BLUE LINE BATTLE
Lyn Park neighborhood fights to reroute light rail
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ALSO INSIDE
Northside native shines on America’s Got Talent.
Page 4
Jamez Staples brings jobs and clean energy to Northside.
Page 20-21
Kim Smith’s backyard faces Lyndale Avenue, which is currently part of the proposed Blue Line extension that will bring light rail to North Minneapolis.
Photo by David Pierini
There is that moment in a conversation when two strangers discover common ground. The grandmother plant we live on suddenly shrinks to a table for two.

I was a sophomore at Michigan State University in the fall of 1986 and, on my way to an early morning class, I picked up the student newspaper, The State News, and prised on a picture of the president of my fraternity outside of a place called Michigan Avenue.

Kim Smith, as she is now known, and I never crossed paths on East Lansing campus. The next day though, light conversation entered a giddy register. Smith is a retired math teacher leading the neighborhood charge to save the picture 35 years later while on Homecoming Queen and I remembered of the homecoming king and queen, and paused on a picture picked up the student newspaper, State University in the fall of 1986 and.

The ride will begin at 1 p.m. from La Cueva Carvaccio. 243 Fremont Ave. N. Each participant gets a free t-shirt for the ride. The event is sponsored by NEON, Shiloh Temple International Ministries and U.S. Bank. Interested riders can sign up at www.Northsideramble.com.

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Yusuf Abdullah

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bike ride mixes beer and history

In my new years of coaching for Minneapolis North, we accomplished some high level of success due to the quality of players I was blessed to have.

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By Ashtella Hanson, Reporter

A year had passed, and Wyn Starks still felt gutted and depressed from the loss of his twin brother, Caine. He struggled to find purpose.

Then the aspiring singer got a sudden opportunity to audition for the hit TV show America’s Got Talent. The fear flushed from his body because he knew it was time to sing for his brother.

Starks, a North Minneapolis native, is one of the breakout artists on the 17th season of AGT and could be on the cusp of changing his life.

The 2001 graduate of North High School grew up in Berean Baptist Church for most of his life until he moved to Nashville, Tenn. There, he signed with the Curb Records, where he’s been releasing music since 2019.

His music celebrates joy, love, and community, acceptance, and loss, all things he’s experienced in his life. Starks, along with AGT, always wanted to contribute to defining the Minneapolis sound.

“You have to make sure you live your own journey since I can remember,” Starks said. 

“Being unashamed about who I am as a member of the LGBTQ community. Although he has moved on to Nashville, he keeps Minneapolis close to his heart. He left us with some remarks to North Minneapolis to perform for his hometown. He left us with some remarks to North Minneapolis to perform for his hometown.

The idea of being on the big stage rattle Starks at first, but when he arrived, he felt as though his brother was right there with him and the fear quickly turned into love and reassurance.

“When I saw the lights, the fear was gone because I felt him there with me, Caine. And I knew I was okay.”

Before Starks began his performance, judge Simon Cowell famously for being particularly harsh, whispered under his breath, “I hope he’s good.”

“Being unashamed about who you are and loving who you are,” Starks said. “I'm gonna be unashamed about who I am as a member of the LGBTQ community. I embrace that because I didn't always feel beautiful.”

Despite being on the big stage, Starks still keeps Minneapolis close to his heart. He performs his original song “Who I Am” for the AGT judges and to the rest of America who he is, choosing to perform Who I Am and original EP released in 2020 because it was one of his brother’s favorite songs. But also because it’s a song about his city, and a song for himself.

Choosing to perform an original song proved to be the best decision for Starks. He is back in Nashville awaiting to hear his fate on the show, although he has moved on to Nashville, Starks still keeps Minneapolis close to his heart.

Starks is eager to continue on with the competition and dreams of coming home to North Minneapolis to perform for his hometown. He left us with some remarks to the community.

“I was in a low place,” Starks said. “My brother was my biggest supporter and I lost him. It just couldn’t even get out of bed some days but when the opportunity came along with AGT I was like, ‘You know what, I gotta do this. I gotta get out of this slump. And I’m glad I did. He would have been so proud of me.’

Throughout his experience in AGT, Starks is eager to continue on with the competition and dreams of coming home to North Minneapolis to perform for his hometown. He left us with some remarks to the community.

“Thank you for all the love and support. I’m so glad to be able to represent my city on the stage I feel like I could be myself.”

Wyn Starks performed his original song Who I Am for the AGT judges. AGT/YouTube screen grab

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Blue Line officials say they’re listening. Can Lyn Park get them to change the route? 

The cul-de-sacs of Lyn Park, a tucked-away neighborhood in North Minneapolis, were once teeming with children. Snoozing and carrying on, they would also play, jump kickball or shoot endless jumpshots into one of those portable basketball hoops. Even as the sun went down, parents had little worry. It was one of those neighborhoods as the sun went down, parents had little of those portable basketball hoops. Even of those neighborhoods.

Bernard Glover, who built his home in Lyn Park in 1978, worries the light rail will destroy the tranquility of the neighborhood.

Bernard Glover, who built his home in Lyn Park in 1978, worries the light rail will destroy the tranquility of the neighborhood. “This neighborhood is a jewel. This is our little secret, our little piece of the suburbs. It’s amazing how many people have no clue what’s over here. We are not light rail. We are anti-light rail this thriving neighborhood.”

Field station to West Broadway Avenue. The current proposal uses Lyndale Avenue, but pressure from Lyn Park residents over the last couple of months has forced officials to consider using Washington Avenue. In meetings, residents have invoked the word Rondo, the once thriving Black community in St. Paul that was wiped out by the construction of I-94. America is full of Rondos, where mostly Black and Brown communities have been displaced by big traffic projects. North Minneapolis has seen its share of harm from transit projects. Its two zip codes suffer from respiratory ailments, like asthma, more than other parts of the state because of its proximity to I-94. Both I-94 and the proposed Blue Line extension make the neighborhood even more toxic for residents. It is too early to say whether North Minneapolis will have a different story ending as a light rail build comes to West Broadway Avenue. But Lyn Park residents want their say in the narrative.

A suburb in the city

Lyn Park is bordered by Plymouth Avenue to the South, West Broadway to the North, East and Dunlop Avenue on the West. Lyn Park dedicates Lyndale Avenue and its roughly 250 residences to the West and the Suburban homes to the East. Crossing busy Lyndale is made safe by pedestrian bridges, used by children over the years to get to any of the three schools nearby. Residents describe it as an experiment meant to change the image of low-income housing. Following racial unrest in the late 1960s, the city set aside 370-acres of land for redevelopment and granted authority to a group of community leaders to decide what would be built on the vacant land. Lyn Park is a part of the New Franklin-Hall Development Corporation wanted to create a neighborhood with a suburb feel. There was a park, rolling plates of land and the cul-de-sacs are more common in an affluent suburb.

Lots were $1,000 and there were model homes with white kitchen cabinets, patio doors and a two-car garage. “It’s amazing how many people have no clue what’s over here. We are not light rail. We are anti-light rail this thriving neighborhood.”

Resident insist Lyndale Avenue is too narrow for two sets of tracks and action.

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Northsider Don Samuels, her opponent, is a new candidate who brings to the challenge the swagger of an insurgent firebrand in the reliably left Fifth District. She responded that defunding the police was a snappy stroke that address root causes of violence, and the human rights of all people. She is a different approach to leadership. She is an alternative to the status quo.

Omar detractors put hope in well-known Northsider for primary battle

By David Pfeiffer, Editor

U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar, who recently convened a town hall meeting at North High, is running for a third term in Congress. Photo by David Pfeiffer

"We agree on many basic Democratic Issues," said Samuels, a former Minneapolis City Councilman and former director on the Minneapolis Board of Education. "We agree that health care is a human right, we agree on a world where we put human rights above the profits of the military-industrial complex. A world where we put human rights at the center of U.S. foreign policy."

"The horse race"

A released poll by Omar’s campaign shows she is in a 39-to-37 lead over Samuels. His campaign released a poll with different results that suggested her approval rating is around 42 percent and what many voters are undecided.

Polls are often wrong and what matters is how voters can shift with the news. Both campaigns released their polls prior to the August primary. Photo by David Pfeiffer

Continued on page 23
Here’s why property taxes in North Minneapolis are skyrocketing

By Steve Brandt, Guest Contributor

Steve Brandt spent 40 years as a reporter at the Star Tribune and is now an elected member of the Minneapolis Board of Estimate and Taxation

It’s no news to Northiders that their property assessments have gone through the roof.

In the two North Minneapolis wards, assessments on residential property have shot up by more than a third in just the last three years.

That’s meant a painful property tax increase for most homeowners in the Fourth and Fifth Wards. That was true in 2021, again this year, and it’s likely to happen again in 2023.

What’s behind these shocking tax increases?

Three factors converge here.

The first factor is how much the city wants to collect in taxes, which is a subset of what it wants to spend overall. Just like the cost of filling your gas tank has risen, the cost of goods and services the city buys rises with inflation.

The second factor is how state law provides equity when they moved on to assessors. That’s meant a painful property tax increase for those who hoped their homes would at least maintain their value. Tax bills are based on the estimated market value of your home last year. Homeowners here got used to paying a tax burden you’ll bear. And in a year like 2020, when the pandemic drove up the value of downtown office towers and robbing destroyed some commercial property, more of the burden shifted onto residential owners.

The city assessor is required by law to keep assessments, within 5 percent of market value. That means assessors look at the prices of homes comparable to yours that sold recently in estimating your house’s value.

But the problem from a tax standpoint is that it’s been hit among residential buyers. That’s great if you’re selling but the resulting higher prices are pushing up assessments. One major factor is that buyers see the North Side as the last affordable area of the city. Investor buyers who snap up homes as rental investments also drive up prices and thus assessments. Some Northiders worry about gentrification driving out people who can barely afford their taxes now.

All this is something of a shock because homeowners here got used to their property’s assessment. This once-a-year chance happens each spring. The city assessor is required by law to keep assessments, within 5 percent of market value. That means assessors look at the prices of homes comparable to yours that sold recently in estimating your house’s value.

The third factor is how fast property values are rising in the assessor’s eyes, and that’s the factor that’s crushing the North Side. The citywide median home value rose 4 percent last year, compared to median increases of 15 and 12 percent in the Fourth and Fifth Wards. The faster your property’s value increases in relation to others in the city, the more of a tax burden you’ll bear. And in a year like 2020, when the pandemic drove up the value of downtown office towers and robbing destroyed some commercial property, more of the burden shifted onto residential owners.

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By Ashlarie Hanson, Reporter

Moziah Thomas grew up under the Friday night lights of football at North High School. Now he is thriving under the spotlight of theater. In August, he will go to Edinburgh, Scotland with the Legacy Arts Group to perform an original piece at the famous Fringe Festival.

Thomas grew up loving to perform. For most of his life, he used football as an outlet to express himself. Until he entered high school, expressing himself through anything other than sports never appeared as an option for him. He remembers taking whatever he was going through in life straight to the game and leaving it all out on the field. That was the only way for him to express himself. Until he entered high school, he didn’t know the story he wanted to tell people. So, he turned to football. “I don’t really like to show emotion and I think football was a healthy way for me to express myself,” Thomas said. “And then I joined Legacy Arts and found out I could do that with spoken word. It was a healthy way for me to express myself and tell my story.”

The Legacy Arts Group, based at North High, is composed of four student performers. Thomas is the only Northsider in the group. During his freshman year, a class at North High took a theater class, a class that became Legacy Arts Group. At the time, he didn’t know the class would change the trajectory of his life.

The group was founded in 2019 by dancer, composer, and former North High dance instructor Tamiki French. She founded the group to get the group to the Fringe Festival. Since its founding, in August, they will finally present their show abroad titled “The Beautiful Ugly.”

It costs about $77,000 to attend the Fringe and the cost staff worked around the clock to make this happen. Moziah remembers working tirelessly along with his fellow cast members to raise money. They utilized their talents and performed anywhere they could get in to raise the money. They performed in alleyways, local theater, and galleries across the state. Now with all of the money raised, the group is excited to share the honest and true stories.

“I love telling people the stories of those hardships. I realized that this opportunity is a self-started and community funded project. “These kids were taught a big lesson on working for your dreams,” French says. “We’ve spent hundreds of hours on this production. They’ve earned it, they deserve it, they worked hard for it. Now the world can see the brilliance and the raw talent of these kids.”

French herself was a recipient of this lesson because she had been dreaming of creating her own performance company since she was a North High student. Today, Moziah stands with his other 3 cast members, ready to share the honest truth about their stories. The entire content of the production is based on the experiences from its young cast growing up in the city. They can not just their own experiences, but the experiences of their communities to showcase to The Fringe’s national audience.

“My favorite parts of the play come from our experiences. A lot of what you see in the play isn’t just the cast. It’s all of us.” - Moziah Thomas

Everything they’re performing is original. Moziah Thomas (left), Danielle Roberson, Judah Gardner, and Antonio Brooks. Photo by Azhae’la Hanson

“We’ve spent hundreds of hours on this production. They’ve earned it, they deserve it, they worked hard for it. Now the world can see the brilliance and the raw talent of these kids.”

Every year, thousands of people across the globe gather in Edinburgh for three weeks, as performers and spectators to witness the world’s largest arts festival. The Fringe. It showcases a multitude of artistic performances including film, art, and theater.

Thousands of acts have graced the stage since the festival’s debut in 1947, so it’s easy to assume that being the first to do something would be a challenging task. However, one group of performers is responsible for two of the festival’s firsts. The Legacy Arts Group is the first group from Minneapolis to attend, and it is doing so as the first all-black cast to grace the main hall stage.

“This accomplishment was no easy feat. Taking nearly three years, the group has survived a pandemic, civil unrest, and the financial obstacle of attending the festival. In fact, the content of the play itself has thrived on it all and they’ve come out on top of those hardships.”

“My favorite parts of the play come from what emerged when I couldn’t give a voice to the work. It made me turn to a bunch of people in my neighborhood to give voice to their experiences. A lot of what you see in the play isn’t just the cast. It’s all of us.” - Moziah Thomas

The group’s production “The Beautiful Ugly” is an original production written and played by the cast. Their show “The Beautiful Ugly” is an original production written and played by the cast. Their show “The Beautiful Ugly” is an original production written and played by the cast.

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Town hall meeting sparks emotional discussion on gun violence

By Amelia Hager and Gaojia Xiong
North News interns

The topic of gun violence took precedence when U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar hosted a town hall at North Community High School June 30. Omar, whose Fifth District includes North Minneapolis, and panelists gathered to discuss abortion rights and gun violence prevention. Last week, a bi-partisan gun safety bill that tightens gun laws passed and was seen as a critical step forward. Panelists also lamented the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision that same week to overturn Roe v. Wade, which now severely limits a woman’s right to make decisions about her reproductive health.

Sharrie Jennings, whose grandson survived a gunshot wound to head last year, said she was frustrated by police’s inability to find the shooters. Photo by Emily Gutierrez/North News intern

The panel included U.S. Rep. Robin Kelly of Illinois, Sasha Cotton of the city’s Office of Violence Prevention, state Rep. Cedrick Frazier, Jerome Treadwell of the Minnesota Teen Activist organization, and two family members of Deshaun Hill Jr., a North High student who was shot to death while waiting from school in February. Northsiders in the audience expressed the exhaustion of trauma and the growing list of victims from gun violence. They demanded accountability and were frustrated with government’s limits to curbing the violence.

When asked by North News reporters what Northsiders can do to help with prevention, Omar said, “Continue to raise your voices and for us, demand transparency.”

Sharrie Jennings, whose grandson survived a gunshot wound to head last year, said she was frustrated by police’s inability to find the shooters. Photo by Emily Gutierrez/North News intern

Don is a Jamaican immigrant with a degree in industrial design. He is currently the CEO of MicroGrants and an ordained minister. For more than 30 years, he worked as a senior executive for major toy manufacturers. Together, he and his wife, Sondra, have raised four children in the Jordan neighborhood of North Minneapolis.

A PROVEN LEADER
Don has served three terms on the Minneapolis City Council and one term on the Minneapolis Public Schools Board. He’s the founder of “Lights On!” and “Healing Our City,” and recently won a lawsuit requiring the city of Minneapolis to provide adequate public safety.

DON SUPPORTS
Reproductive freedom, common-sense gun laws, voting rights, affordable housing, universal healthcare, LGBTQ+ rights, and action to counter climate change.

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Sharrie Jennings, whose grandson survived a gunshot wound to head last year, said she was frustrated by police’s inability to find the shooters. Photo by Emily Gutierrez/North News intern
Upcoming Northside event offers resources for a healthy ‘lyfe’

By David Piatern, Editor

For 50 Saturdays, a mobile clinic offering free COVID-19 vaccines was parked outside Telio Wilson’s barbershop. So don’t be surprised to see an entire health fair in front of Wilson’s Image Barbers + Stylists, 2126 W. Broadway Ave., on Saturday, Aug. 20.

Wilson, Brittany Clausen, Latasha Sims and Bellmont Partners have organized a health and wellness block party for Northsiders and beyond called “Live Your Healthy Lyfe.”

The event will run 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and feature free COVID-19 vaccines, food trucks, arts and education. Northside event sponsors include: Children’s Minnesota, North Memorial Health, LifeSource, PrairieCare, Bellmont Partners, Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity, Andal, West Broadway Business and Area Coalition, the City of Minneapolis, Hues for Good and Northside Urban Coalition.

“Sometimes it takes a little while,” Wilson said. “But if they continue to see you, they return with trust and that’s how barriers get broken down.”

Like the health care workers people saw in the mobile clinic, Wilson said he and his partners have been intentional about bringing in Black and Brown doctors, nurses and other care workers to provide resources and build relationships.

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THE FOLLOWING Minneapolis students were named to the spring Dean’s List at St. Cloud State University, included a string of Minneapolis scholars. They are:

- Arinna Lee, School Counseling; Ablas Jackson, Bachelor of Elective Studies/Liberal Studies; Dong Kiang, Bachelor of Science, Biomedical Sciences, Cum Laude; Riley Peterson, Bachelor of Elective Studies/Liberal Studies, Cum Laude; and Hakima Slayd, Bachelor of Arts, Criminal Justice Studies and Psychology, Summa Cum Laude; Isabella Green and Jan Hernandez Soto, both of Minneapolis, made the spring Dean’s List at University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire; Jewel Seacrest and Alexander Yang, both of Minneapolis, were named to the spring Dean’s List at Gustavus Adolphus College.

In other news, all of Minneapolis’s schools. They are:

- Kashia Yang, Hayes, Mercado, and Tomlinson. The list of spring graduates at St. Cloud State University, included a string of Minneapolis scholars. They are:

- Annika Lee, School Counseling; Ablas Jackson, Bachelor of Elective Studies/Liberal Studies; Dong Kiang, Bachelor of Science, Biomedical Sciences, Cum Laude; Riley Peterson, Bachelor of Elective Studies/Liberal Studies, Cum Laude; and Hakima Slayd, Bachelor of Arts, Criminal Justice Studies and Psychology, Summa Cum Laude; Isabella Green and Jan Hernandez Soto, both of Minneapolis, made the spring Dean’s List at University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire; Jewel Seacrest and Alexander Yang, both of Minneapolis, were named to the spring Dean’s List at Gustavus Adolphus College.

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“Don’t step on those,” Staples gently cautioned. “There’s a lot of work and money going into those panels.”

The hard work Staples refers to is not only physically labor-intensive but also involves the potential for bringing renewable energy and jobs to the Northside. He laid the groundwork before solar became popular providing a future for the Northside. He laid the groundwork before bringing renewable energy and jobs to the community.

Staples is founder and CEO of Renewable Energy Partners (R.E.P.), a solar development company based in North Minneapolis that installs solar energy systems all throughout the state. Being a Northsider, the majority of his life, James has seen the hardships of his community and wanted to create a positive impact by simultaneously addressing climate change and creating jobs. In conversation with North News, James said moments from his upbringing provided some insight into what shaped him and his success. He remembers a conversation with his father that changed the course of his life. “I remember it like it was yesterday. I was going to be of tremendous help to someone who was looking for a job, for an opportunity to really create some real jobs that have some impact.”

Creating Economic Opportunities for the Northside

When I came back to Minneapolis, the Minnesota Solar Jobs Act was being passed and I saw that as an opportunity to get our community involved and create economic opportunities for people from my community. I approached the state and saw the opportunities it brought.

In conversation with North News, James talked about the North High Solar Project and the opportunities it brought. “I picked up two guys in the neighborhood and after working on a few projects with them I quickly realized they didn’t know what they were doing, they were just being told what to do. So I'm, like, well, do we get them skilled up and prepared so they can actually do stuff on their own as opposed to just being told what to do. That’s when the training center came into fruition. I quickly realized that what we were creating was an opportunity for them.”

R.E.P. - The Future Hub for Solar Panel Training

“I think if we can get people engaged, educated, trained and hired, I think that will change a lot of the dynamics that we see in North Minneapolis. First, they need to know that there’s an opportunity for them.” - James Staples

Jamez describes how solar energy is converted into electricity, powering the system that runs air conditioning all throughout his company building. Photo by Asha’a Holman

Creating Opportunities for Young People

Hopefully, we will get more young people that see this as a path they can just kind of roll right out of high school into a job. It’s the goal that they get started here, get on a roof, start making some money. But then continue to educate themselves, and they could get their two year technical degree if they wanted to and go into different areas. If they continue that education pathway, aligned with the industry they're in, they could become an electrical engineer or be a designer of systems or work for Xcel Energy or whatever. A pathway and a pipeline of opportunity is what we’re trying to instill here.

A Project Near and Dear to the Heart

The North High Solar Project is not just for Northsiders, Staples said. “If we can get people engaged, educated, trained and hired, I think that will change a lot of the dynamics that we see in North Minneapolis. First, they need to know that there’s an opportunity for them.” - James Staples

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While voters in DFL primaries have been occasionally visiting Hassett’s campaign headquarters, Soler and Samuels have not. That signals to some how they might be playing things close to the vest for the general election.

Continued from page 9

It remains to be seen if Soler and Samuels will be able to capitalize on their momentum and break into the general election with a more solidified support base. With primaries still ongoing in other political races, both Soler and Samuels have been maintaining a low profile as they make final preparations for the general election.

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**Fringe Fest**

**Continued from page 13**

by its cast members and also includes their own personal stories. It’s about the ugly and the beautiful things that happen in the Northside, and in collecting the stories of the rest of the city. It deals with loss, stress, gun violence, the pandemics, and navigating those things as a young person.

“The legacy that they have to leave behind is to build. It’s not just making an appearance in the community, to be known, to be loved in our own backyard of the Northside, and to truly leave a legacy of opportunities for youth to express themselves for many generations to come.”

James Staples, poetry director

What’s it like to live in the famous solar garden on some high school that you once ran the halls in?

It gives me great joy to know that I still work with my community and helping my community. That’s what’s important to me. I’m not just about poetry, it’s just another thing I can do to help other people. I don’t have the answers, but I’m happy that they may not even know what we’re doing. I’m just trying to get the work done to solve the problem and move on to something else.
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