

# NORTH NEWS



November 18, 2022

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## Lion's Den Station: A pastor buys a gas station as an extension of his ministry

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Bishop Larry Cook and Dr. Sharon Cook stood proudly on the corner of Broadway and Fremont, excited about the future to come for their church and their newly procured business. Photo by Azhae'la Hanson



# Letter from the Editor David Pierini

The women cut small squares of cake, careful to not slice into the face of the guest of honor, which had been printed on edible icing paper and placed in the center of the cake.

New Minneapolis police Chief Brian O'Hara was the center of attention during a special swearing-in ceremony at Shiloh Temple International Ministries on Nov. 10.

He and his family received a warm welcome.

There were smiles and hugs, a small gospel choir, a Native drum circle and blessings from three different faiths. One was a Jewish prayer delivered in song by Mayor Jacob Frey.

O'Hara was just wrapping up his first week on the job and was greeted as if he had been a friend of Minneapolis for years.

But this was more than a polite gesture with light conversation. Each five-minute speech contained a five-ton expectation for the new chief, who has been hired to do what seemed impossible after the police murder of George Floyd two years ago.

The city burned with rage over years

of excessive force by police that stayed mostly hidden before technology put video cameras in our phones. "Defund police" became a misunderstood rallying cry and many residents lived in fear through a violent crime wave. Longtime rank-and-file cops ran for the exits and the city endured months of rancorous discourse over how to reform, how to reimagine, public safety.

In the days before City Council approved his hire, O'Hara met with several community groups who rightfully wanted to size up whether he was a true reformer. His background in Newark, New Jersey as a high-ranking police official is an impressive record of reform and trust building.

"We told him about our collective experience with the Minneapolis police. I told him I knew what it felt like to have the knee of a Minneapolis cop on my neck," Mike Forcia, a long time Indigenous activist said as he introduced a drum circle that kicked off the night. "Then and there he gave us assurances things would change."

Forcia was not alone in making remarks that mixed pain and hope.

O'Hara sat on the stage, his fidgety young sons and wife at his side and seemed to absorb the moment.

He seems to understand the job ahead and even said he felt called to his new post.

"I'm aware this is perhaps one of the most challenging positions to be in policing in this country today," O'Hara said. "But I do believe that my life, my career and my experiences have prepared me for this moment and paved the path for me to be here today."

"This is not only a new beginning in my life, my family's life, but it's also a new beginning in the family of our city and of our police department."

Afterward, people waited patiently to have a few words with the new chief who was generous with handshakes, hugs and eye contact. Folks wanted their picture taken with him and if his son, Branden, was in the picture, he stood upright and gave a salute to the camera.

Forcia was off to the side and told one attendee, "I believe this will be a paradigm shift."

# North Minneapolis at a glance

## NAZ to get a new home

The Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ) will move to a building it purchased at the corner of West Broadway Avenue and North Second Street.

According to a statement on the NAZ website, it was seeking to move out of rented space at the corner of West Broadway and Penn Avenues because of increased gun violence. NAZ is expected to move into the 19,000-square-foot building by February.

NAZ's mission to end generational poverty by building a culture of achievement. It collaborates with parents, schools and community organizations to get low-income children of color on a track to graduate high school, get to college and prepare for a career.

## Expectations and hope



Newly hired Minneapolis police Chief Brian O'Hara greets community members after a swearing-in ceremony at Shiloh Temple International Ministries on Nov. 10. City leaders say are hopeful he can rebuild trust in community and moral in depleted officer ranks two years after the police murder of George Floyd. With O'Hara is his son, Seamus, 6, and his wife, Wafiyah. Another son, Brendan, not pictured, held a Bible for his father during his swearing in. Photo by David Pierini



## Washburn Center names new CEO

Craig Warren was recently named the CEO of the Washburn Center for Children, 1100 Glenwood Ave.

The agency provides outpatient children's mental health services and Warren is the fifth CEO in its 72-year history. He is also the first person of color to lead an agency where 55 percent of its clients identify as BIPOC.

Warren joined the agency as the chief administrative officer in 2020 and was tapped to be acting CEO in May. He has held leadership roles at Minnesota Children's Museum, Greater Twin Cities United Way, Best Buy, Rockwell Automation, The Coca-Cola Company, Towers Perrin and the United States Army. Warren is a graduate of Johns Hopkins University and the University of Chicago.

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## Senator Champion makes history and other election outcomes

By David Pierini, Editor

There is a lot to unpack from the 2022 Midterm Elections, so we're keeping it local. Below are results involving Northsiders who appeared on the ballot.

### That's Senate President Champion:

State Sen. Bobby Joe Champion may not have had an opponent on Nov. 8, yet his uncontested bid for a fourth term turned historic.

A Blue Wave swept Minnesota, meaning the DFL won control of the House and Senate for the first time since 2013.

Two days after the election, the Senate DFL caucus elected Champion Senate President. He is the first Black person to hold the gavel and he will lead what is said to be the most diverse Senate in Minnesota history. This includes the youngest member, the first Muslim woman, the first Black woman and the first majority-woman caucus.

"I am proud and honored that the Senate DFL majority has nominated me to serve as the next Senate president," Champion said in a statement. "I will be the first Black Senate President to preside over this esteemed Chamber, and I promise to serve with distinction and integrity."

### Minneapolis Public Schools Board of Directors:

Despite strong backing and key union endorsements, Northsider KerryJo Felder

lost her bid for an at-large seat on the MPS Board of Directors Tuesday.

Felder finished third in a four-way race for two at-large seats. Collin Beachy was the top vote getter with 68,058 votes. Sonya Emerick, a disability advocate who wants to lobby the state to fully fund public education, narrowly defeated Felder 52,355 to 51,857. Lisa Skjefte totaled 31,930 votes.

Felder seemed a shoe-in for a seat but with a week before the race, she faced calls to back out after the ex-wife of her husband accused Felder in a Facebook post of being intoxicated and "assaulting" her children during a recent family trip to Maryland.

Education advocates called Felder unfit for office and held a news conference to encourage her to back out and press her endorsers to drop their support.

Felder told North News she would stay in the race. The Minneapolis Federation of Teachers continued its support of Felder through the election.

In a statement to SW Voices, Felder admitted some of the things Vann Daley said on Facebook were "valid" and alluded to a possible addiction to painkillers because of chronic pain caused by osteoarthritis.

### Hennepin County Attorney:

Mary Moriarity, the former chief of the Hennepin County Public Defender's Office,

will now be the county's top prosecutor after a big win over Martha Holton Dimick, a Northsider, former judge and prosecutor.

Moriarity won with 57.6 percent of the vote to Dimick's 41.8 percent, according to unofficial totals. The vote total was 254,418 to 184,739.

Moriarity is part of a growing group of public defenders in the United States to win prosecutor jobs on campaigns of reform, data driven charging decisions and philosophy that violent crime is a public health crisis. Dimick was the establishment candidate with a tough-on-crime stance and won endorsements from several law endorsement groups and mayors across the county, including Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey.

Moriarity will succeed Mike Freeman, who is retiring at the end of the year.

### Minnesota Attorney General:

Incumbent Keith Ellison, a resident of the Lyn Park neighborhood, won a second term and in what appeared to be one of the closest statewide races. Ellison defeated Republican challenger Jim Shultz 1,253,690 to 1,232,837 (50.4 percent to 49.6 percent).

The margin was not narrow enough

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## catch up with our Council Members



WARD 4:  
**LaTrisha Vetaw**



For the past month, the Office of Community Safety (OCS) has been leading Operation Endeavor, a coordinated effort of both law enforcement and non-law enforcement partners to reduce violent crime in Minneapolis. I am proud to support this initiative and advocated for its presence in Ward 4. This past week Operation Endeavor released a public report about the first 28 days.

Operation Endeavor is a collaboration between the Minneapolis Police Department, the Hennepin County Attorney's Office, the U.S. Attorney's Office, the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office, the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, the Minnesota State Patrol, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms & Explosives, and others. This work is a continuation of those involved in Operation Safe Summer.

The first 28 days of Operation Endeavor

has resulted in the following:

- A 30% decrease in gun related calls for service (CFS) compared to the same period last year.
- A 5% decrease in gun related CFS compared to the previous 28 days.
- A 29% decrease in gunshot wound victims compared to the same period last year.
- A 17% decrease in gunshot wound victims compared to the previous 28 days.
- A 65% decrease in carjackings compared to the same period last year.
- A 36% decrease in carjackings compared to the previous 28 days.
- 100 illegal firearms recovered.
- \$67,000 of contraband funds recovered.
- 2,908 fentanyl pills and 50 grams of fentanyl powder recovered.
- 46 people charged including multiple suspects related to a number of homicide, carjacking, and shooting investigations

- 61 violence interrupter shifts in neighborhoods across North Minneapolis (including Ward 4), Lake Street, Cedar Riverside, and Downtown

I am extremely hopeful after seeing these results from Operation Endeavor's first 28 days. Operation Endeavor's presence will continue in Ward 4 over the next coming months. I will keep Ward 4 updated with their results. Operation Endeavor will also continue to provide regular public reports on their efforts. You can find the full report at [www.minneapolismn.gov/government/mayor/issues-and-priorities/public-safety/operation-endeavor-public-report/](http://www.minneapolismn.gov/government/mayor/issues-and-priorities/public-safety/operation-endeavor-public-report/)

Don't forget to sign up for the Ward 4 Newsletter at [www.minneapolismn.gov/government/city-council/ward-4/newsletters/](http://www.minneapolismn.gov/government/city-council/ward-4/newsletters/) or reach out to our office at [ward4@minneapolismn.gov](mailto:ward4@minneapolismn.gov) or 612-673-2204.

The Ward 4 Office wishes a happy and healthy Thanksgiving to all who celebrate!

budget is \$1.66 billion and the 2024 budget is \$1.71 billion. The proposed tax levy increases for 2023 is 6.5% and is expected to be 6.2% in 2024. The levy will impact the Northside so come share your voice at the public hearings so that city hall knows where us, Northsiders stand. Visit the City's website to learn more about the mayor's recommended budget, key dates in the approval process, FAQs and more. You can also watch a series of videos on the City's budget process. Comments submitted online will be entered into the public record and shared with the mayor and council members. Mark your calendar for City budget public hearing: 6:05 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 6, Room 317, City Hall, 350 S. Fifth St.

As shared last month, the safe routes to school project received its funding and I had the honor of joining the ribbon cutting on November 1st to celebrate the official opening of the new route which will provide safer travel for students of Hall Elementary, Franklin Middle School, and North High School. Safe roads are a form of public safety and something our office continues to support in Ward 5. The

City of Minneapolis has a new process to prioritize requests for traffic calming measures on neighborhood streets, a system designed to be equitable, data-driven and transparent. Traffic calming measures are street changes that support slower and safer traffic speeds. Examples include street pavement markings, speed bumps, curb extensions and traffic circles. Anyone can apply for neighborhood traffic calming, including residents, property owners, business owners, neighborhood and business organizations. Suggestions for traffic calming needs can be shared with our office, 311 or email [traffic.calming@minneapolismn.gov](mailto:traffic.calming@minneapolismn.gov).

As always, you are more than welcome to reach out to our office at any time with whatever you may need. Whether it's a meeting with me, a constituent services issue, sharing a concern, or inviting our team to an event, we are here to serve you. You can sign up for the Ward 5 newsletter, RSVP to my weekly virtual office hours (Monday at 12 p.m. - 1 p.m.) or request a one-on-one meeting with me at [www.minneapolismn.gov/ward5](http://www.minneapolismn.gov/ward5).



WARD 5:  
**Jeremiah Ellison**



Happy November, Northside! It's hard to believe the elections have been finalized and we are nearing the end of the first year of this term. Our office hosted a people's assembly on November 16th which was great. We talked about public health and safety, economic development, and housing and centered what we as neighbors want for our community. We plan to continue to hold these events throughout the next year and would love to see you at the next one. To sign up to date on these events, be sure to sign up for our newsletter.

We are deep in budget season, and we are finding ways to ensure that the budget is investing in the Northside. A few items I am excited to see come out of the budget is continual investment in the Commercial Property Development fund, an investment of \$18 million in each year of this biennial budget in the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, and over \$8 million for street light system replacement over two years. There are upcoming public hearings for people to provide feedback on Mayor Jacob Frey's recommended 2023-2024 City budget. Comments can also be submitted online at the City's website. The proposed 2023

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.

## New WBC director wants light rail project done for Northsiders, not to them

By David Pierini, Editor

Kristel Porter missed being a member of Minneapolis City Council by less than 100 votes. Rather than dwell on disappointment, Porter tuned into the Universe for the lesson and her next assignment.

A year after coming close to defeating Ward 5 Councilman Jeremiah Ellison, Porter was named executive director of the West Broadway Business Coalition. She stepped into her new role on Nov. 14, just as fate had planned.

"I think that everything happened the way it's supposed to," said Porter, the founder and executive director of MN Renewable Now, a non-profit that brings solar panels to Northside homes and businesses. "We are all in the right place at the right time. However that election turned out was because there was something else for me to do."

This belief has served her throughout her life. It enabled her to move through the fear and trauma of being a teen-aged mom who was once forced to live out of her car. From those lessons came empathy, resiliency, a college degree and the emotional intelligence to rise as a grassroots leader.

Porter now heads an organization that has been working to support local businesses and growing the West Broadway Corridor into a thriving economic hub.

"I think Kristel is the right person for the job at the right time," said Martine Smaller, executive director of the Northside Residents Redevelopment Council, a fellow believer in timing.

Porter's new role with WBC has her literally stepping in front of a moving train.

Transportation officials are in the survey and environmental impact phase of a planned Blue Line extension that could have trains running up and down the middle of West Broadway Avenue before the end of the decade.

Light rail has a way of spurring longterm economic growth, but it can also bring pain and gentrification to parts of the Twin Cities in which it runs.

The train will be no easy fit down West Broadway and it is sure to wipe out street parking. The mostly Black-owned businesses in the corridor will have to figure out how to survive during construction and possibly new ways of operating after West Broadway is transformed and the trains begin running.

"There's no way I can read the future, but I'm definitely somebody that is poised to help make this development successful," she

said. "There's so much effort that needs to take place, especially if we're talking about equity, environmental justice and a cultural district that has struggled because of a lack of investment," she said. "In order to do this right, you have to go the extra mile."

Porter has been putting in those miles. She has sat on a long list of boards where she empowered youth through sports and jobs, promoted cycling, advised schools through site councils and working groups for Community Development Corporations, non-profits that take on revitalizing neighborhoods.

She has held positions with two neighborhood associations, co-founded the United Black Legislative Agenda with Al Flowers and her fast-growing solar energy non-profit has brought renewable energy to more than 150 Northside homes and planted some 3,000 trees here.

Ralph Jackson, whose IPS Solar has partnered with MN Renewable now, said he is impressed with Porter's community connections and ability to address



Kristel Porter

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Sharon and Larry stood behind the counter, and demonstrated what people should see when they walk into the station- smiling and welcoming faces. Photo by Azhae'la Hanson

# New gas station owners fill the tank with gas and hope

By Azhae'la Hanson, Reporter

Bishop Larry Cook grew tired of the criminal activity at the gas station next to his church, Real Believers Faith Center.

So he and his wife, Dr. Sharon Cook decided to buy it.

The Cooks became the new owners of what was once a Marathon Gas Station, near the intersection of West Broadway and Fremont avenues. With the keys and inventory to the station in hand, they assumed operation on Nov. 1 and are in

the process of renaming it the Lion's Den Station.

"We're not weak. We are not a soft target," Larry Cook said. "We are ready for any and every type of contest."

Real Believers congregants were exposed to drug dealing and gun violence that spilled over from the gas station. The Cooks said gunfire sometimes hit the church building and drug deals took place near their property.

"They come up to me, asking me, 'Do I wanna buy some drugs?'" Sharon Cook

said. "I shouldn't be subjected to that."

Larry Cook bought the property to do more than disrupt crime. It had been his mission to own it since the church opened its doors in 1998. He believes Northsiders should have a real stake in economic power in their own community.

Back then, Cook laid his hands on the gas station, which was then a car wash, and prayed to one day own the property. "I said we need to have this," he said about the prayer.

But the time wasn't right. The church

congregation consisted of eight people.

He dedicated the next 24 years to developing a team that he could rely on, a team that shared Cook's commitment to the ministry and to the church's vision for the neighborhood.

Today, the gas station is fully staffed by that team. Real Believers Faith Center averages 200 Sunday attendees and 500 registered members. Under their ownership, the gas station is one of few Black owned gas stations in Minneapolis.

"We're glad it's for profit," Cook

said.

"So we can hire our own people, hire people in the community and then also benefit from the economics of it. That makes our church stronger and makes what we do stronger."

**"I know what drugs do to our children. I know what they do to our community. I know the element that it brings. There's a reason why we have shootings and a lot of times we will demonize the guys that are in front of it, and we'll say they have no value.' Lock them up and get rid of them.' That's not my opinion at all. I am those guys."**

Bishop Larry Cook

The gas station will soon accept EBT as a form of payment for select items, and will feature more than just gas and snacks. In the coming months, those who enter will see new retail items that include



Dr. Sharon Cook is excited to revamp the store with new products, but her favorite snack will remain in the aisles. Photo by Azhae'la Hanson



Kameron White, decade long member of the church started his first day behind the counter and is getting to know the ins and outs of the register. Photo by Azhae'la Hanson

beauty supply, cultural wear and hot food. They plan on buying and leasing out the Krispy Krunchy Chicken restaurant that is attached to the station and changing it to the Lions Den Cafe.

If successful, they want to franchise the Lion's Den station to other parts of Minneapolis.

Along with bringing financial wealth to the church, Cook wants to use his new economic power not to push crime doers off the block, but to bring them into the house.

It's what he says he has always done, and he doesn't plan on stopping anytime soon.

When Cook sees people committing crimes on the property, he doesn't see the enemy. He sees someone who doesn't have hope.

He doesn't want anymore bullets to hit the church and he doesn't want drug dealers to sell on his property. He also wants to see those people make it because some of his church members were once like them.

"I want to see their lives change," Cook said. "I have a whole church full of guys

that have been changed that used to do that same thing. And I look at those guys now and they're priceless to me."

Cook's assistant pastor first came to the church 11 years ago. He was a gangbanger with a black eye that day. One of the deacons used to sell drugs and another church member Cook trusts with many responsibilities used to rob houses.

"These guys are not throwaways," he said. "We need ministries that are willing and not scared to engage in our community, and not be judgmental when you're looking at people that don't have any hope."

Kameron White, a member of the church for 10 years, is currently being trained to work at the gas station.

"Bishop Cook is being that light for people," White said. "So when they come in here, you know whatever they have going on out there, when they come here, they feel a sense of security."

That sense of security is what White sought when he felt he had no direction when he came across the church as a teenager. He's looking forward to making people feel welcome, and improving the gas station's reputation.

**\*SPONSORED CONTENT\***

# NorthPoint's campus expansion: how community engagement led to community investment of the Northside

When leaders at NorthPoint Health & Wellness Center envisioned a campus expansion project, community engagement was at the forefront, and prioritizing inclusion was the path to that engagement. The two pillars of this vision were: maximize small business inclusion in our contracting process and deepen community involvement in our project workforce.

NorthPoint's Community Board highlighted these priorities through a partnership with Hennepin County, which invested \$87.15 million in the project and engaged in an amended procurement process. The project was unbundled by creating smaller construction packages for Small Business Enterprises (SBEs) to bid for selection. The funding for these smaller packages were designated for SBEs employing ex-offenders.

The process yielded two small minority owned business enterprises (MBEs): KMS Construction and TRI-Construction, local contractors whose teams comprised of 74% small MBE sub-contractors and suppliers. As for workforce inclusion from the community, the general contractor, JE Dunn Construction, collaborated with the Urban League of the Twin Cities to recruit hires. The project set out to prioritize recruiting and hiring local laborers and carpenters, particularly with a goal toward increasing minority and women involvement. A common vision

JE Dunn Construction, KMS Construction, and TRI-Construction share a common vision of a healthy northside community thriving as a result of direct investment in its people and businesses. Access to living wage jobs and quality health care are crucial

to the longevity of the northside. NorthPoint's campus expansion is an example of that type of direct investment in the community. For Ken McCraley, owner of KMS Construction, it's also an opportunity to show that minority contractors can deliver high-quality projects and become a blueprint for how to package projects to include MBEs.

For JE Dunn Construction, a big part of their work is with health care facilities. JE Dunn's guiding principles aligned with NorthPoint's campus expansion project: family first, do the right thing, serve others, and health & well-being. Bill Igel, JE Dunn's Healthcare Vice President for Minneapolis, says NorthPoint's new building "will be among the best-in-class facilities we have worked on" and will give access to a state-of-art facility that many community members previously never had a chance to visit. Mr. Igel believes it will be a very welcoming space that brings pride to the northside community.

## Engaging with community

While JE Dunn Construction is not based in Minneapolis, Mr. Igel points to their Minneapolis office made up of all local people and NorthPoint's campus expansion as an opportunity to enrich the lives of community members who live in community. One example of this is JE Dunn's work with the Urban League of Minneapolis hosting a job fair in August 2021, informing community members about working in the trades and the well-paying jobs available.

For Ms. Delmarie Nelson, 51, getting hired was an opportunity to



Ms. Delmarie Nelson, 51, on the NorthPoint construction site. Photo courtesy of NorthPoint Health & Wellness Center

earn a competitive wage and more importantly, a pension. Ms. Nelson, a beautician, and business owner said she was attracted to the hourly pay and also the opportunity to earn a pension, something she does not have as a business owner. The debt free training was also very appealing. Ms. Nelson was trained before getting on site, visited, and learned from various labor unions, and eventually began working on the NorthPoint site in May 2022, after completing 3 months of training. One training she especially appreciated was on

emotional intelligence, which she said is important to keep emotions calm while working with heavy machinery. Ms. Nelson is still working on the NorthPoint site today and even got re-certified as a flagger. She hopes to gain more certifications and move up in positions, because in her own words "the sky is the limit". She also hopes to see more women and black people in higher positions, like foreman and superintendent. For Ms. Nelson, who used to visit her doctor at NorthPoint when it was Pilot City, it means a lot that she will drive by the finished

**\*SPONSORED CONTENT\***

building and be able to say, "I was a part of that".

Another example of JE Dunn's commitment to partnership beyond the construction is their engagement with NorthPoint's programs like the Food Shelf, where employees can volunteer and host fundraisers. The goal is not just to pound nails and pour concrete, as Mr. Igel puts it, but it's also "to know the importance of this job and why we're doing this".

## Investing in community

For the northside, which is majority African American, the new building will be an investment in the

community. TRI-Construction owner Calvin Littlejohn explains that "if we want to see the African American community grow, we must bolster or increase the business sector of the African American community". TRI-Construction works to ensure that payroll dollars go to households in the northside. This sentiment is shared by Mr. Igel of JE Dunn, who says "we want to enrich people's lives through the buildings we build."

And for NorthPoint's staff, 70% of which have community ties, the new building will be an improved space on par with other top tier health care facilities throughout the Twin Cities.

## Long term impacts

The new and improved NorthPoint building also means the capacity to increase services. Community members will access facilities including a Dental Specialty Center, a Bistro Café and Teaching Kitchen, a Child Wellness Center offering free childcare services, a Spiritual Healing and Wellness Center, and increased Food Shelf distributions.

Programming focused on Health Equity will also include the NorthPlace Housing Connection to create and support a housing network across North Minneapolis, the African American Men's Center of Excellence

to focus on collective support for African American men, the NorthPoint Nutrition Center that will align all food programming and educate guests on health food options and ensuring the environmental equity with community education on renewable energy and other sustainable energy practices. For KMS's Ken McCraley, these increased services and programming impacts will make a healthier community. "From a pure people perspective, folks will believe in building in this community out because they will have high-quality, accessible health care right here in their neighborhood."



An aerial view of NorthPoint's main campus under construction from October 2022. Photo courtesy of NorthPoint Health & Wellness Center



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## NEWS

# These two zine teens from Henry High have a tale to tell

By David Pierini, Editor

When the Minneapolis Public Schools strike ended in March, students griped when administrators extended the school year into the summer.

Marshawn Ambers and Sky Vang did not complain. Instead, the two used the time to create the first volume of a comic zine that by next Spring is on track to get released as part of a four-volume book.

Already, Ambers and Vang have published two volumes of Destin Tale, a story line that starts when villagers chase away a young person who then falls down a hole into a magical forest with monsters and other village castoffs.

**"You never want to underestimate a project like this. I tell kids that you can do this thing out in the real world and get paid to do it."**

Alex Conover, Henry digital arts teacher

Monsters and humans fight and the main character's journey through the forest is one of self-discovery as they try to get monsters and humans to stop fighting. Ambers wrote a non-gender specific character to give the reader the opportunity to give them their own identity, sort of how a video game allows the player to create their own character.

"They're trying to figure out how to get people together to love each other," said Ambers, a senior. "Part of the storyline is based on racism and people disrespecting each other. That's where problems come from.

"To me, comics and stories do this well, to have some kind of message and to tell people to look at these things and come together."

Ambers and Vang came together earlier this year through a mutual friend. Their friend had seen Vang draw characters in a Japanese black-and-white comic style

known as Manga and introduced them at lunch. Ambers loves Manga and is often seen walking the halls with colorful shirts adorned with whimsical Japanese comic characters. He was already playing with a story and knew he wanted someone to illustrate it.

When Vang showed some drawings to Ambers in the cafeteria, they clicked.

Vang is a self-taught artist who never thought his "comic doodling" would go beyond idle time at home. Ambers writing provides Vang the direction to draw, he said. Vang likes to sit with the story before lightly sketching his ideas of characters' looks and actions before turning to Ambers for creative input.

"Drawing for me is inspired from things I liked as a kid," Vang said. "I love video games, I love space, things like that. I didn't really know how to express this other than to draw. As I got older and inspired by other things I continued. I've developed a habit of just drawing."

To gain an audience for the Destin Tale series, the young authors got a big assist from digital art teacher Alex Conover, who was able to use printing privileges at an art college to produce a small batch of each zine. The second volume dropped in October.

Conover was always intrigued when he saw Ambers walk the halls in his colorful shirts and came to appreciate his creativity and organizing skills when he finally had him in a class.

Vang would show up to see Ambers and Conover found himself arrested when looked over Vang's shoulder and saw him drawing.

"It stopped me in my tracks," Conover said. "I had never seen anything like it. He was making the best art I'd ever seen from a student at the school."

During the 10-day extension of last year's school year, they made printing the first zine a project. Vang learned how to digitize his drawings and with the first printing, a path, not so different than the one of self-discovery in Destin Tale, unfolded before them.

Both are interested in some sort of art program after high school. Ambers would like to study art and creative writing. Vang says he would love to one day run a production company that produces animation.

Volume three of Destin Tale is in the works and the hope is to have a fourth completed before Ambers graduates and have all four volumes bound in one book. This could take some fundraising, but as they try to give away their zines, people want to pay for them, Amber said.

"You never want to underestimate a project like this," Conover said. "I tell kids that you can do this thing out in the real world and get paid to do it."

"I know they have the interest and the talent. Art school could genuinely be a good fit for them. They're kind of built for it."



Henry students Sky Vang and Marshawn Ambers are the authors of Destin Tale. Photo by David Pierini



Panels from the second volume of Destin Tale.

# Mentoring spirit of late coach opens doors to new Northside gym

By David Pierini, Editor

Joe Brown had walked into gymnasiums countless times, but the one in the building for sale on Thomas Avenue North felt different.

In it, he saw himself welcoming Northside boys and girls. He would offer them a safe space to play and a lively and dedicated coach and mentor with firm guidance and unconditional love.

Brown passed away from a heart attack in February on the very day his church, New Oil Christian Center Church, purchased the former charter school. His pastor, Bruce Carpenter, was about to leave for Brown's house to give him the keys when he got the call that the beloved dean and basketball coach at Anwatin Middle School had died.

At a dedication ceremony for the gym on Oct. 22, family and friends vowed to infuse his spirit and legacy between its walls.

In the lobby of the gym is a large photo of Brown surrounded by banners and gear for his favorite football team, the Green Bay Packers.

His eyes are focused and muscles around his mouth show no signs of a smile.

"Yup, that's him," one observer said. "He has that look like, 'I see you and I'm not playin.'"

Inside, was a banner proclaiming the gym "Joe's Place."

"I was here when he came to see the gym," said church member Portia Stringer, who organized the dedication ceremony. "And he was like 'Oh yeah.' He saw it as something that would be really good for our young people."

"Joe just liked being with young people. He would introduce himself and just start talking. He liked being with young people, trying to steer them on a straight path and keep them away from the foolishness."

Brown was a larger-than-life figure at Anwatin Middle School for 22 years. Students and staff were so gutted by his sudden passing and wrote messages to



Friends prepared the gymnasium for its opening and dedication to the late Joe Brown, a coach and dean at Anwatin Middle School. Photo by David Pierini

him on the walls of the hallway leading to his office. The walls became so filled up, some mourners found ways to get their message to him on the ceiling, Stringer said.

Carpenter said there were countless times Brown reached into his pocket to buy a school lunch for a student who had nothing to eat. When he learned a student didn't have a ride to school, he'd drive to pick them up.

"Somebody's child is successful today because Joe went outside the box and took an extra step or go an extra mile in order to save our children," Carpenter said during a prayer that preceded the ribbon cutting.

"He and I talked about it. He was going to do what he does best and that's love our children, be the big uncle, the big brother, whatever he could do, in order to enhance the lives of children. With this building we can always remember the sacrifice that he made."

He is a 1989 graduate of Henry High School who went on to play college basketball at Rainy River College. Brown eventually earned a Bachelor's degree in Education and he was in his 30th year as an educator with Minneapolis Public

Schools.

He is survived by his wife, Nakisha, six children and three grandchildren. Over the years, the Browns fostered eight children.

The gym is just part of a larger New Oil Christian Empowerment Center that will include childcare, health services, a food shelf and eventually senior housing services. New Oil Christian Center Church is a small congregation coming up on its 25th year. It moved from south Minneapolis to a church building next store to the empowerment center before the COVID-19 pandemic arrived.

Nakisha Brown used an oversized pair of scissors to cut the ribbon. Ward 4 City Councilwoman LaTrisha Vetaw read a proclamation calling Oct. 22 Coach Brown day in the city of Minneapolis.

Carpenter said he and others with Brown's mentoring spirit will take turns stepping into his sizable shoes to give kids in the surrounding area a safe place to play and learn new basketball skills.

"We have to keep this alive," Stringer said. "Because he was so sure about what he wanted to do here."



Friends and family gather around a photo of Brown for a group photo. Photo by David Pierini

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Tutor Brenda Kemmerick works on reading with a first-grader at Ascension Catholic School. Photo by Rob Hahn

# COVID's impact on local schools includes shortage of tutors

By David Pierini, Editor

As schools in North Minneapolis rebuild teacher ranks and student growth lost by two years of COVID-19 restrictions, one shortage is particularly troubling to principals – tutors.

From small charters to long-established public schools, North Minneapolis began the 2022-23 school with 32 openings for tutors, according to Ampact, which partners with schools across the state to provide tutors for reading, math and early learning.

Low-income and communities of color around the country were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. In North Minneapolis schools, the scramble to convert to remote learning and struggles to keep

students engaged online lay bare inequities in resources and a glaring achievement gap. A three-week strike in March by Minneapolis Public Schools disrupted the long-awaited return to the classroom and set students further adrift.

Nationwide, two decades of growth in reading and math were wiped out when COVID-19 shuttered classrooms, according to the Institute of Education Sciences, which publishes a yearly study called The Nation's Report Card.

"Some kids have to put in the extra time that a teacher or parent at home can't provide them," said Kendra Halbert, Ampact's program manager. "Tutors are just that extra kick we know some scholars need."

Northside schools need tutors are: Ascension Catholic School, Bethune Arts Magnet, Cityview Community School, Franklin STEM Magnet Middle School, Fraser-PICA Head Start, Hall Stem Academy, Hmong International Academy, Loring Community School, Lucy Craft Laney Community School, Nellie Stone Johnson Community School, North Star Early Childhood, Sojourner Truth Academy and Way to Grow.

Julie Guy, principal of Sojourner Truth Academy, uses what her school calls scholar coaches from kindergarten through third grade. These are tutors that spend every day in the classroom, supporting teachers and working with students one on one.

Of the eight positions needed to be

fully staffed, the Northside charter school is trying to make due with three.

"The hot topics are learning loss and the regression that kids had during COVID," Guy said, referring to ongoing conversations with teachers and other colleagues. "It is critical that kids get as much individualized academic and social/emotional attention they need and to have those tutors, especially in the early grades is critical."

Guy said younger tutors are likely to leave for higher-paying jobs or take that first teaching job.

Pay and benefits vary based on hours. A tutor working 35 hours per week gets a

Continued on page 23



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Franklin McCray III, George Jackson, and Mike Friestleben, left, stand outside and turn around incoming cars who try to drive though 16th Avenue after school. Photo by Azhae'la Hanson

# Polar community asks government for help with student safety

By Azhae'la Hanson, Reporter

Parents and staff of North High School are urging government officials for safety solutions amidst a slew of threats made against students.

North has lost at least one student per year to gun violence since 2018 and the school says students this school year have dealt with threats of violence as they walk to and from school.

"Historically, it's always been our job to keep kids safe in school," said Assistant Principal Steve White. "And in the last couple of years, it's shifted to getting them to school."

Still feeling the lingering grief of the murder of Deshaun Hill last February and the overwhelming feeling amongst students that they could be next, North's Parent Teacher Association called on government officials for help.

The PTA held a meeting on Oct. 27 that included Mayor Jacob Frey, Chief Inspector Charlie Adams, and representatives from the school district and Metro Transit.

Some of the threats have been so concerning that staff have to block the street off with their cars for an hour after school to deter students from facing intimidation from gang members, speeding cars, violence, and guns.

**"No student should have to know what it feels like to mourn a classmate, write 'Long live' on a blackboard, permanently decommission a locker, or wonder and worry about their own safety."**

Lars Lindqvist, Teacher

"I stand in the middle of the street, knowing full well that you're not going to run over somebody," White said.

George Jackson, a parent, said he chose to volunteer with the staff after a gun was pulled on his son after football practice earlier this year. He has other children who will attend North in the future and says he isn't going anywhere.

"We need to protect our own," Jackson said. "I'm not going anywhere, I'm around now and I will be around 10 more years."

The school district eliminated yellow school buses in 2012 in favor of Metro Transit buses. Students have had to walk further distances for transportation in unsafe areas.

The Metro Transit bus that stops outside of the school provides very limited service to the majority of the student body.

So far this year, students reported 47 incidents that took place walking to or from school or city bus stops.

Dede Williams, parent and former Polar, walked to school everyday when she was a student. Today, she lives three blocks from the school but still drives her son to North every day.

"I used to walk to school, I didn't even stress that part," Williams said. "I wasn't afraid to walk to school, but now, I'm not letting him walk to school because I don't want to be on the other side of 'I wish I would have.'"

**"We need help. We need support"**

Ramiyah Jackson, Student Council president

At the meeting, parents asked that officials commit to providing safer options for students.

Minneapolis Public Schools interim Superintendent Rochelle Cox and school board Director Sharon El-Amin said the board will look at an Equity and Diversity Impact Assessment around transportation for the district schools including North.

"We need our support from our commissioners, from our mayor, from our senator, and from our state representatives," El-Amin said. "This is a collective effort that we have to continue not to only just show up today, but hold us responsible because our children don't deserve this. Our families don't deserve this."

MPS plans to spend \$1.4 million for safety in the coming year.

Chief inspector Adams said officers will be ready to respond to any future calls from North High. He said hoped new policing strategies for controlling crime on West Broadway Avenue will help students feel safer.

The Metro Transit police are currently working on reestablishing a partnership with a local organization for juvenile outreach.

"It sounded good but when will it manifest," asked community activist Lynne Crockett. "Our kids are in trouble right now. My problem is that everything takes too long."

English teacher Lars Lindqvist listed the names of three students who were murdered in the time he's been teaching at North High School, two have been in the past year.

"Deshaun Hill Jr, Keimonte White, and



Parent Dede Williams refuses to let her son walk to school despite living only three blocks away. She tells officials that they need to put a better effort to protect the students. Photo by Azhae'la Hanson

Demonte Wallace. Sadly, they are not the only students...lost in recent years," Lindqvist said. "And they don't fully account or speak for the experience of students who have been shot, injured, followed, threatened or been in unsafe conditions.

"It's the reality which our students and staff live in. I should not be used to this."

Principal Mauri Friestleben said students were too triggered on the subject to talk to officials. Friestleben reminded officials that North High isn't just dealing with the aftermath of one incident. Students deal with trauma every day.

She recently spoke to a ninth-grader who was shot and still chose to come to school the next day.

"Our children deserve just as much compassion and protection as anybody else's children in any other place," Friestleben said. "And I think we constantly get held accountable for the outcomes and we realize that we're working with children that have been shot over the weekend and somehow still found a way to come to school and go to class that we are missing so much more."



Deshaun Hill's memorial sits on the intersection of Penn and Golden Valley Rd where he was fatally shot last February, this is the main bus stop students use on their way to and from school. Photo by Azhae'la Hanson

# Jamil Jackson got a second chance and makes it count for others

By Azhae'la Hanson, Reporter

As a young man with no parents and no one to give him clear direction in making life decisions, Jamil Jackson found himself taking care of himself and his younger siblings the only way he knew how – hustling.

And it caught up to him. He faced up to 31 years in prison for felony marijuana charges. But after spending 36 hours in county jail, he was released.

“I wondered why I was able to walk away from that situation where I got caught red handed,” said Jackson. “I thought it was God saying that it's my responsibility to turn my life around.”

He took the second chance, and never looked back.

Today Jamil Jackson is transforming the old Gethsemane Episcopal Church in downtown Minneapolis into a community center.

He is hoping by Jan. 1, the community can be welcomed into the CEO Center for Change (The CEO stands for Change Equals Opportunity).

The 24,000 square-foot property will feature a mix of social justice, performance arts, and STEM based activities. There will be a fully functioning kitchen, movie theater, arcade, braiding salon, barber shop, classrooms, a full gym, and a production studio.

Jackson wants the center to be a mecca of fun, community, and opportunity. It has been a dream of his a decade in the making.

Jackson's active sons led him to start coaching sports at Fairview park in 2008. At one point he coached football, basketball, and baseball because it's what his kids loved to do.

When he went to his kids' school to check on their behavior, he also found himself checking on their teammates.

“The kids valued sports,” Jackson said. “So all the school had to do was give me a call to set them straight.”



Jamil Jackson outside what will soon be the CEO Center for Change. Photo by Azhae'la Hanson

Very quickly, he became the person the school called to mediate behavioral situations with all of the young boys on his team.

The longer he coached, Jackson realized the importance of his presence in the community for youth, as his sons were not the only young boys who saw him as a father figure.

He found his purpose coaching young boys who lived similar lives that he had, and he knew he could show them a different path.

“When I was a young man I had no clue where I was going and my community wasn't supporting me in terms of allowing me to vent or be open about how I felt or what I was going through,” Jackson said.

“I wanted to help guide them through their goals and how they can get from point A to point B instead of just aimlessly wandering.”

So Jackson set out on a mission

to create spaces for young men, again meeting them where they're at and helping them discover what it is to be a man.

He founded CEO with a mission to mentor youth from ages 12 to 25 in the areas of education, employment and life skills.

Today, the organization has grown to branch into various schools across the state including Minneapolis Public Schools, the Run and Shoot basketball league at Fairview Park and CEO Academy.


Jackson wears many hats. In addition to CEO he also serves as the head basketball coach at Patrick Henry High, a teacher for the office of Black Male Achievement, a youth violence prevention consultant for the City of Minneapolis, and the commander of the Minnesota Freedom Fighters.

Trying to change lives is busy work.

And he is a busy man. Once completed, he hopes the center will bring all of his programming under one roof.

**“When I was a young man I had no clue where I was going and my community wasn't supporting me in terms of allowing me to vent or be open about how I felt or what I was going through”**

Jamil Jackson




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## DRAMA

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See website for full class listings.

**Northside Strong Scholarships:** Students who live in North Minneapolis, Golden Valley, Brooklyn Center or Robbinsdale are eligible for full or partial scholarships. Lundstrum is committed to serve all students regardless of financial circumstances. The scholarship application is part of the regular application form.



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**NOTICES**

**COMMUNITY RESOURCES**

**Help with homework:** St. Olaf Lutheran Church offers after-school tutoring with an "expert mathematician" on hand. Sessions run 3 to 5 pm, Mondays and Thursday and 3 to 6 pm Tuesdays and Wednesdays. The church also offers a Youth Club for grades 6 through 12 on Wednesdays at 6:30 p.m. Transportation available. Call 612-529-7726 to enroll in tutoring or the Youth Club.

**Skate through the winter:** North Commons Park is offering figure skating lessons and a youth hockey program beginning Nov. 1 at a low cost. Sign up on Wednesday from 6-8 p.m. beginning Nov. 1. Transportation is available. Call 612-588-9177 for more information.

**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% 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.

**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. Walkups are welcome.

**Community Dinner:** Pillsbury United Communities offers free dinners every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday at the Oak Park Community Center, 1701 Oak Park Ave. N. Meals are currently to go during the pandemic, but PUC hopes to reopen its indoor sit-down space soon.

**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 WIXX 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](mailto:maggie.kohl@minneapolismn.gov) or cell: 612-258-3982. Contact Betsy Brock with other needs via email: [betsy.brock@minneapolismn.gov](mailto:betsy.brock@minneapolismn.gov).

gov or cell: 612-257-5242. You can also reach Vetaw via email: [latrisha.vetaw@minneapolismn.gov](mailto: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](mailto:ward5@minneapolismn.gov). You can also contact his policy associate Bethny Turnwall at [bethny.turnwall@minneapolismn.gov](mailto:bethny.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](mailto:irene.fernando@hennepin.us). For constituent services contact policy aide Bill Emory at 612-348-3526 or at [bill.emory@hennepin.us](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:DavidP@pillsburyunited.org)

**Election outcomes Continued from page 5**

for an automatic recount and Schultz the next morning conceded defeat, according to news reports.

Among Ellison's first-term accomplishments was his office's successful prosecution of former police officer Derek Chauvin for the murder of George Floyd in 2020.

Schultz called Ellison soft on crime and used the uptick in violence in the Twin Cities over the last couple of years to gin up support. The attorney general is primarily responsible for consumer protection, legal representation of state government, advocating for small businesses in utility proceedings and prosecuting criminal proceedings when asked by county attorneys.

**Winners before the polls closed:**

State and county Democrats elected to serve North Minneapolis secured new terms Tuesday after appearing on the ballot without challengers.

In addition to Champion, they are: Hennepin County Commissioner Irene Fernando; and state Representatives Esther Agbaje and Fue Lee.

**Kristel Porter Continued from page 7**

skeptical homeowners.

He recalled a successful Zoom meeting she organized in 2020 about the hazards of plastics getting into the ocean.

"How she set it up was really meaningful," Jackson said. "She actually had several state legislators, community leaders... a nice mix of people. That's a real skill to get all of those people together in the room."

Porter is known for her charisma and endless energy for working to solve problems in North Minneapolis, especially as it relates to the environment and climate change. Conversation, for her, and with her is easy. Call it a soft skill, but for Porter it is a skill she uses for heavy lifting.

"We have a lot of great people doing great things," she said. "How do we start to partner together to make some investments so that we can limit the amount of displacement that happens? I'm somebody very interested in unique finance models. We can get some of this work done without having a large impact from people from the outside coming in and taking our home and community and developing something they want as opposed to something we need."

**Tutor shortage Continued from page 16**

\$900 stipend every two weeks and gets up to an additional \$6,000 for tuition or student loans. Other benefits include student loan forbearance and interest repayment, health insurance and child care.

At Ascension Catholic School, Principal Benito Matias has his fingers crossed. Ampact is interviewing a retired math teacher to serve as a part-time tutor for the school's two eighth-grade classes. Before COVID hit, there were two math tutors.

"There are self-esteem issues if they feel like they're not smart enough," Matias said. "They blame themselves when they're struggling academically. There's so much more than just having someone who can speed a lot of time with a scholar to help them improve their math or reading. There are so many other components (tutors) can impact."

"As much as we all wanted to go back to some level of normalcy, it's not going to happen overnight."

Ampact continues to look for people interested in tutoring. The application deadline is Dec. 15 to begin work in January and training is provided.

To apply, visit <https://join.readingandmath.org/careers-home/>



Fremont Clinic offers free/low-cost STI testing 3 days a week, no appointment or insurance needed. Private & confidential.

Every Tu/Th/F, 1-4 PM  
3300 Fremont Ave N

612-588-9411  
[neighborhoodhealthsource.org](http://neighborhoodhealthsource.org)



miles of smiles

## THE NEW METRO D LINE OPENS DEC. 3

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Discover a new, faster way to ride.

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The new METRO D Line is an improvement over Route 5 with D-pendable service that's:

*Fast* – up to 20% faster

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*All day* – and every day of the week

*All yours* – comfortable, brand new buses



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