue North. The Story Orchard has genres and books for all ages, is open Wednesdays from 2-6 pm.

De Paz was an elementary school teacher for 18 years, and it was then that she got the idea. De Paz needed books for her classroom. However, she realized books are expensive. So De Paz began collecting books to give to other teachers and fill out their libraries.

As De Paz's book collection grew, she got the idea to start a bookmobile. Research on the positive aspects of reading inspired her to start the shop. She learned that the community had limited access to books and wanted to provide an efficient resource accessible to everyone. During the summers,

De Paz would visit garden parties and farmers' markets or bike around the neighborhood with the bookmobile, giving out books. This bookmobile is still used today.

"What really increases access to books is books in people's homes," De Paz said. "All people benefit from reading."

De Paz sought to create a space where anyone could come in and delight in the space. The ultimate goal of Story Orchard is to give the community better access to literacy.

"People are just thrilled to have a space to go to that's so welcoming and warm."

Amy Bakken, a volunteer at Story Orchard, talks about the impact she's already seen on the community. She loves watching over the store, seeing kids and adults excited and looking forward to returning. She's seen firsthand the impact they've had on the community.

"I just see people getting excited about something, and, you know, there's no barrier to the books. They're free," Bakken said.



Leslie De Paz, a former elementary teacher, holds up a book in the reading corner. She founded Story Orchard in 2017. Photo by Azhae'la Hanson

In the future, De Paz hopes to expand the shop and include more opportunities for the community, including book clubs, a family story hour, and writing classes for adults. Her biggest goal is to have a complete service community literacy center open to all different age demographics.

Customers can walk in, receive a bag, and take as many books as desired.

Some books are bought new, but they also source their books from donations. De Paz encourages everyone to stop by, anybody can donate, and they're always accepting books.

"Our hope is to bring our community together and provide people awesome opportunities to read and learn and just be together," she said.

Capri teen tech students shine bright with hit song

By Aja Conteh, North High School

Five talented teens from North Minneapolis are making waves in the music scene with their original song, crafted in collaboration with the Capri Best Buy Teen Tech Center.

Their track, "Long Way Home," earned them top honors at the Global RE@CH

Music Festival and even garnered them the opportunity to open for music artist Pitbull at Best Buy's Charity Classic, a fundraiser supporting Teen Tech Centers nationwide.

It is their second year opening for a celebrity music artist. Last year, another song titled "Good Day" landed them the opportunity to open for Jennifer Husdon.

The teens poured their hearts into every aspect of their music journey, from writing and recording songs to designing album covers and promoting their work on social media. Under the guidance of Chuckie Smith, the young artists have access to professional-grade equipment and a studio for free.

"Here we have kids getting together that probably wouldn't even hang out if it weren't for the studio and like making music together," Smith said. "Collectively coming together and like performing or

making a song, especially about things they all can relate to, is great."

Quintin Carter helped produce the beat for "Long Way Home." He learned from Smith when the program first opened two years ago. He says he's inspired to shine a light on North Minneapolis. He wants to use music to better his current circumstances, and he looks to Smith as a role model to teach him the tools to reach that goal.

"There's not a lot of people from Minnesota being recognized for their talent," Carter said. "I want to represent where I'm from and put local artists on bigger platforms."

Singer Janae Hinton said her experience was surreal and inspiring.

"Winning the award was a proud moment," Hinton said. "It was amazing. I'm glad our song was able to reach so many

people in different ways."

Hinton sings the chorus on the song that goes, "You can't give up now it's a long way home."

She says the song is about chasing your dreams no matter how big. She's been singing her whole life, and is now in New York City attending the Rock Nation School of Music at Long Island University.

"To me, it means, no matter what you're going through in life, just never give up. Wherever you're at in life, just know that whatever you're doing, it's all gonna pay off."

Center Director Andrew Hopkins encourages more youth to get involved with the program that runs everyday for ages 13-18.

"It's a great and free opportunity to showcase the talent we have in this community," Hopkins said.

Jovonta Patton makes First Avenue headliner history

By Azhae'la Hanson, Reporter

It was a first for First Avenue. The famed music venue hosted its first-ever gospel headliner on Feb. 2, when the stage was turned over to Northsider and Billboard chart-topper Jovonta Patton.

The show was sold out and included a visit from Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey, who presented Patton with a resolution that marked Feb. 2 as Jovonta Patton Day in the city.

Patton sang through his song catalog of the last 16 years and shared the night with his youth choir, Deliverance for Youth, and the Northside troupe, Dance City. Local comedian Ashli Henderson and artist and promoter Chadwick Niles Phillips hosted the show, further extending the Northside love. The outfits were from Camden's Houston White.

Patton was born and raised in North Minneapolis. He started singing when he was 4, writing music at 6, and directing a youth choir in middle school. He has since founded a youth choir, Deliverance for Youth (DFY), landed the number one spot on the Billboard's gospel charts six times since 2016 and operates The Wave, a pop-up worship service in North Minneapolis.

During the concert, the crowd burst into an uproar of praise for Jovonta as Mayor Jacob Frey walked on stage to declare Feb. 2 Jovonta Patton Day.

"People like Prince, Jimmy Jam, and Terry Lewis, they've created such an impactful music history there," Patton said. "I felt like I got a chance to be on the world stage, right here at First Avenue."

The concert was an intentional expression of Northside love. Many Northsiders were part of the sold-out crowd. The choir outfits were made by Northside Entrepreneur Houston White. Northside comedian Ashli Henderson and artist Chadwick Niles Phillips hosted the show. The Northside dance troupe Dance City opened for Patton, and Patton's youth choir came on stage with Patton to



On Feb. 2, Jovonta Patton became the first gospel headliner in First Avenue's 53 year history. Photo by Azhae'la Hanson



Jovonta sold out First Avenue. He will be releasing a documentary on the historical performance in the Spring. Photo by Azhae'la Hanson

Continued on page 19

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Youth Club: St. Olaf Lutheran Church, 2901 Emerson Ave. N. grades 6-12, Wednesdays at 6:30 p.m. Transportation available. To enroll, call 612-529-7726

Hockey for boys and girls ages 6-17: at North Commons Park and Northeast Arena during the months of November through February. All equipment is provided and the cost is minimal. Register and get more information at North Commons Park, 612-370-4921.

Safe Station: Struggling with substance abuse? Start your recovery journey at Minneapolis Fire Station 14, 2002 Lowry Ave. N., where a firefighter or recovery coach can help get you a variety of services. Open 24 hours. No judgment or shame. Safe Station is a partnership with the Twin Cities Recovery Project and the Minneapolis Fire Department.

Free legal advice: Legal Aid takes on civil cases, such as housing, family, consumer tax, immigration and public benefits. The non-profit organization now has a clinic

in the office of the Harrison Neighborhood Association, 1501 Glenwood Ave. Services are free for those who qualify. Must be 200 percent of federal poverty guidelines or age 60-plus. Hours are Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10 a.m.-3:30 p.m. Walk-ins welcome, but appointments are preferred. Call 612-746-3611 to make an appointment.

Homework help: Sumner Library, which is closed for the next year for renovation, has a temporary site at UROC, 2001 Plymouth Ave. N. Limited service includes homework help, computer access, on-site technology assistance and printing and copying. Free tutoring and help with homework runs each Monday and Thursday from 4-7 p.m.

The Healing Place: The Healing Place is back at Zion Missionary Baptist Church, 621 Elwood Ave. N. It is committed to healing trauma in the Black community by helping to break the cycle of oppression. It is a safe space if you need a prayer, a conversation or just a place to sit. Every Wednesday from 1 to 5 p.m.

Food Distribution: Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church, 3355 4th Street N., will distribute free fresh food on the second and fourth Saturdays of each month from 10

a.m.-noon. There are no pre-qualifications. Everyone is welcome.

Free Dinners: The Camden Collective and the Sanneh Foundation sponsor a weekly free food pickup at Salem Lutheran Church, 4150 Dupont Ave. N., each Saturday from 1-3 p.m. Call 612-521-3644 for more information. Walk-ups are welcome.

Pet supplies: Are you in need of pet supplies or pet resources? The North Minneapolis Pet Resource Center, 1401 44th Ave. N., is open for curbside pickup Tuesdays and Thursdays from 5 p.m.-8 p.m. and Saturday 11 a.m.-2 p.m. Call 764-273-0710 to place an order and leave a voicemail.

Radio updates in your language: Tune into Minneapolis's cultural radio programs for COVID-19 updates. The city is broadcasting updates on KMOJ 89.9 FM (English), La Raza 95.7 FM (Spanish), KALY 101.7 FM (Somali) and WIXK AM 1590 (Hmong).

Minneapolis Ward 4 contact info: If you live in Ward 4 and want to reach City Councilwoman LaTrisha Vetaw, contact Maggie Kohl via email: maggie.kohl@minneapolismn.gov or cell: 612-258-3982. Contact Betsy Brock with other needs via email: betsy.brock@minneapolismn.gov

minneapolismn.gov or cell: 612-257-5242. You can also reach Vetaw via email: latrisha.vetaw@minneapolismn.gov or cell: 612-322-1143.

Minneapolis Ward 5 contact info: If you live in Ward 5 and want to reach City Councilman Jeremiah Ellison, call his office at 612-673-2205 or email him at ward5@minneapolismn.gov. You can also contact his policy associate Bethany Turnwall at bethany.turnwall@minneapolismn.gov.

Hennepin County District 2 contact info: To reach Hennepin County Commissioner Irene Fernando, call 612-348-7882 or email her at irene.fernando@hennepin.us. For constituent services, contact policy aide Bill Emory at 612-348-3526 or at bill.emory@hennepin.us.

Minneapolis Public Schools, District 2: Sharon El-Amin is the Board of Education director representing North Minneapolis. She can be reached at 612-986-3281 or Sharon.El-Amin@mpls.k12.mn.us

Do you have an ongoing program, meeting or event you would like to see published in North News? Please send the details to DavidP@pillsburyunited.org.

NOTICES

NEWS

Farwell Park Continued from page 4

Smaller accepted her son at summer camp. Porter was a young, single mom juggling parenthood and a career looking for help watching a 5-year-old with outsized energy.

"He had impossible behavior and when it came time to pick him up, I was bracing myself for bad news and a long lecture on his rambunctious actions. She said he was great. I don't know what kind of magic she had on this kid, but it worked.

"As the years went on, she stayed in touch with me, and she went from Mrs. Smaller to Mama. I am so grateful for the blessing she has been to my family and the many lives she has touched in the community."

Leon Mallet said Smaller gathered in children others gave up on.

"I was one of those kids kicked to the side and thrown to the curb," he said. "This woman was a sister and a soldier, a liberator, and a warrior. Women like this in our community don't get thanked enough. She could inspire you and motivate you and breathe life into an individual who was damn near dead."

Non-motorist Bridge Continued from page 7

Santa Fe, indicated it had no intention of relinquishing the bridge

"It's really about reconnecting people," said design project planner Tyler Pederson. "We've got a number of really great connections across the river in central and the downtown area. As we get up towards Plymouth, Broadway and Lowry avenues are dominated by vehicle corridors.

"We want to change that experience and create a centrally located human crossing not dedicated to trains, trucks or cars."

The board will decide later this year if a new bridge is feasible. MPRB and board commissioners will also have to determine how to raise the money.

Catering Business Continued from page 14

to capitalize on what she was good at; cooking. Her origins in cooking trace back to her own father, who she says made every meal beautiful.

"It could have been a can of beans," Braxton said. "He would make it look

amazing. I wanted to do that, too."

She picked up a side hustle of cooking food to make ends meet with her family and made a chicken alfredo for her classmates, which quickly generated a buzz because of how good it was.

"I had so many orders at one time that my truck was full," Braxton said. "I was doing pickups and deliveries while I still had homework to do."

After Miracle was born, she found it more difficult to maintain a typical 9-5 job. She stopped trying to make it work and continued cooking full-time. Her catering clientele expanded from classmates and family to neighbors and strangers, confirming to Braxton that she had a gift that people loved. Something else was born with that realization, a dream to start her own restaurant.

Today, Braxton makes meals to order with a rotating weekly menu that customers can choose from for the week. She says she can make just about anything and features a chicken alfredo that was in demand during her high school days.

Her mind is full of new ideas and spins on traditional home-cooked meals, and she stands at the stove for hours at a time to perfect old classics like cornbread,

chicken, and collard greens. She says she constantly adapts to the way food speaks to people and takes on the challenge of making sure she can use her culinary skills to build a life for the two of them.

Jovonta Patton Continued from page 17

perform the finale.

"Jovonta is dedicated, hard-working, and resilient," Henderson said. "I've seen Jovonta beat the odds. I've seen him overcome hate, doubt and struggle. I've seen him win, and I've seen him lose. But through it all, I've seen him believe in himself and believe in God, and he believed in what God gifted him, and today, shows the fruits of all of those things."

Patton sang such hits as "Always" and a new song, "Don't Find It Strange." Afterward, he was surrounded by family and friends. Patton will be releasing a documentary so everyone can experience the First Avenue concert in the Spring.

"My husband is walking into a new realm of being a legend and the next big voice," his wife, Symone Patton, said. "This is just the beginning."

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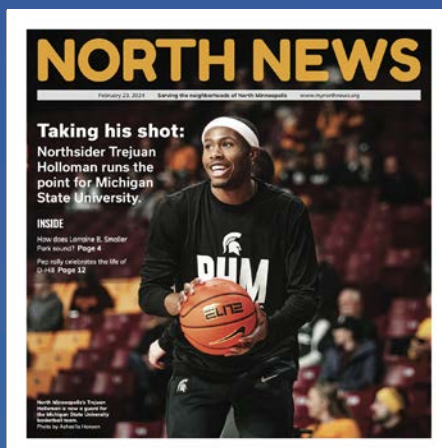
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