A second chance after being sentenced to life

North High student reporters Ashley Powell and Myesha Powell interview Elizer Darris about making amends for a crime he committed at 15.  

Page 18

ALSO INSIDE

MPS is facing a $33 million deficit. How did we get here?  Page 10

New building houses hundreds in Hawthorne  Page 4
Make your New Year's resolution to support grassroots, local media in 2018

Over 30 high school students in our community have participated in our journalism education program. Next year, we resolve to continue growing, dreaming, and bringing you the information you need to stay aware of what’s happening in your North Minneapolis neighborhoods.

We hope you’ll resolve to support local media too in 2018. You can start today by purchasing an excellent last minute holiday gift – a subscription to North News! For $30/year, we’ll mail our monthly issues straight to your house, apartment or PO Box. Email me to sign up.

By supporting North News you’re also supporting our high school students as they learn how to ethically, accurately, and responsibly tell stories about our community. Look no further than this issue for stellar examples of their work.

On Page 18, Ashley Powell and Myesha Powell (no relation) teamed up to do a Q&A piece on Elizer Darris, a 33-year-old community member who was released from prison a little over a year ago after serving 17 years for a murder he committed at 15. Ashley and Myesha, who both take the North News journalism class at North High and work as paid afterschool interns with us, interviewed Darris about his penitentiary experiences and the seeds he’s sowing for a successful future now that he’s a free man.

There are 12 other student-led pieces in this paper. North High journalists teamed up with Bethel University journalists to cover the new Hawthorne EcoVillage Apartments opening in late November (Page 4). Senior Morris Grear writes about being a Liberian immigrant on Page 15, and sophomore Dalvin Crockett writes about students who endure long public transit commutes to be able to attend the school of their choice (Page 6). Senior Jermaine Hardin links present day poverty to historic redlining on Page 6, and athletes Tayler Johnson, Pierre Hampton, and Antonio Simmons explain why healthy eating is essential to peak sports performance (Page 7).

As a staff, North News will spend the remaining week of December and first few weeks of January planning for 2018. If there’s a story you’d like to see us explore, an opportunity for our youth that you’d like us to consider, or if you have an idea for how we can better serve you, please let us know.

Happy holidays,
Kenzie O’Keefe
Editor/Publisher, North News
kenzieo@pillsburyunited.org
651.245.2647

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS
11/30/17 edition, Page 6
"Empowered by solar"

The article misspelled Kitrina Stratton’s name.

The article stated that MRES customers would have to pay back a portion of their solar credits. This is sometimes the case for other community solar gardens but is not the case for the MRES gardens.

Happy holidays
Happy Holidays from all of us here at North News.

Thank you for supporting us this year.
Landlord’s license loss creates uncertain future for tens of families

57 Minneapolis families may lose their rental housing by the end of February 2018 because the City revoked their landlord’s (Mahmood Khan’s) rental license. On Dec. 18, a Hennepin County housing court referee appointed an administrator for all 43 properties involved. Exactly what that means for tenants remains to be seen, but many see it as positive sign. The Minneapolis Public Housing Authority (MPHA) and Community Action Partnership of Hennepin County (CAP-HC) have teamed up to try to support the affected families. According to a press release from the MPHA, families will be offered an emergency rental subsidy of up to $500 per month for a year as they seek new housing. “It’s a balance between an amount of money that could make a real difference … and what we could afford,” said Jeff Horwich communications manager for the MPHA. Northside neighborhood organizations are also involved. Dani Tietjen, housing chair at the Folwell Neighborhood Association, has connected with affected residents and urges community members with knowledge about available housing to contact the MPHA and CAP-HC. “I can’t imagine how much anxiety these families are experiencing,” she wrote on Facebook in mid-December. According to City data, the vacancy rate for rental housing in Minneapolis is just 3.4% and average monthly rent is $1,279.

By Kenzie O’Keefe | Editor

New community gym the "Power House Center" to open in January

Noir Elite Fitness has teamed up with Brothers EMpowered Minneapolis to create a new gym for the community called the Power House Center, located inside North High. It’s for both adults and students in the community. This isn’t an ordinary gym. They will have many classes – kickboxing, zumba, strength and conditioning, and they will also offer mentoring and tutoring through Brothers EMpowered, led by Charles Caine. Noir Elite Fitness co-owners Chaz Sandifer and Valerie Fleurentin say this opportunity all started with a phone call from the E.J. Henderson Youth Foundation, which runs a gym space at North High. The foundation offered them an opportunity to do something productive and positive with the space that wasn’t being put to use. Sandifer and Fleurentin were excited. They’ve been hosting pop-up fitness opportunities throughout the community, but this will be their first brick-and-mortar home. “We’re elated. We didn’t think it would happen so fast,” said Sandifer. The gym’s grand opening celebration is planned for Jan. 12. Thanks to Fleurentin, Sandifer, and Caine, we will now have a wonderful gym in our community.

By Myesha Powell | North High

City plans to issue an RFP for two Broadway properties

The West Broadway Business and Area Coalition (WBC) held a meeting on Dec. 18 to discuss the futures of two North Minneapolis properties, 927/931 and 1001 West Broadway Ave. The City will likely be releasing an RFP for 927/931 in January 2018. “Nothing is set in stone, but [there is] a strong desire for public input and a need to activate that very exciting intersection,” said James Terrell, Principal Project Coordinator and Manager for the City of Minneapolis’ Community Planning and Economic Development (CPED). The 927/931 lot is currently a three-floor building. Jackson Hewitt and WBC occupy its first floor. Its basement, second floor, and third floor are empty and currently unusable. 1001 will need to be torn down due to structural issues. According to Terrell, the cost of the buildings will be “close to a dollar” and development objectives should be focused on business and office use.

By Cirien Saadeh | Reporter

STEP-UP for a job opportunity

STEP-UP is an internship program for teenagers so they can have a job during the summer and stay out of trouble. Teens work all around the city, everywhere from rec centers to office buildings. To work for STEP-UP, you must live in Minneapolis, be 14-21 years old by June 1, 2018, and not currently be enrolled in college. One of the following must also apply: you must meet family income guidelines, be a student with disability, have an IEP, be an English language learner, and/or have been involved with the justice system. To have a spot or chance to get the job you have to apply online by Feb. 16, 2018. Some fun facts about STEP-UP are: 93% of interns say that their internships prepared them to become valuable contributors to the future. 75% of interns say that their internship helped them to decide what career to pursue. interns earned $2.9 million in wages over the summer last year. Apply online at www.stepupmpls.org.

By Eli Campbell | North High

Housing envisioned for UHT

Approximately 80 people met Nov. 30 to discuss housing in the Upper Harbor Terminal (UHT) redevelopment. “There was a lot of opinions in the room and, near the end, a lot of commonality,” said Kate Lamers, Design Project Manager for MPRB. Community members will have more opportunities to engage in UHT discussions in 2018. Visit their website http://upperharbormpls.com/ for more information. The City and MPRB have sought feedback on UHT’s redevelopment. Current plans include private development and park amenities.

By Cirien Saadeh | Staff Reporter

CHRISTMAS AT ASCENSION: Kindergarteners Aniyah Dobbins-Bailey, Jonas Dixon and Tahiry Fleurentin were excited. They’ve been host- ing pop-up fitness opportunities throughout the community, but this will be their first brick-and-mortar home. “We’re elated. We didn’t think it would happen so fast,” said Sandifer. The gym’s grand opening celebration is planned for Jan. 12. Thanks to Fleurentin, Sandifer, and Caine, we will now have a wonderful gym in our community. Photo by David Pierini.
Thumping feet and screeching voices echo off the hardwood floors and bare drywall of the three-bedroom apartment located on the corner of Lyndale and Lowry avenues. The aroma of Sarpino’s pepperoni pizza lingers as Donia Caldwell pleads with her three kids – Keyondre (9), Kamryn (8), Zaniah (5) – to begin their homework. Instead, she watches the kids take turns attempting to wear out the floors of their new home. With each lap down the hallway back to the living room, they display a new outfit for the rest of the family to see.

Five years ago, Caldwell lived in a homeless shelter with no space for a family fashion show. She spent four months there, caring for her two sons and 2-month-old daughter, who suffered from asthma attacks. Then she lived in an apartment that got burglarized. Her TVs and computers were stolen. From there she moved in with her boyfriend at the time, but the relationship grew toxic, forcing her to move in with her mom. She was one of 27 people living in the house; her kids were three of the 11 children there.

After years of bouncing around, Caldwell has hope for stability. On Nov. 20, she signed a lease and moved into a three-bedroom apartment in the new Hawthorne EcoVillage Apartments with her three kids. The Hawthorne EcoVillage Apartments is a 75-unit, workforce, affordable-housing apartment building created and maintained by Project for Pride in Living (PPL). Workforce housing requires residents to be making at or below 50% of the area median income. According to the Metropolitan Council website, the median income for Minneapolis is $90,000. The project began in 2010 as one solution to Minneapolis’ affordable housing shortage. After years of planning and 13 months of construction, it has the potential to house 224 people. All 75 units are leased, and all residents will be moved in by the end of January.

The EcoVillage Apartments is part of a larger neighborhood redevelopment project PPL continues to work on in the Hawthorne neighborhood of North Minneapolis. PPL has been working to fill up a four-block radius with high-quality affordable housing and this project is just the latest installment. The project cost roughly $18 million and received funding from 16 partners, including the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization, Hawthorne Neighborhood Council, City of Minneapolis and Hennepin County.

Caldwell grew up in the neighborhood. She walks the streets of her childhood with her kids and points out where she once got bit by a dog, a spot that reminded her of a boy that she used to pick on because she had a crush on him and the corner where her brother got jumped. Caldwell is not worried about raising her kids in this area as she says she has seen significant improvement since she roamed these same streets as a kid.

"Hawthorne residents said ‘we don’t want to just fix the problems, we want to attract people to our neighborhood,’” PPL Project Manager Abbie Loosen said. “We found that with our for-sale housing, half of the people that buy are already North Side residents and half are from somewhere else.

The new Hawthorne EcoVillage Apartments are providing a safe place for hundreds in North Minneapolis.
that are attracted to the North Side by the housing opportunities here."

When she first applied to live in the EcoVillage Apartments, Caldwell said her application fee got returned because her income was lower than the requirement set by PPL, which requires residents to meet a minimum income to ensure they can afford their home. However, in June she started working as a personal care assistant to qualify.

“I got to shouting and praising,” Caldwell said about her reaction to getting accepted into the building.

PPL reports it has safeguards in place to ensure families have the financial support they need to be successful in their new residences. According to Jake LeFaive, the EcoVillage site manager, PPL works closely with residents to ensure they are on track to pay their rent every month. They will also work with anyone struggling with finances and point them to resources that can provide help.

Another focus of the building is to promote healthy living and eco-friendliness. Building amenities include a fitness room, bike storage room and green roof. A water tank under the playground collects rainwater that can be reused. Unlike many apartment buildings, the stairs are located in the lobby and the elevator is around the corner to encourage people to take the stairs. Despite all these features, the thing Caldwell is most excited about in her new apartment is the dishwasher. She has never had a dishwasher.

Now that she has stable housing and employment, Caldwell says she plans to get more involved in her kids’ education. Caldwell also wants to help her kids work on respect, something she says they have struggled with in school.

“I respect everybody as long as they respect me,” Caldwell said. “That’s what I try to instill in my kids.”

Since the family moved into its three-bedroom apartment, Caldwell has already noticed improvements in her kids’ behavior. She has received far fewer calls from their school about her two sons misbehaving and hasn’t received any calls regarding Zaniah.

Caldwell’s kids, one of whom has ADHD, have fallen behind in school during the time the family had been on the move. The kids’ grades dropped. They threw temper tantrums, disrespected teachers and started fights with other kids. Caldwell believes the lack of stability in the family’s housing helped cause these problems. One of her goals now that she has stable housing is to focus on getting her kids back on track in their education.

Caldwell is a member of the Northside Achievement Zone and through that program she has learned how to advocate for her kids within the school system. She also has them working with the Washburn Center for Children to help with the behavioral problems.

“ать,” Caldwell said. “I went to go live in the shelter, that’s when I learned how to start asking for help and that’s how I started finding out about all these resources.”

After the final slice of pizza was gone, Donia played “How Far I’ll Go” from the Moana soundtrack through her speaker as the kids practiced the lyrics for their school’s performance. They used the living room to choreograph their dance routine, consisting of twirling from Zaniah and head spins and moonwalks from Keyondre and Kamryn.

This story is made possible by a partnership between the Bethel University and North High journalism programs.
Traveling from city to city to get to school

By Dalvin Crockett | North High

Living all the way in St. Paul and going to school in North Minneapolis is a hassle. Some even find it overwhelming. Managing time is tough, especially when you need to get on a the train in four minutes to be on time for school.

North High sophomore Avayana Kemp moved to Saint Paul in September but still travels to North for school every day. “I didn’t really think about switching schools at first, but now I am because I get to school late, and it’s cold outside. My mom wants me to transfer to Washington [Technology Magnet School],” Kemp keeps coming to North for her education because that’s where she’s most comfortable. “I like North, I don’t have any friends or anything at a school like Washington, and I don’t want to start all the way over, plus some schools credits run different,” she said.

Traveling between cities for school can be hectic. You’re looking at at least an hour ride on the train, or maybe more if you catch the bus. Then you have to worry about delays, replacement buses, finding the actual stop for the replacement bus, and ticket check. Kemp said, “I usually get a ride when I’m late.” She says the hard part about her commute is getting up for school. “I have to get up so early. I go to sleep at like 12am or 1am,” she said. She says she likes living in Saint Paul, but it’s very different than Minneapolis. “There is a huge difference. North Minneapolis has so much more stuff for the youth and Saint Paul is more for business all the time,” she said.

She’s not the only one that has been through this experience. I am going through this lifestyle as well, but I take a different approach. I make sure I set my time for 6am at night each night just so I can make it before school to actually eat breakfast. Waking up that early is normal for me. That’s the time I used to wake up for school when I went to school in Mississippi. Sometimes I like my commute, especially when I get a seat to myself on the train or bus. I listen to my music and clear my head on the long ride. The thing that grinds my gears is when the train is too late or extra early. One time I thought the train was coming at 6:43am but it actually came at 6:41am. As I was walking, I saw it and ran after it. Everything was all cool until I slipped on some ice and fell. That changed my mood for the whole day.

Moving from city to city to get to school is not very hard, you just have to get used to the order of things.

Do not let seasonal blues get you down

By Tamika McQueen | North High

Are you feeling depressed? In fact, 350 million people suffer from seasonal depression. Have you been sleepy or sleepless? Had body pains? Have you been easily irritated? Have you been forgetful or had trouble concentrating? Or crying spells? Seasonal blues are a common experience during the winter. If so, it’s possible that you might be part of the 5% of people in the world that have seasonal depression.

During the winter, days are shorter and gloomier, and that can make the holiday season more stressful. But, there are some things that can make turn your seasonal blues into holiday spirit. Try driving, walking, or even riding a bike around North Minneapolis and looking at the festive lights. Take a family trip to the Holidazzle downtown. The Holidazzle is every Thursday through Sunday until Dec. 23. Maybe you could even come to North High on Jan. 11 to see Tony-nominated Donald Byrd’s Spectrum Dance Theater performance. Or you could grab something to eat at one of the many local restaurants on West Broadway. Don’t let the holiday gloom bug bite you and go enjoy everything North Minneapolis has to offer this holiday season.

Redlining: a root of poverty

By Jermaine Hardin | North High

Many people in our community are struggling due to poverty. Redlining, which began in the 1930s, is one of the reasons poverty exists in modern times.

Poverty means you don’t have choices and opportunities. It means not having enough to feed a family, not having a school or clinic to go to, not having land, a job, or credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It means people live in more violence and that their everyday life can be more dangerous.

Redlining has caused poverty in our community and others. Redlining impacts people financially and limits their housing opportunities. During the 1930s, federal programs such as the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation and the Federal Housing Administration were established to encourage widespread homeownership and suburban development by making home loans and mortgages affordable. However, neighborhoods that were mixed-race or predominantly African American did not benefit from those programs, because their credit was considered high-risk.

In the early 1900s, before the practice of redlining began, racial homogeneity was preserved in suburban communities by implementing zoning laws that did not allow the construction of small, affordable houses or apartments. Racial homogeneity also was preserved through residential segregation, as whites tended not to sell or rent to non-white people, often by placing racially restrictive covenants in property deeds. African American newcomers who found a way to work around such policies and practices to move into suburban neighborhoods usually found themselves in hostile environments.

In the period following WWII, suburban communities remained largely white, despite anti-discrimination rulings and legislation to the contrary. In 1948 the U.S. Supreme Court, in the case Shelley v. Kraemer, ruled that courts could not enforce racially restrictive practices. In 1968 the Federal Fair Housing Act forbade discrimination against minorities by real estate brokers.

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Eat healthy or play slow

High school athletes stand to lose if they don’t think about pregame nutrition.

By Talina Hill and Zadir King
| North High

They won’t have energy to run up and down the court or field. When players are able to play their best, games are more competitive and the teams are more dominant.

Dr. Leo Lewis, North High School’s former athletic director and a former NFL player, is a fan of eating well before games. “I’d like for [athletes] to eat a meal way before the game starts,” he said. “It helps you sustain some of your energy during the game.” Athletes need to eat before a game because, “your muscles need it. They go through a lot of stress,” he said. At the time of this interview, Lewis was still the school’s athletic director.

Damon Young, a sophomore basketball player at North High, says meals help him a lot before games. Eating well “makes me get buckets,” he said.

Here at North High, many athletes don’t eat lunch before their games because they think North High’s lunch is nasty. “I don’t eat school lunch because it isn’t good, it’s terrible,” said varsity football player Kiareon Bellfield. He thinks we should be served fried chicken for lunch as an option.

Coaches and parents support the athletes by bringing them healthy food and drinks sometimes. Players even look out for each other when they notice someone is struggling during warmups or looking lazy. They share Gatorade on the sidelines and before the game starts, they’ll pass around snacks like graham crackers or Sun Chips. “We just break bread,” said junior varsity player Jaylen Green.

It’s not just important for athletes to eat. They should eat healthy foods before games. They should not eat heavy, meaty foods like steak or a cheesy hamburger, said Lewis. He says they digest too slowly. “Before a game you want something that’s digestible really quickly – a lot of carbohydrates, like pancakes, bread, things that digest really quickly. Fruit, that type of stuff.”

It’s also important to hydrate well. Lewis says that anything but milk and alcohol are probably good choices. “No one should drink alcohol. Certainly water, things with carbs in them like Gatorade. You want to stay away from full sugar, like pop. Anything that has a lot of water in it is fine,” he said.

In conclusion, athletes should eat a healthy meal before every game or activity that they participate in. There should also be someone that looks out for them and makes sure they eat a good enough meal that will provide them enough energy to participate in whatever activity it is. Athletes can’t be picky on what they are given, but schools should put more effort in the meals they feed students on a daily basis.

Social media has mixed effects on teens

By Talina Hill and Zadir King
| North High

We live in a society where looking “cool” on social media has become more important than being a genuine person.

Social media is a large part of teenagers’ lives from the time they are in middle school throughout all of high school and beyond. The things they put on social media are sometimes negative and sometimes positive. They speak, type, and photograph their feelings even if that means that they hurt other’s feelings. Sometimes they tell lies, act as a person they really aren’t, and sometimes they confirm people’s stereotypes about black teens. Fights, getting exposed, being petty, gangs/cliques, and other relations on social media lead to social media having a negative effect on the community.

Jaylen Green, a North High sophomore, says “Social media isn’t only a problem in the community but also the society as a whole.” According to CNBC, over 80% of teens use a cell phone regularly making cyber-bullying very common and 10 to 20% experience it regularly and could lead to violence or even suicide.

Elijah Campbell, a junior at North High, says he tries to stay out of drama on social media because “college recruiters look on your social media page.” College is really important to him obviously, and he can’t afford to put his future career on the line or anything of that sort by being in a negative space on social media. This is a known fact that being negative on something so public like social media could damage your career. As we all know, social media isn’t a walk in the park, you have to be careful on what you say because you never know who could be watching and what you could put yourself in. Campbell’s advice is: “keep your business private.” You will have less problems when you keep your business private and you don’t have to put your every move on social media. When you post your life on social media there will obviously be people that disagree with what you do and they have every right to speak on that which is why there’s a lot of gossip, drama, and cyber-bullying.

Green says he thinks teens humiliate each other on social media because “society is ignorant and not focused on other things that are important such as school.”

Jasiona White, a sophomore at North High, has been on social media since she was 11. She sees danger in the way social media is used but understands why it’s attractive to the community. “As far as bullying and suicide, it’s killing our young people, but it makes people famous and they can get money off of it,” she said.

Despite the negatives, White sees ways social media can be used positively. She sees it as a way people can give each other “exposure to their talents and complimenting others.” White also believes that success can emit from social media, leading to wealthy careers and fame. Social media is surging with positivity and the success stories are on the rise whether it be Snapchat, Twitter or Facebook.
DOCS Gym offers affordable, accessible martial arts classes

By Cirien Saadeh | Staff Reporter

As an advanced belt in karate, who has taken classes on-and-off since I was nine, I’ve always felt most myself in martial arts studios. So when I passed by DOCS Gym on Small Business Saturday, I knew it was what I wanted to explore for this month’s Small Business Spotlight. As part of our coverage for this month’s Spotlight, I took a two-hour Brazilian Jiu Jitsu class under Instructor Josh Haynie. It was a great class and I could not be more proud of the the bruises and sore muscles I earned from chokeholds, leg locks, drops, and grappling.

DOCS Gym is situated between Dr. Greg Olson’s chiropractic office and North End Hardware & Rental. It is a crowded space, with a sizable classroom made up of spring-loaded mats and an assortment of other martial arts equipment, an exercise and fitness room, pint-size locker rooms, and big heart. DOCS stands for Developing Olympic Combat Sports and Developing Our Community Spirit. It is not a nickname for founder Greg T. Olson, who started the original DOCS Gym on Lyndale Ave. in 2003. They moved to their current location at 3115 Penn Ave. N in 2008.

“It felt right, and it was something to do. By about year three, you just keep doing it. You just get up and keep going,” said Olson. DOCS Gym is primarily staffed by volunteer instructors. According to Haynie, DOCS affordable dues ($75/month for adults and $50/month for youth) are really just meant to keep the lights on. “Jiu jitsu is not just for people who can afford it, it’s for everybody,” he said. “Judo and Jiu Jitsu teaches you what you’re capable of, figuring out what your body and mind can do,” said Haynie, a first-degree black belt.

I was lucky enough to partner with Janna Lidberg, a two-year martial artist in the class I took. Karate has little to do with Judo and Jiu Jitsu, but I was happy to wear my old “gi” (“uniform”) and a white belt – my brown belt in karate does not transfer over – and hit the mats with Haynie, Janna, and several other members of the class who took the time to guide me, train me, and correct my form. I had little trust in my ability to do the class, but Lidberg says she started out at DOCS the same way.

“Coming to DOCS and training has taught me to trust myself. It’s helped me so much. I originally signed up for self-defense class and then fell in love with Jiu-Jitsu and judo and all the people here,” said Lidberg, who helps to teach some of the youth classes and wants to be an elementary school teacher. “Teaching the kids is pretty challenging, but I love it. It combines my loves of teaching, kids, and martial arts,” she said.

According to Randy Mathews (nickname “the Mechanic”), a Northsider and former foster kid, taking classes at DOCS has meant an increase in self-esteem and discipline.

“This martial art is a gentle art – arte suave. It’s not about how big or strong someone you are. It’s about angles and leverage in the sport, and in life as well,” said Mathews. You can find more information about DOCS Gym, including its class schedule and contact information, at www.docsgym.net.

Could college be possible during the school day?

By Azhae’la Hanson | North High

College Possible (CP) is a college readiness program that focuses on making college possible.

Schools across the country utilize this Amercorps program that provides ACT training and the informational and emotional support low income students need when transitioning into college. Last year, 30,000 CP students were on a path to a college degree earning $13.4 million in scholarships.

The program’s popularity has landed it in all of the North Minneapolis area schools, including North Academy of Arts and Communications at North High, Patrick Henry High School, and nearby Edison High School. It’s undeniably making a difference, providing college tours and waiving college application and ACT fees.

The program consists of two hour sessions of ACT prep for juniors and college preparation for seniors. There are two different sessions, early and late, providing opportunities for the sports players to attend as well.

I am a CP student and have noticed attendance isn’t what it could be. Students aren’t able to commit to CP after school because some students work or have other responsibilities that restrict them from attending CP. How could that be fixed? After talking to some students and staff, I’m convinced that making CP an elective offering during the school day is a solution that would increase attendance and give an opportunity for all eligible students to join. This would allow more students to receive all of the benefits of CP, instead of some.

“It would probably be a much better elective for seniors just as an additional tool for working on applications and working on essays,” said Susana Perez, CP coach at North High.

There would be some challenges if CP became a school-day elective. “Juniors, especially with ACT prep, need the two hours. It is really helpful for the coaches also because we need that full two hours to work through all of the curriculum and making CP a class could make lessons more difficult. It’d be a lot of stuff that we might need to turn around to make that possible,” said Jonathan Sutton, another CP coach at North High.

The takeaway is that making CP into a class could be a good idea, it’s just an idea that would need more thought in order to execute.
Protect and grow your money in 2018

Financial advisor and Northside community member Julien Kafo suggests seven financial resolutions for the new year.

The holiday season is here, and with the holidays come New Year’s resolutions. Every year, saving more and spending less seem to be near the top of the list of pledges to keep. But, do you often find yourself looking back at your year in December and see that you have barely started the resolutions you set back in January? Even for those who have managed to get their finances in order, holiday expenses can quickly steer these resolutions off track.

I grew up in the inner city of Toronto and Montreal where getting finances in order never seemed to even be an option. I came to Minneapolis on a football scholarship with the University of Minnesota Golden Gophers.

I am really passionate about helping communities of color in our cities reach all their financial goals.

I have since become a financial advisor, and I’ve become very involved in the North Minneapolis community, mentoring a lot of young students from the area through my church.

North Minneapolis reminds me a lot of where I am from. Now, having had the opportunity that I am granted, I am really passionate about helping communities of color in our cities reach all their financial goals.

Here are a few things for you to consider in this holiday season:

1) Set SMART goals for yourself and have a vision. It will be hard to reach a goal if you don’t have one. Know where you are headed. Your goal(s) should be (S)pecific, (M)easurable, (A)ttainable, (R)ealistic, and (T)imely.

2) Sit down and make a budget. I know we’ve all made a budget for ourselves in the past and it is almost impossible to stick to it. The goal of making a budget is to figure out how much money you have coming in every month and how much in fixed expenses that NEED to be paid every month no matter what (rent, insurance, phone bill, etc.). This will allow you to see what kind of discretionary income you have if any and think about how to allocate it.

3) Find areas in your budget where you can cut down. We don’t want to stop enjoying life but find a couple areas in your finances where you can cut down a little bit. Whether it be eating out, shopping, or something else, see if there is a way for you to increase the amount of discretionary income you have.

4) Create a good emergency fund. Yes! Creating an emergency fund is extremely important and often an easy fix to make sure that the most important things to you are protected.

5) Make sure you have proper amount of insurance coverage. If you feel that you are not in control of your finances, an unfortunate event could become catastrophic without the proper amount of coverage. Whether you sit down with your HR team at work, or with a financial professional, it’s extremely important and often an easy fix to make sure that you are protected.

6) Create a strategy around paying down debt. Debt can usually seem a lot more stressful than it is. Do an inventory of all your debt, calculate how much discretionary income you have, and create a plan of how you will allocate it. Usually it is best to pay down any private debt and debt with a high interest rate.

7) Start contributing to retirement accounts. Talk to your HR team and see if you have access to a retirement account through work. You want to contribute to that, especially if your employer offers to match your contributions. A full picture financial plan includes strategies to protect and grow your assets – so you can live life today and tomorrow with confidence.

Make 2018 the year of your success story. You are capable of achieving your resolutions and goals when you are willing to put in the time to make a plan. If you have any further questions about anything mentioned in this article, please feel free to contact me.

Kafo is a Financial Representative with Northwestern Mutual, the marketing name for The Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company (NM), Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and its subsidiaries. Julien is an agent of NM based in Edina, MN. To contact Julien, please call (952) 806-9648, email him at julien.kafo@nm.com or visit his website at julienkafo.nm.com.

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MPS projects

$33 million deficit

MPS borrowed money from itself to cover last year’s deficit, but now it’s still in the red without a backup plan. North News spoke with MPS administrators about the budgeting process and how we got here. By Cirien Saadeh | Staff Reporter

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

The MPS budget is sort of like a house: some money keeps the lights on, some money goes to the mortgage or rent, some money is in a savings account. And while MPS has numerous revenue sources, each funding a different piece of the school district, this year’s deficit comes from its two primary funds: its general fund – which pays the bills – and its fund balance – its savings account. Over the last several years, MPS has dealt with a multimillion dollar General Fund deficit, by shifting money from the Fund Balance, in the hopes that the money spent would come back into the district via the programs and services offered, and increased enrollment.

However, according to MPS administrators, that expectation has not panned out, and it’s left them in the hole $33 million, with not enough in their savings to rely on anymore. This is because MPS is required to have 8% of its General Fund balance in its Fund Balance at any point. In recent years, they had too much money in the Fund Balance – around $144 million – and had to spend it down. However that decision to spend down – which is legislatively required – has left them without the funding they need.

Tammy Fredrickson, Budget Director for MPS, says that MPS’s budgeting this year is a little different. Not only does MPS have to create a balanced budget for next year, it has to take a look at itself and its operations, fixing the gaps, structures, and policies that helped to cause this deficit.

"Essentially we didn’t fix our structurally-imbalanced budget for this year. In the past we’ve just chosen to use fund balance to make it balanced. So as we go into the ’18/’19 year, we still have a structurally unbalanced budget, and – as inflationary costs catch up to us, utilities, like transportation contracts, salary increases, health benefits – as all of those increase for ’18/’19, you’re just adding onto your structurally unbalanced budget. So our deficit for this year (17/18) carries over to next year, and then you add inflation onto that, and that’s where we get our projected deficit for ’18/’19," she said.

The deficit – and those structural imbalances – have meant that this year’s budgeting process is a little different than in past years. Because MPS cannot depend on its Fund Balance, it needs to reconsider what it is funding and how, what is working in the District and not, and what to do now. According to Superintendent Ed Graff, cuts are inevitable, particularly with a deficit of this size – approximately 5% of the district’s $654 million budget.

“Even with increased enrollment, I don’t think we would solve this budget deficit. We’re looking at a number of things, everything is on the table,” said at-large School Board Director Kim Ellison, a Northsider. Ellison also notes that unreliable state and federal government support has also contributed to the district’s financial woes. According to Ellison, MPS is funded by both the federal and state government to provide ESL classes for three years (around $85 million), but MPS pays an additional $58 million to teach people English, as Ellison noted, “until they learn English.” Graff calls that particular situation an “underfunded” subsidy.

MPS has opened up its budget planning process to Minneapolis families and schools, asking for input through an online and phone survey (which was completed in November) and focus groups. Survey results were discussed during the Dec. 12 MPS Business Meeting. “Student outcomes and equity were the two highest [values] ranked, regardless of the type of survey. The phone survey...engagement was the third value. In the online survey...the fifth value was engagement, third was effective staff,” said Eric Moore, Chief of Accountability, Innovation, and Research for MPS. According to Moore, approximately 4000 people participated in the research through the variety of methods used. Moore noted that the phone survey primarily reached communities of color, while the online survey primarily reached white communities. According to MPS, of the district’s 35,000+ student body, over 23,000 of MPS’s students are people of color.

According to MPS administrators and Ellison, North Minneapolis schools should not be impacted any differently than MPS schools in other parts of town, but Kerry Jo Felder who represents North Minneapolis is not convinced.

“We’re underserved already. I think it’s going to hurt the Northside the most. I’m really scared to see what that looks like, because we’ve already been working with that,” said District 2 Director Felder.

Few details have been released yet on what budget cuts might look like, but the district is conducting research into class size increases (by one student in some classrooms), shortening the school year, program cuts, and more.

The budget will be finalized in May of 2018 and voted on in June of 2018. It becomes active in July of 2018.

How does MPS decide how much money each school receives?

MPS funds schools based on each school’s unique needs and programming

FACTORS INCLUDE

- Projected enrollment numbers and targeted class sizes
- # of students who receive free or reduced-price lunch
- # of students receiving Special Education services
- # and needs of students learning English
- School-specific programming: magnet, advanced academics, time adjustments, media, Q Comp, IB, etc.
- School leadership needs (principals and assistance principals)

Data from www.mps.org
COMMUNITY REACTIONS...

North News visited Lucy Craft Laney Elementary School, just north of the Lowry Ave. and Penn Ave. intersection, to talk with community members there about the district’s budgeting process. Laney has historically had some of the state’s lowest test scores, though in recent years they have seen consistent gains. It is centered near the middle of North Minneapolis and is also a powerful symbol of North Minneapolis — what it is and what it can be.

Morgan Sr. McDonald and Morgan Jr. McDonald

According to Friestleben, the parents she has met are feeling calloused regarding the budget even as they remain on high-alert, an emotion that Morgan Sr. McDonald, a Lucy Laney parent and the school’s Student Support Specialist, echoes. McDonald Sr. and his son Morgan Jr. (nicknamed “The Champ”), a fourth grader at Lucy Laney, are concerned that budget cuts might mean changes to the Lucy Laney environment they love.

“I think as a parent, if there was budget cuts my concern would be is, if the school is running the way it’s running and everything is fine,” said McDonald, “We can make sure we keep working towards our goal: make sure every kid is safe, that they’re learning, and that it’s just a positive atmosphere.”

Both McDonald Sr. and The Champ say their biggest fear related to the budget would be losing a member of their community due to budget cuts.

“I care about the budget. I like schools because, they’re my second home. They help me learn and I like the teachers. They’re nice and I like our principal, Ms. Friestleben, she’s amazing,” said The Champ.

Student Council Members Sophia Stroot and Ellayah Smith

According to Sophia Stroot, Student Council President and fifth grader at Lucy Laney, and the Student Council treasurer Ellayah Smith, a fourth grader at Lucy Laney, are concerned that budget cuts might mean changes to the Lucy Laney environment they love.

“We are going to hopefully do a college trip to learn more about what’s ahead of us for the future,” said Stroot.

Stroot and Ellayah are quite frustrated. They don’t understand why they can work so hard to make their Student Council budget at Lucy Laney work and others cannot make the MPS budget work. They are worried that MPS’s budget woes will change their school and they are scared that a cut in teacher’s pay may mean a favorite teacher cannot teach anymore.

“We are figuring our budget out better, because our minds work a little bit differently. And we do not listen to the rules, we do things our own way, so that helps us figure it out,” said Smith.

MPS’ BUDGET BREAKDOWN

The blue portion in the middle chart represents the General Fund.

MPS has separate funding for facilities maintenance and repair not included in this diagram.

Data from http://www.mpls.k12.mn.us
The school board report

Our education reporter brings you the latest news from MPS

By Cirien Saadeh Staff Reporter

Calling the Dec. 12 School Board meeting packed would be the utmost of understatements. Over 200 community members packed the standing room only assembly room – and there was barely any standing room too. Multiple community groups, including parents representing several schools and the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers, showed up to call attention to a number of important issues. Here are some highlights:

**Teacher contract renegotiations** – Members of the teachers’ union showed up to show solidarity for contract renegotiations with MPS, though much of their public comments did not focus on those contract negotiations. Representatives from the teachers’ union spoke up on a need for restorative justice in schools, a less top-to-bottom educational model, more creative arts classes, a need for full-service community schools in Minneapolis, a living wage for all MPS employees, and more. “We are here tonight to confirm our commitment to the schools our children deserve and to ask you to do the same. We stand strongest when we stand together,” said Mary Manor, union member.

**Harrison Education Center** – Kimberly Caprini, Northsider, spoke about Harrison Education Center and “a loss on instruction” in the culinary arts and music programs at the school, due to postponed renovations and a lack of materials and supplies.

**#ChangeTheName** – Student activists from Patrick Henry High School, who want to see their school’s name changed, spoke during the public comment period to loud cheers from meeting attendees, regarding the cancellation of a movement rally scheduled for Friday the 15th. The rally was cancelled for failing to meet district policy. Organizers and leaders are planning a January rally, on school grounds, and numerous other community-focused events. “Why are we continuing to uplift the people who did damage to this country? Ask the students what they want Patrick Henry to be called. Why? When you sit down to do this work, sit down to do the work? It’s about our kids, it’s about the students,” said one speaker.

**SROs** – The SRO debate is back. Student speakers requested that all SRO funding be used for restorative justice practices and mental health support. Chief Medaria Arradondo spoke during the meeting on the SRO program, as well as his vision for MPD and his belief in restorative justice.

**Members of Fight for Justice LLC spoke up on the topic of resource investment.** “You gave us school resource officers. It should be a quick vote to give us school resources,” said John Thompson, community activist with the organization, who has spoken in the past against the SRO program. “We are going to remove you from those seats, out-door knock you, out-phonebank you. You can change today. We put you in these positions to make these decisions.”

**Lyndale Community School bussing** – community members gathered en-masse to comment on bus route cuts to Lyndale School, which are primarily impacting the Somali community. One Lyndale parent Lana Barkawi spoke about Lyndale as a diverse community and popular with students and families. “We are ready to continue to be a place for all kids. We are simply asking that students North of the Lyndale are be allowed to ride the bus. We want to fill the bus,” said Barkawi.

**School time changes** – Jefferson Community School parents showed up to ask the Board to change school hours, which are currently 9:40 am-3:10pm, to an earlier start time. They also requested an additional hour of after-school time, from one hour to two hours.

**Possible early end to the school year** – MPS is considering shortening the 2017-2018 school year so that it would end by Friday, June 8. This recommendation was made by Superintendent Ed Graff who noted that the 2016-2017 school year ended with a spate of hot days and an increase in student and staff absences from schools. A vote will be held in a later meeting.
Wellness, 1313 Penn Ave. N. The Twin Cities Mobile Market delivers affordable and healthy food. A wide variety of fruits, vegetables, meat, dairy products, and staples like rice and dried beans are available at below-market prices. Cash, all major credit cards, debit cards, SNAP/EBT, and Market Bucks are accepted! Questions? Call 612-529-8054.

Mondays – 12pm-1pm, The Salvation Army at 2024 N. Lyndale Ave. is partnering with Loaves and Fishes to offer a free produce giveaway.

Do you live in Near North or Willard/Hay? Then your block could be eligible for a mini block club grant through the Northside Residents Redevelopment Council, NRRC. Funds are available for a project or event you want to create. For more information call 612-335-5924 or email contactus@nrrc.org.

The Northside Residents Redevelopment Council-NRRC is partnering with Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid to connect residents of Near North and Willard Hay with free attorneys. If you are having legal troubles that relate to your home or business and live in the Near North or Willard Hay neighborhood visit their clinic at the NRRC office Mondays and Tuesdays from 10am-3pm or set up an appointment by call 612-335-5925.

Spend Diversity Dashboard: The City of Minneapolis has developed a new tool, available to the public, that details the city’s discretionary spending and the improvements the city can make in increasing participation of women-owned and minority-owned businesses in City of Minneapolis contracts.

The City of Minneapolis has posted the deleted Environmental Protection Agency climate change data. The information is available on the City of Minneapolis sustainability website.

What’s Up 612! is an online resource for children and youth, ages 5-21, where citywide afterschool activities can be found. More information can be found at: http://www.whatsup612.com.

Camden Neighborhood Center offers time and space dedicated to seniors age 65+. Snacks, lunch, and limited transportation are provided on Tuesdays and Thursdays with RSVP. 1210 37th Ave N. Call for details: 612-787-3718.

Explore public art using interactive map tours developed by the City of Minneapolis and the Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board. To take a self-guided tour or more information: arcg.is/mlpsart.

EVENTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Hockey and figure skating for girls and boys ages 6-14 are offered at North Commons Park and Northeast Arena during the months of November through February. All equipment is provided and the cost is minimal. Transportation is available for those who need it. Register and get more information at North Commons Park, 612-370-4921.

Mondays – Community Yoga at Serendipity Spot (3300 Lyndale Ave N) 6pm-7pm. Vinyasa flow for all levels; $5 suggested donation.

Thursdays – Community Coffee & Conversation, 11am-1pm, complimentary beverages at Serendipity Spot, 3300 Lyndale Ave N. 1/27 – 6pm-8pm, Community Book Club at Serendipity Spot. Start reading Watson Is Not An Idiot and join in a discussion of character portrayals and the resurgence in popularity of the stories of Sherlock Holmes.

EDUCATION

Free in-person and online tutoring for K-12 students. No advance sign-up needed. For more information, see www.hclib.org/homework. Sponsor: Friends of the Hennepin County Library.
The Minneapolis City Council has approved the creation of a new division in the City Coordinator’s Office to help drive the City’s work to reduce and eliminate racial inequities throughout City government. The Division of Race and Equity will include staff of the City’s equity team who will work with City departments to set goals and expectations around race equity, assist in accelerating the City’s efforts and progress around racial equity goals and create accountability.

The Minneapolis City Council approved two ordinances to support programs that will help the City accelerate toward its energy and climate change goals. One ordinance for gas and one for electricity raises the franchise fees by half a percentage point – about 59 cents monthly for the average household. The rate increase will take effect in the spring.

Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) Superintendent Jayne Miller announced her resignation. Miller’s last day with the MPRB is 2/3/18. Miller’s resignation means the newly elected and re-elected MPRB Board of Commissioners that take office in January 2018 will need to fill her position after she departs in February to serve as President and CEO of the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy.

The Minneapolis & Saint Paul Home Tour, 4/28-4/29, is accepting nominations at www.MSPHomeTour.com, click on “submit a home” for the option to apply online or download an application. For 11 hours, homeowners and contractors open their doors to share ideas with other home enthusiasts, based on their remodeling experience. Visitors are particularly interested in period-accurate restoration/adaptations and expansions sensitive to the surroundings. Being on the tour gives homeowners great feedback as well as the incentive to finish those last few projects. If you or someone you know needs more information, contact coordinator Margo Ashmore at mfashmore@aol.com or (612)-867-4874. Selections are made in January-February.

Minneapolis has joined a statewide program to help reduce homelessness among veterans. Since the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs launched the Minnesota Homeless Veteran Registry in 2014, it has housed 1,218 homeless veterans – 613 in Hennepin County. Minneapolis and Hennepin County have the highest concentration of homeless veterans in the state. Anyone who served in the U.S. armed forces, Army Reserve or National Guard can join the registry regardless of the type of discharge. Homeless veterans or their representatives are encouraged to call 1-888-LinkVet (1-888-546-5838) or complete the application online at the website for the Minnesota Department of Veteran Affairs Homeless Veteran Registry.

CenterPoint Energy is reminding customers about certain rights and their responsibilities as it relates to the Cold Weather Rule (CWR), which protects residential customers experiencing difficulty paying their natural gas bill from having their natural gas service disconnected between and April 15, 2018. While the CWR does not prevent customers from being disconnected for nonpayment, it does provide customers extra protection as defined in the CWR, but residential customers must contact CenterPoint Energy to set up a payment plan. Under the CWR, special payment terms are available to customers who: Apply for and receive Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funding assistance in Minnesota; or meet income guidelines set by the state of Minnesota and provide proof of income. Call CenterPoint Energy to set up a payment plan at 612-372-4680 or 1-800-729-6164. For additional information, please visit CenterPointEnergy.com/ReadyForWinter.

The City’s Municipal Minimum Wage Ordinance takes effect 1/1/2018. There will be a tiered phase-in period for small and large businesses. Large businesses that employ more than 100 workers will be required to pay employees a minimum of $10 an hour beginning Jan. 1, 2018. Small businesses with 100 or fewer employees will be required to pay workers at least $10.25 beginning 7/1/2018. Large businesses have until 7/1/2022 to reach a minimum wage of $15 an hour and small businesses have until 7/1/2024 to reach $15 an hour.

Through its 311 service, the City of Minneapolis has opened a new hotline for reporting hate crimes which are harassing behaviors motivated by prejudice. The hotline number is 311 for anyone calling from within the city of 612-673-3000 statewide. The 311 hotline will be answered 7am-7pm weekdays and 8am-4:30pm weekends. Those with a report to make can also call the Department of Justice at (612)-664-5600. As always, in the case of immediate physical violence, property damage, or threats, people should call 911.

Following Minneapolis fire laws will help keep our neighborhoods safe and livable; outdoor fires are permitted 9am-10pm, fires must be less than three feet in diameter and two feet high, and a fire must be completely out before being abandoned. Illegal open burning or recreational fires could result in fines that start at $200. For more information on recreational fires or to register a complaint about a recreational fire, call 311 or email Minneapolis 311@mnepolismn.gov, or to register a complaint about a recreational fire outside 311 hours, call 911. The Fire and Police departments are authorized to extinguish a fire immediately if it is hazardous.

The U.S. Department of Justice is awarding the City of Minneapolis a $1.2 million grant to help combat gun violence. These funds will make it possible to add 10 sworn officers to the Minneapolis Police Department.

The City Council has authorized the City Attorney to initiate a lawsuit against manufacturers and distributors of opioids. The proposed litigation will seek to recover monetary damages incurred by the City in responding to the opioid crisis in Minneapolis and injunctive and other relief. The City of Minneapolis joins a number of states, counties and cities across the country that have filed similar lawsuits against drug makers to help recoup costs associated with fighting the opioid epidemic.

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) has banned all tobacco products on Minneapolis park properties and owned and/or operated facilities as of 5/8.

The Minneapolis City Council has passed an ordinance prohibiting discrimination against Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher holders. Under the ordinance, landlords will only be obligated to consider renting to voucher holders. That means a landlord cannot refuse to rent, impose unique standards, or otherwise treat HCV holders differently from tenants without vouchers. Landlords retain their ability to screen the voucher holders like other tenants using legal criteria.

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University of Minnesota Extension

Urban Region, Minneapolis
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• Bachelor’s degree in health, nutrition or closely related discipline, four years of related experience including supervising staff. Advanced degree preferred.

Application Deadline: January 8, 2018
Position will remain open until filled.
Job ID: 321257
To learn more and apply, visit: http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/employment/index.html

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What makes a great principal?

By Shayy Tyler | North High

Every school has a principal. Principals are leaders who guide their staff in the best interest of student learning. Principals do not micro-manage their students. It is the teacher’s job to receive respect, and they need flexibility from their principals to provide instructions that are meaningful for their students in the classroom.

A principal should be available throughout the day. If students don’t know their principal, it’s the principal’s responsibility to be more open to their students. The principal should show up as much as possible, and what I mean by that is: a great principal knows their students. They know their names, stories, and strengths. If we can’t get that from a principal then maybe the principal isn’t so great.

One Minneapolis High School senior says that a good principal should show positivity to students and be loyal to them. “Like basically coming to check up on us. Just keeping loyalty around us students and so we know that we know they are around. Like attendance basically, having good attendance around your students, stop being in the office all the time, personality like they are a good and fun person. Being likeable because if you’re a good principal everyone will talk about you and you know, brag about having a good principal but I would say showing up at sports and being their for a student, all those are good traits,” she said.

Now let’s look at what others outside our community have to say. According to What Makes A Great Principal by GreatSchools, “Principals vary in strategies, temperament, and leadership style but GREAT principals have four characteristics in common. One, they take responsibility for student success. Two, they lead teaching and learning. Three, they hire, develop and retain excellent teachers. Lastly four, great principal build a strong school community.”

What do you think makes a great principal? Write us a letter to the editor or comment on our Facebook page: @mynorthnews.

Being an immigrant in North Minneapolis

By Morris Grear | North High

My name is Morris Grear Jr. I’m from Liberia, West Africa, and I’m an immigrant. I want people to know about my experience as an immigrant because it has inspired me. I came to the United States with my two sisters, Ellenita and Morrislyn, and my dad, Morris Grear. We came to the US for better life and better education. When I was a kid growing up in Liberia, my favorite country was the US and my favorite American artists were Chris Brown, J .Cole, Lil Wayne, and B.O.B. I loved to watch BET, Tom and Jerry, and Martin P. Before coming to the US, I went through a lot of processes and paperwork. I’ve met so many different people since I arrived in the US, and it was great to meet them. When I first got here, it was cold and the food was different from the African food I was familiar with. I did not like it, and it took me time to get used to it.

In Liberia, we spoke English but the English we spoke was a different dialect than we speak here in Minnesota. I’m not a citizen in America yet, but I want to be. I want to be an American citizen to help my mother and my other family in Africa to come over here. I have all my papers, so I’m not worried about Trump.
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3107 PENN AVE NORTH (Across from ALDI)
A little over a year ago, **Elizer Darris, 33,** was behind bars at the state penitentiary serving time for a murder he committed when he was 15. Now, out on parole after having his sentence reduced, Darris is making the most of **his second chance at a free life.**
Who were you at 15 that led you to be involved in a murder? When I was 14 I ran away from home with a carnival, Murphy Brothers, and traveled around the United States. I made my way back home, and then I left a second time. It was in the midst of that second time that I found myself in a heap of trouble. I used to have my own life sentence as a juvenile. At 15 I was put in with the adults at the adult correctional facility. Ultimately, I was sentenced to life at 16 and sent to the state penitentiary. I found myself inside that situation, languishing for many years, struggling trying to figure out my identity.

Where did you grow up before you went away with the carnival? St. Louis. Life was rough, really rough. I had a tough time at home. I never got to know my father. St. Louis was very violent. I saw a lot of things growing up. I attempted suicide growing up.

What was the first thought that popped into your head when you heard you were given a life sentence? I was feeling a crushing pressure. Just imagine a judge, some white dude in some white town way up North somewhere, no family in the courtroom, by yourself, saying “I sentence you to spend the rest of your natural life in the commission of correction.” It shook me.

Did you have any remorse for the man that you killed? Of course. That is largely why I go as hard as I do in terms of serving my community. I'm filling a debt that I want to pay back that could never be paid back in full. Because of that, I have a perpetual feeling inside of me to serve, to work, to do things to make my community better.

How would you describe yourself today? I'm a person who is determined to make an impact on the world, determined to uplift my community and challenge the powers that be.

How did you turn your life around? There was a pivotal moment in my life where the choice to live or to die became abundantly clear. I realized that if I died, the only thing I would have left in my wake was pain and destruction. I was actually laying in toilet water because I had flooded my cell. I said – “I don’t want to die like this.” … I thought to myself: “If I get out, I’m going to change.”

Did you have hope at that time? Hope wasn't what was floating through my mind. What was floating through my mind was survival. Needless to say, I made it out of there. Before then, a lot of the other inmates were giving me books. They wanted me to read. They wanted me to educate my mind.

What do you think the other inmates saw in you? I was really rough around the edges. Every other word was a curse word and the N word. They saw something in me that I wasn't quite seeing. I didn't feel the strength to rise up to the level that they were forecasting me to get to. Oceans separated where I was then and how I saw them. These guys were talking about geopolitics, sociology, and holding debate groups. They were towering individuals and remain towering individuals in my life. I began developing myself spiritually, intellectually, and emotionally with these guys over many, many years.

Where did you find the motivation to keep pushing forward? As I began reading and studying about my history, my heritage, and my culture, I began to learn about all of the things that were infected inside of it. It pissed me off. It fueled a desire to learn as much as I could and to start breaking down some of the lies and misconceptions that I was taught in school and even in family. I was learning with an impassioned anger. I was knocking books down like I was knocking these lies out of my mind. I was growing more into a man. Anger began it, but it ultimately turned into a love of myself and a love of my people.

You’re planning a speaking tour. Tell us about it. It's called the Speak Life tour. My idea is to go into high schools where it’s most difficult, most challenging, where there is not a lot of hope floating around or a lot of high expectations, and bust through some of that stuff. I'll probably have the speaking tour sponsored by some entity that’s going to allow me to go across the United States – Miami, Oakland, Cleveland, Detroit, Mississippi – (to some of the) darkest, dankest, most ragged places. Because I was them. I was right where they are. Somebody like me came and spoke life over me. I have a duty to do the same.

Why have you chosen North Minneapolis to be your community? I know a lot of these people. I feel comfortable here. This is a beautiful community. I don’t feel uncomfortable or unsafe. I love the people. The people have embraced and accepted me as one of their own. It’s love. It’s respect.

What’s one thing you learned from prison? What stuck with you the most? Resiliency – how to overcome difficult situations and come out ahead, come out thriving, despite what people say.

You got married in prison in your late 20s. What was it like to be married in prison? It was a challenge; relationships in general are challenging. When you're in a relationship, you are attempting to mesh two separate lives into a singular understanding of [how to move]. You have to have quite excellent communication. Communication is challenged in a correctional setting because you can only call and meet at certain times. You can only relate in certain authorized ways.
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