

PHOTO BY CHUCK HOVEN

Friday, January 9, 2026; Candlelight vigil in memory of Renee Good, Market Square Park, W. 25th and Lorain Avenue: Civil Rights Lawyer Subodh Chandra, who formerly served as the Director of the City of Cleveland Law Department, says a *New York Times* frame by frame analysis of the murder of Renee Good in Minneapolis by an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent shows "she was simply trying to move her vehicle out of the way."

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Plain Press

Cleveland's Westside Newspaper

The ICE men cometh: local sightings spur fear, resistance

by Bruce Checefsky

Across Cleveland, reports of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent sightings and raids have flooded social media, describing everything from suspicious Sports Utility Vehicles (SUVs) cruising neighborhoods and staging in public school parking lots to

stories about people getting pulled over and detained. Despite efforts by the Cleveland Division of Police (CDP) to identify and document ICE activities, a press release issued by City Hall on January 14 contradicts the sightings.

"The Cleveland Division of Police (CDP) has reviewed multiple re-

ported ICE sightings and, to date, has found no evidence of ICE raids in Cleveland. While not federally required, we have not been notified that ICE is conducting any immigration-related operations within the city," said Division of Police Sgt. Wilfredo Diaz.

"It's also important to note that CDP officers will never ask about an individual's immigration status," Diaz continued. "CDP is tasked with protecting public safety, and while they will take action against anyone who commits violent crimes, they are not responsible for enforcing general federal immigration law."

In a request for more clarity on ICE activities included in the CPD statement, a spokesperson for the City issued the following response: "The best ones to answer further questions about their operations would be ICE themselves. We encourage all Clevelanders to learn more about their rights and access the support they need. Helpful resources available include the Cuyahoga County Welcome Center and Health and Human Services, Global Cleveland, Re-Source Cleveland, and the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland."

People widely recognize that ICE frequently restricts, rather than fa-

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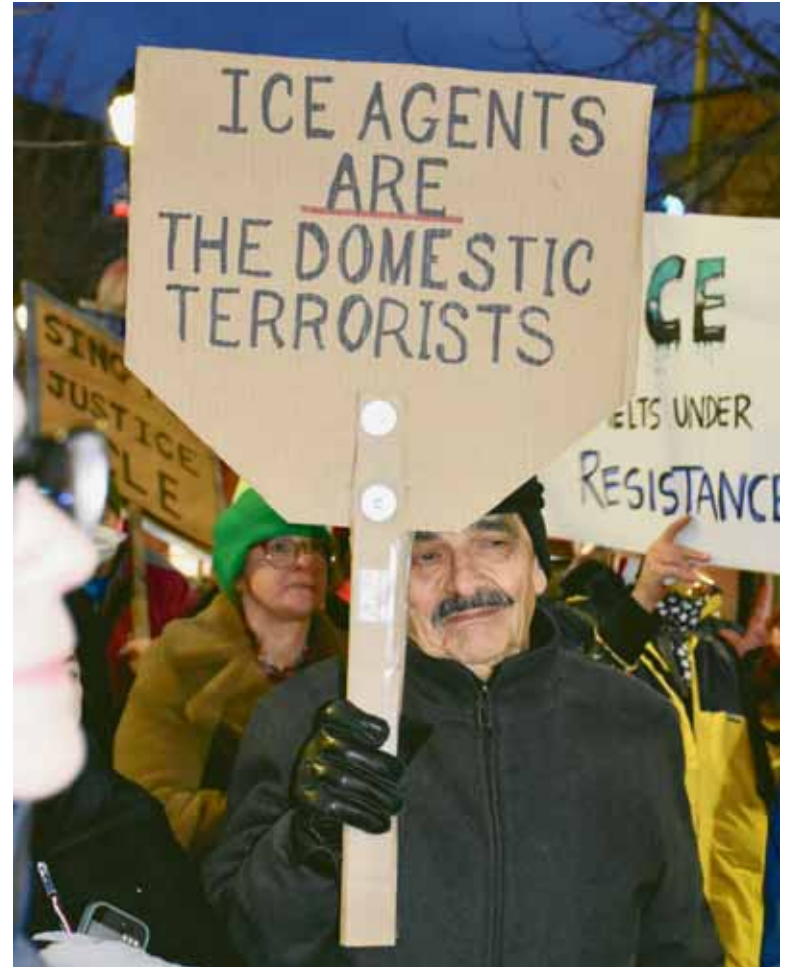


PHOTO BY CHUCK HOVEN

Friday, January 9, 2026; Candlelight vigil in memory of Renee Good, Market Square Park, W. 25th and Lorain Avenue: A protester shares his view of the true nature of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents.



PHOTO BY CHUCK HOVEN

Friday, January 9, 2026; Candlelight vigil in memory of Renee Good, Market Square Park, W. 25th and Lorain Avenue: This woman brought a message for Ohio leaders to the protest.

Musicians perform John Prine songs to benefit Greater Cleveland Food Bank

by Chuck Hoven

Four musicians performed at Dunlap Corner Bar in the Clark Fulton neighborhood at W. 32nd and Meyer on January 10th at an event titled *Ain't Hurtin' Nobody: An Evening of the Songs of John Prine*. The event was a benefit for the Greater Cleveland Foodbank. Performing before a full house were musicians Michael Sean McDonald, Kate Kooser, Ed Bridge and Landen Kearns.

The four musicians took turns singing and playing the songs of John Prine. Each musician was asked to perform six of John Prine's songs.

Michael Sean McDonald, who organized the event, said he learned just before they began performing that Bob Weir, guitarist and founding member of the Grateful Dead, had died. In memory of Bob Weir, the musicians sang the John Prine song "Please don't bury me."

Some of the many John Prine songs performed that evening included: "Humidity built the snowman", "Sam Stone", "Souvenirs",

"You never call me by my name", and "All the best."

Prine, a singer, musician, songwriter and performing artist wrote songs from the late 1960s up until his death in 2020.

Those attending the event were asked to give a donation to the Greater Cleveland Food Bank. In addition to collecting donations, staff from the Food Bank passed out fliers with a list of the 10 most needed donations and a list of volunteer opportunities at the Food Bank.

The ten most wanted donations to the Greater Cleveland Food Bank are: money, beans (canned or dried), peanut butter, canned or boxed entrees, pasta sauce (low sodium), 100% juice, cereal (hot or cold), canned protein (like tuna or chicken), whole grain rice & pasta, and canned fruits and vegetables.

Volunteers are needed for the following positions at the Greater Cleveland Food Bank. Repack volunteers are needed to sort, screen and prepare in-coming food dona-

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Clevelanders gather to demand justice for Renee Good

by Chuck Hoven

Over 250 Clevelanders packed into Market Square Park on Friday January 9th to demand justice for Renee Nicole Good, the 37-year-old woman shot three times and killed by an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent in Minneapolis, Minnesota on January 7th.

The candlelight vigil featured speakers, songs, poetry and many creative signs brought by protesters.

The Cuyahoga Democratic Women's Caucus, Mobilize The Vote

Northeast Ohio (NEO), and the Lakewood Democratic Club organized the event.

Organizers issued three statements in advance of the protest.

"We call on Ohio Senators and all elected officials to condemn this unlawful use of lethal force against an American citizen in her own neighborhood."

"We object to border patrol agents operating in urban settings, outfitted in riot gear, without proper background checks, credentials or train-

ing. There is no reason for masked or unidentifiable agents to emerge from unmarked vehicles, akin to the actions of a secret police force, per the Center for American Progress."

"Furthermore, all Americans should be incensed by Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem's false accusation, based on no evidence, that this Minneapolis mother of three was a 'domestic terrorist' or that the agent was in any danger, based on numerous videos."

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PHOTO BY CHUCK HOVEN

Saturday January 10, 2026; *Ain't Hurtin' Nobody: An Evening of the Songs of John Prine* to benefit the Greater Cleveland Food Bank, Dunlap Corner Bar, 3258 W. 32nd Street: Performing before a full house, musicians Michael Sean McDonald, Kate Kooser, Ed Bridge and Landen Kearns take turns playing and singing songs written by John Prine while raising funds for the Greater Cleveland Food Bank.

Boys & Girls Club boosts math, reading skills under federal initiative

Youth attending the federally funded Boys & Girls Clubs at Joseph M. Gallagher Middle School on the Near West Side of Cleveland improved their reading and math scores during the 2024-2025 school year and showed high attendance, according to independent evaluations.

The Club, funded by the federal 21st Century Community Learning Center initiative, also received high marks from parents for educational support and staff communication, the reports said.

Ten percent of Joseph Gallagher Club members who were considered “off track” during fall reading evaluations were considered “on track” by spring. Notably, 75% of eighth grade students in the 21st Century program tested proficient or better on their Spring 2025 math evaluations.

Dr. Karen H. Larwin, an external evaluator who studied the Club, said the program “provided structured academic support and enrichment that

aligned with program performance objectives, even though several targets were not fully met.”

The 21st Century Community Learning Center programs academic enrichment opportunities during non-school hours for children, particularly students who attend high-poverty and low-performing schools. Future funding for the program is uncertain, as it is not included in the proposed federal 2026 budget.

“We continue to see positive academic results from the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program throughout Northeast Ohio, and it is our hope we will be able to count on this funding to help our youth and their families,” Boys and Girls Clubs of Northeast Ohio

(BGCNEO) Chief Executive Officer Allen Smith said.

21st Century grants run for five years. New applications are not being accepted.

Fifteen BGCNEO sites in six counties were funded under this program during the 2024-2025 school year. For Clubs in Sheffield Lake and Barberton, it was the final year for this funding.

BGCNEO provides safe, fun places for youth ages 6-18 to go after school with a focus on academic success, healthy lifestyles, leadership and life and workforce readiness. There is no charge to join a Club. BGCNEO currently operates 30 Clubs in six Northeast Ohio counties.



from 11 am to 2 pm. By the end, you'll have handmade gifts for loved ones—or keepsakes to treasure for yourself. The workshops are free and family friendly and open to anyone 8 years old and up. Space is limited. Register now at juliadeburgos.org/calendar.

FRIENDS AND FAMILY OPEN STUDIO: Arthouse Inc. (3119 Denison Ave.) offers a free, family-friendly art workshop on the third Saturday of each month from 1 pm to 3 pm. This month's Family Open Studio, entitled “Black History Month Collaborative Art,” will be Saturday, February 21. Children are welcome but must be accompanied by an adult. Visit arthouseinc.org to sign up or call 216-398-8556 for more information.

LATIN DANCE CLASSES: Registration is now open for the Spring sessions of Flamenco Classes and Latin Social Dance classes at the Julia de Burgos Cultural Arts Center (2800 Archwood Ave). The flamenco classes will meet on Tuesdays, starting February 3, and the Latin Social Dance classes will meet on Thursdays starting February 5. Both feature separate sessions for kids (ages 5-11) and teens (12-18) and offer performance opportunities so the students can show off what they've learned. To learn more or to sign your child up, visit juliadeburgos.org/calendar.

STREET STUDIO: This month's Street Studio will be Saturday, February 14 from 1 pm to 3 pm at St. Paul's Community Church, 4427 Franklin Ave. All are welcome to share music, poetry, spoken word or to listen in support. Piano, drums, guitar, and microphones provided – as well as coffee and snacks. For more information, contact Ian Heisey at heisey2140@sbcglobal.net or Trennell Garrison at sapphire1497@yahoo.com.

BIKE CLEVELAND ADVOCACY TRAININGS: Level up your advocacy skills and learn how to make Cleveland's streets safer, more accessible, and more sustainable. Join Bike Cleveland for these upcoming virtual trainings: “Parking Reform” (with the Parking Reform Network) on February 9, “Understanding Cleveland's Budget” on March 30, “2025 Crash Report” on April 21, and “Using 311 for Advocacy” on May 13. All trainings start at 7 pm and are available through Zoom. These sessions are a great way to get informed, get involved, and help shape a more bike-friendly Cleveland. Register now at bit.ly/advocacytraining2026.

BLACK HISTORY AT THE LIBRARY: Celebrate Black History Month at the Cleveland Public Library. Throughout the month of February, the library system will host a series of educational and family fun programs and activities about the Black experience at its various locations. For a full list

of events and programming, visit cpl.org/bhm.

LGBT TEEN SUPPORT GROUP: The Power of Us, a group for teens to come together and build community with the help of licensed counselors, meets Tuesdays at 4 pm at the LGBT Community Center of Greater Cleveland (6705 Detroit Ave). Register now at tinyurl.com/ThePowerofUsCLE.

THE MAY DUGAN FINANCIAL OPPORTUNITY CENTER provides career and financial coaching for people looking to build effective money habits. Financial coaches work with individuals to assess public benefits, plan and achieve career goals, and plan for financial goals. If you are ready to take a deep dive into your finances, call us at 216-631-5800 or email us at gloch@maydugancenter.org.

REPORT SCAMS: Call the Cuyahoga County Scam Squad at 216-443-SCAM (7226). Hang up if a caller threatens you with arrest or property seizure, claims to be a grandchild or loved one in trouble with the law; asks you to wire money, mail cash or pay with gift cards; if a repair person calls out of the blue and wants to “fix” your computer.

COMMUNITY GUIDE
PLAIN PRESS will publish the annual Community Guide in the March issue. In the Community Guide, the Plain Press offers nonprofit organizations and government agencies serving residents in the Plain Press target neighborhoods a free listing of their name and phone number. New organizations that have not been listed in the Community Guide in the past should email their contact information to: plainpress@gmail.com. Organizations that have changed their name or phone number should also send that information to the Plain Press. The Plain Press offers ads in the guide for organizations that wish to place additional information in the guide beyond their name and phone number. To advertise in the guide, contact Ed Tishel at plainpressads@yahoo.com.

EDUCATION
ESPERANZA SCHOLARSHIPS: Esperanza, Inc. proudly awards scholarships to Hispanic and Latino students in Cuyahoga and Lorain Counties who are pursuing higher education, whether they are starting or continuing their college journey. The deadline to apply is March 15. Learn more at esperanzainc.org/esperanza-scholarship-overview.

FREE BOOKS for kids ages 0-5: Dolly Parton's Imagination Library of Ohio mails kids one free book each month until their 5th birthday. Any child in Ohio between birth and age 5 is eligible for the program. To sign up, visit: Ohio-ImaginationLibrary.org.

FREE ESOL CLASSES: Aspire Greater Cleveland offers FREE beginner, intermediate and advanced-level



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE BOYS AND GIRLS CLUBS
A student at Joseph Gallagher School receives academic support at the Boys and Girls Club at the school. The after-school program is made possible through a federally funded 21st Century Community Learning Centers Initiative.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes. Students must attend an orientation session before beginning classes, and you must register to attend orientation. Classes are offered at a number of convenient times and locations around town. To enroll, call 833-277-4732.

HEALTH
“HELP! MY CHILD IS STUTTERING”: In this new, 16-minute film from the Stuttering Foundation, parents and speech-language experts talk about how to promote easier talking and interacting with children who stutter. The professionals offer simple tips that parents can follow easily. To view the film for free, visit stutteringhelp.org/content/help-my-child-stuttering. For more information, contact us at info@stutteringhelp.org. National Stuttering Awareness Week is the second week in May. International Stuttering Awareness Day is October 22.

NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS: Drug problem? We can help. Call the free 24-hour Narcotics Anonymous hotline at 1-888-GET HOPE (1-888-438-4673) or visit <https://wordpress.naohio.org> to find an NA meeting near you. Remember: “Any addict can stop using drugs, lose the desire to use drugs, and find a new way to live.”

SOCIAL SUPPORT SERVICES: Do you need someone to talk to? Social Support Specialists, social work-trained, trauma-informed care professionals, are available at every city recreation center to provide free and confidential support for young people, seniors, and families. Services we offer include referrals to medical care, counseling, and public assistance; help with applying for public benefits like Social Security, Medicaid/Medicare, food stamps, and housing assistance; and mental health support for young people dealing with bullying, toxic stress, trauma, or other challenges. Call 216-664-2223 or visit your local rec. center to get started.

HOMELESS
IF YOU NEED SHELTER, contact Cuyahoga County's Coordinated Intake office at 216-674-6700. Hours of operation: 8 am – 6 pm, Monday – Friday. After hours and weekends, please call 2-1-1. If it is after hours, women in need of assistance may also go directly to Norma Herr Women's Center, 2227 Payne Ave., and staff will assist you in contacting Coordinated Intake the following day.

LAUNDRY LOVE, a program offered by Malachi Center, gives the unhoused and low/no-income families an opportunity to clean their clothes at no charge. Participation is based on need. By ap-

pointment only. Call (216)771-3036 x7 to make an appointment or sign up in person at Malachi Center (2416 Superior Viaduct). Hours: Monday - Friday: 9:30 am to noon. Detergent and dryer sheets will be provided. Each person is limited to 2 loads. No blankets or comforters allowed. No transferring / No sharing of client appointments. Each client must leave with the clothes they bring. Each client must handle their own loads / clothes.

TAXES
AARP TAX PREPARATION ASSISTANCE: Volunteers from AARP will be on hand at various locations in the Cleveland area to help seniors and most other individuals file federal and state tax forms for free. Visit aarp.org/money/taxes/aarp_taxaide to find a list of locations and to review the list of documents you will need to bring to your appointment in order to complete your tax return.

ESPERANZA, INC. TAX PREPARATION ASSISTANCE: If you earned \$69,000 or less in 2025, you qualify for free tax filing services through the EITC (Earned Income Tax Credit) Coalition. Appointments at Esperanza, Inc. (3104 W 25th St., 4th Floor) and other local EITC partner organizations are available now at RefundOhio.org!

UTILITY ASSISTANCE
HEAP WINTER CRISIS PROGRAM: Is your power disconnected

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“El Sueño Americano” exhibit at the Maltz Museum sheds light on the struggles of immigrants who risked their lives to reach the United States’ southern border

by Lynette Filips

The sign on the side of the building at 2929 Richmond Rd. in Beachwood says “Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage”, but since its founding in 2005, the Maltz Museum has demonstrated that it’s also interested in much more than Judaism. That’s largely been shown through the wide scope of the Museum’s special exhibits, and its relatively recent nomenclature change to “Maltz Museum for All Humanity”.

The current special exhibit, which will be wrapping up a five-month run on Monday, February 16th (Presidents Day), is a good example of how the Maltz Museum highlights the struggles of oppressed peoples across multiple cultures.

“El Sueño Americano/The American Dream” is the brainchild of American photographer-artist Tom Kiefer. It’s been traveling to venues across the United States since 2018, but this showing in Cleveland is the first time that it’s being displayed with pieces by Mexican artist Elizabeth J. Pineda.

Kiefer got the idea for the presentation while he was living in Azo, a city in southwest Arizona, and working part-time as a janitor (2003-2014) at the United States Customs and Border Control facility there. After about four years of seeing massive amounts of shelf-stable food confiscated from the migrants and thrown into the garbage, he asked for — and was granted — permission to donate it to local food pantries.

In the process of sorting through the trash for salvageable food items, Kiefer noticed all the other personal items which the agents had seized from the migrants... and then promptly discarded. The agents said that they were “non-essential” or “potentially lethal” but Tom Kiefer didn’t view them that way. He viewed them as the American government’s attempt to dehumanize the desperate people who’d packed the most important items from their lives into a backpack and risked life itself to cross Arizona’s killer Sonora Desert for a week (or more) in the hope of reaching a perceived better life in the United States.

If they survive the Desert, what they encounter at the border is the opposite of what they hoped for, as well as the opposite of what earlier generations of immigrants encountered (ideally at least) at Liberty

Island in the waters outside of New York City.

“El Sueño Americano...” opens with the words of poet Emma Lazarus at the base of the Statue of Liberty written in English, French and Spanish with alphabet soup macaroni letters —

*Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,*

The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.

Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,

I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

Next there is a huge display of black water jugs, specifically designed for the Desert crossings, and then begin Tom Kiefer’s photographs.

The photographs are artistic arrangements of items in the migrants’ backpacks which Kiefer rescued from the garbage: Clothes like extra pants and shirts/tops, underwear, socks and shoes, shoelaces, belts, hoodies and gloves; Food like little cans of tuna fish, jars of peanut butter, candy bars, milk, yogurt drinks and energy drinks; Toiletries like hair brushes and combs, toothbrushes and toothpaste, bars of soap, rolls of toilet paper, nail clippers, deodorant, cologne and make-up; Religious items like rosaries, holy cards, pocket-size New Testaments, necklaces with crucifixes or images of Our Lady of Guadalupe and small statues; Children’s play items like small toys and stuffed animals; Intensely personal items like photos of loved ones, diaries, wallets with the IDs still inside, money, cell phones, CDs, rings, keys, medicine, condoms and female contraceptives; blankets, notebooks and needles with spools of thread.

There is a photo of muddy yellow rubber duckies which migrants purposely leave in the Desert to mark the route for subsequent migrants; and another photo of newspaper articles about noteworthy tragedies which occurred there. There is also a short documentary film playing in the theater in the exhibit area.

Elizabeth Pineda’s work is at the end of the exhibit. Born in Mexico City, she now lives in Surprise, Arizona. The purpose of her work is to memorialize the thousands of migrants who died in the Desert on the way to America. It begins with a film, “Ceremonia”, of her sitting

at a typewriter, saying out loud the name (or no name) of each person who perished. Then she types that individual and location of death onto a long panel of silk — “Sin Nombre in Esta Tierra Sagrada” (Nameless in This Sacred Land).

The volumes of artfully hung silk panels are in the next area and titled “Reverencia”. There are so many typed entries in such small type that it is nigh impossible to read even one line of it, but the idea of the overwhelming number of human beings who have lost their lives in the Sonora Desert comes across.

The final segment of Elizabeth Pineda’s art is “Maíz” — a series of cyanotype prints of traditional cooking herbs on corn husks.

In addition to its rotating special exhibit room, the Maltz Museum has two permanent exhibits — The Temple-Tifereth Israel Gallery (one of America’s largest collections of Jewish art and Temple artifacts) and the American Story (about Jewish life here). There is a large lobby for special events and a gift shop off the lobby.

The Museum is generally open Tuesday through Sunday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Under the “Museums for All” program, admission is free for individuals and families with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) or Women Infants and Children (WIC) program cards. Call 216-593-0575 to reserve tickets and be sure to bring the card and a photo ID the day of the visit.

Admission to the Maltz Museum will be free for everyone on Presidents Day. Otherwise, admission is \$12 for adults, \$10 for seniors and students over the age of 12, and \$5 for children ages 5 -11. Children 4 and under are free.

Beachwood is not as far away as it sounds and can be easily accessed via just two roads from the west side of Cleveland — Take Denison east (its name changes to Harvard on the other side of the Cuyahoga River) and then take Richmond Rd. north (a left turn off Harvard.) The Museum will be on the right at 2929 Richmond Road. Or take the highways if you prefer. The important thing is to experience this exhibit.

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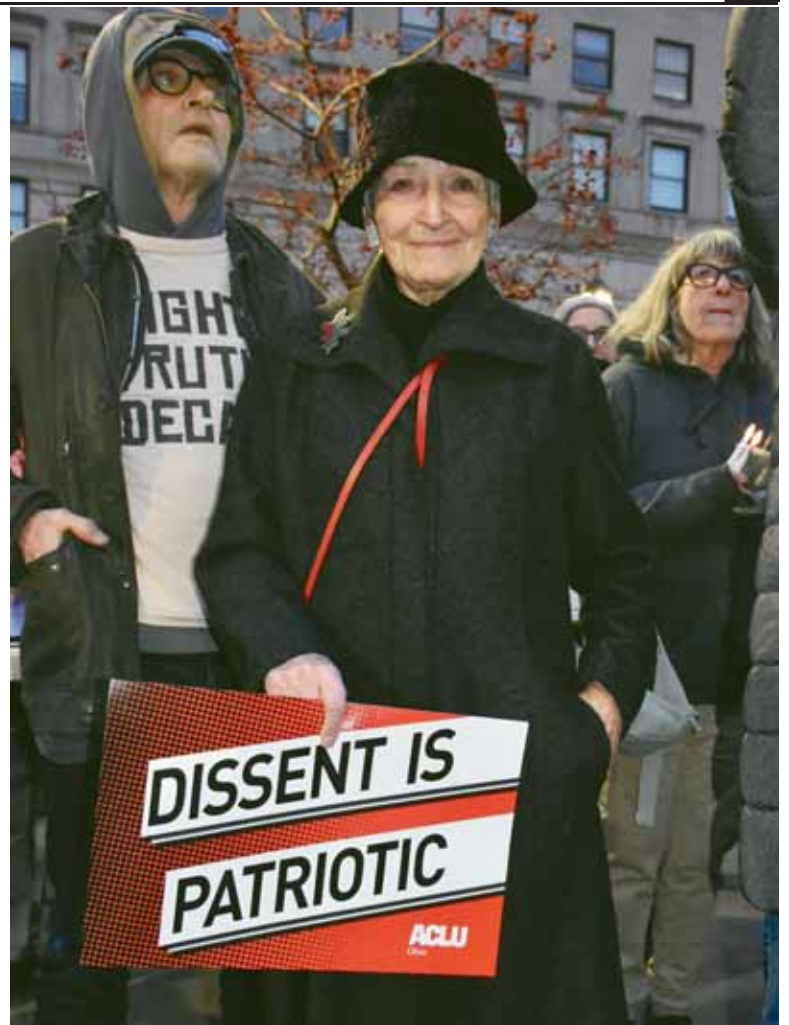


PHOTO BY CHUCK HOVEN

Friday, January 9, 2026; Candlelight vigil in memory of Renee Good, Market Square Park, W. 25th and Lorain Avenue: This woman expresses her patriotism through protest.

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PHOTO BY CHUCK HOVEN

Friday, January 9, 2026; Candlelight vigil in memory of Renee Good, Market Square Park, W. 25th and Lorain Avenue: This protester quotes the late Congressman John Lewis about getting into “Good Trouble.”

THE ICE MEN COMETH
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ilitates, independent media coverage and public oversight.

Paul (last name withheld for safety) shared a story with this reporter about an incident in the Clark-Fulton neighborhood, a historically rich Puerto Rican area near Metro-Health Hospital, that took place on January 15, the day following the CPD press release.

“I was driving along West 44th to Sackett Avenue when I witnessed two separate incidents within four minutes of each other. Four dudes popped out of an SUV wearing masks and flak jackets. A few minutes later, five more unmarked black SUVs appeared. The car in

front of me tried to back up. I blew my horn to get her attention, and just then, a big dude wearing a bulletproof vest and mask, with guns hanging out of every pocket, told me to take another route because it was ‘going to take a while.’

“They had the entire street blocked,” he added. “Then I saw a bunch of guys on the porch trying to get in the house.”

CPD has denied any raids but has not commented on ICE sightings. Confusion between unmarked SUVs, trucks, and vans and nondescript police cars causes residents to face retribution by the federal law enforcement agency if they speak out. Coming forward is dangerous for immigrants because of the fear of deportation, detention, or family

separation, but advocates say it’s necessary to protect rights.

In the West Boulevard neighborhood, a woman who asked not to be identified said she has copies of her birth certificate and her mother’s ready and within reach, just in case. She’s terrified. And on the Near West Side, authorities have not confirmed that ICE raided the May Dugan Center in the Ohio City neighborhood despite a first-person account that the event took place. Executive Director Andy Trares did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

At the public-school level, the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) released a letter to parents last fall addressing the raids in Northeast Ohio by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, promising to provide a secure environment for learning regardless of background or immigration status. The urban school district saw absentee rates spike as Border Patrol agents began enforcement in and around Cleveland.

“We understand that families may have concerns about law enforcement inquiries or actions on school grounds. Please know that CMSD follows clear protocols, grounded in district policy and federal and state law, to ensure that any such interactions occur in a manner that minimizes disruption to our students’ education,” said the Cleveland Metropolitan School District.

“We are also actively reviewing and reinforcing our protocols with school leaders and our safety and security teams to ensure we remain vigilant and prepared.”

On the statewide political front, U.S. Sen. Jon Husted (R-OH) urged people not to interfere with immigration operations after a federal agent shot and killed 37-year-old Renee Good in Minneapolis. “The president said he would conduct the largest deportation effort in the history of the country to fix the errors of the previous four years.

That is an enormously complicated task,” said Husted in a virtual press conference. “ICE agents are moms and dads. Our neighbors they’re part of law enforcement that is there to keep people safe. And by and large, they do a really good job in accomplishing that.”

Husted, a conservative Republican strongly aligned with President Trump, is seeking to win a full term after being appointed to fill the vacancy left by Vice President J.D. Vance’s resignation and faces Democrat Sherrod Brown in November 2026.

Locally, U.S. House member Max Miller (R), who represents Ohio’s 7th district in Bay Village, wrote an op-ed in the Washington Times several months earlier calling for the National Guard to deploy to Cleveland.

“My constituents in the suburbs are afraid to go into the city. The Cleveland I grew up in is now unrecognizable. Families no longer feel safe walking down the street, and small businesses are being boarded up,” said Miller. “The people I represent should be able to go to Guardians, Browns, or Cavs games without fearing for their lives. There is no higher duty of government than this.”

Ayla Blumenthal, an immigration attorney at Margaret W. Wong & Associates, LLC, said there is no clear reporting agency and no central database for reporting ICE activities. Information is more community-driven with posts on social media like Facebook. Police are doing nothing on either side of the issue, she cautioned.

“US citizens should carry a valid passport or passport card, birth certificate, or naturalization certificate,” she suggested. “Permanent residents should carry their green card and memorize an attorney’s phone number and consult an attorney if they are not sure of their immigration status.”

International students with a visa status should have it with them.

“It is very common for ICE to take passports from people from other countries. It is very hard to get them back,” said Blumenthal, “and often easier to get a new passport. Authorities could detain people without legal status for months, a year, or longer.”

Laura Rodriguez-Carbone, a Puerto Rican and natural-born American citizen from Cleveland, got pulled over by ICE and detained and threatened for about half an hour. “It was one of the scariest experiences of my life,” she wrote in a description of the event on her Facebook page. “I did not think I would make it home.”

“There is a critical gap in our public safety information,” she added to a Messenger request for more information on her experience, “where no single entity appears to be systematically tracking ICE enforcement activity in the Cleveland area.”

“If local officials are monitoring these incidents, they are not sharing that information with the people. Community organizations have not coalesced around a coordinated response. We know ICE is operating here. What we don’t know is how they’re conducting enforcement, whether civil rights abuses are happening under a more shelled umbrella, or what pattern is emerging,” said the local strategist and humanist. “We may not be seeing the same level of aggression as other cities yet, but this is the same agency committing human rights abuses across the country. Cleveland residents feel scared; they want their elected officials actively protecting them, not keeping their heads down, hoping to avoid Trump’s attention.”

Rodriquez-Carbone added, “That silence leaves our most vulnerable residents completely exposed while the rest of us pretend we are exempt from what is happening nationwide.”

[Editor’s Note: This is a developing story.]

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Welcome Nikki Hudson and Phil Kidd to their new positions

by Greg Cznadel

The monthly Democratic Ward Club meeting January 14th at the Estabrook Recreation center in Old Brooklyn was the first combined meeting of residents from the new Ward 4 (formerly Ward 13) and the new Ward 11. Normally, Councilman [Kris Harsh](#), Ward 4, has a guest speaker from the City, followed by updates in the neighborhood and the Old Brooklyn Community Development Corporation.

One learned of new and future construction ([the Pearl Road Residences](#), the Memphis-Pearl Project), the state of abandoned stores (CVS, Rite Aid, Walgreens) and what's going on with Melted Wings Winery and Oak Park Hotel. People are always welcome to ask questions, bring up issues on their street, like abandoned houses, drug spots, and speeding.

This meeting welcomed Nikki Hudson, new Ward 11 councilwoman. As Ward 4 and 11 now cover all of Old Brooklyn, the two councilpersons will be sharing news at the monthly meeting. Hudson explained that this was her first week on the job and there was a lot to learn. With fewer wards each councilperson has taken on additional committees. One of her first meetings pertained to the Safety Committee. It was three hours long! Kris Harsh smiled and laughed. He said he was listening in on You Tube, went back to work, came back a few hours later and it was still going on.

Copies of the *Plain Press* were on the table. I shared the types of articles on our community - on Old Brooklyn's history and their Tree Stewards program. Nikki Hudson chimed in, complimenting Chuck Hoven and the *Plain Press*. [Hudson, a Snake Hill supporter](#), has braved many cold weather hikes. See past and future updates in the *Plain Press*.

During the meeting, Ward 11 Council Representative Nikki Hudson asked what topics or people

those attending the meeting would enjoy. I mentioned the Depaving Program in Cleveland and [Phil Kidd](#) from the Mayor's Office of Capital Improvement. Phil Kidd was at the first [Tree Stewards Tree workshop](#) at Six Shooters in January 2025 (see *Plain Press*). He was standing at the end of the table, listening. If I didn't mention the City's Depaving Program, he probably would not have spoken up.

He always seems to appear at "green" meetings somewhere in the crowd. At a Coffee with the Cops and Steward event later that year at the Rebel Reserve, I thought I recognized him. Then at the [Cleveland Parks and Greenspace Coalition](#) quarterly meeting with 14 community-led park and greenspace groups

in attendance, I saw him again.

At the last [Cleveland Tree Coalition](#) meeting, Sara Tillis called him up during one of the slides to explain the status of the Depaving program along streets in Cleveland and Old Brooklyn streets Broadview and State roads. He walked up to the screen saying he was not expecting to give a speech.

When I suggested him as one of our speakers, a smile appeared on both Kris Harsh's and Nikki Hudson's faces. A smile like I have never seen. I was not sure what I said. They explained that he left the Mayor's office to the [Cleveland Foundation as Director of Vibrant Neighborhoods](#). They both agreed this was a great loss to the Mayor's office.



PHOTO BY GREG ROSENBERG
Saturday, January 3, 2026; Tres Reyes Magos Family Crafting Workshop, Julia De Burgos Cultural Arts Center, 2800 Archwood Avenue: Community member [Jessica McMillen](#) designs a *cajita para los camellos* for children to place under their beds just in time for the arrival of the Three Kings.

Friends of Snake Hill's first encounter with Metroparks takes place in the freezing cold

by Greg Cznadel

Friends of Snake Hill braved Cleveland's cold on December 19th to gather at its trailhead in Old Brooklyn at 3800 Muriel Avenue in the Edgewood Neighborhood for a planned meeting with a representative of the Cleveland Metroparks. The trailhead is just northwest of the intersection of Memphis and Pearl. The temperature at the time of the meeting was 21°F, with wind gusts up to 32mph.

Eric Greifenstein, leader of Friends of Snake Hill, waited by a pickup truck talking through an open window to Brenda and Larry Theurer, Snake Hill enthusiasts. He explained that the groups would be meeting with Kelly Coffman, a park planner for Cleveland Metroparks. One-by-one, others came up. Eric Greifenstein stated, "Where's Kelly Coffman? She should be here."

Then came a woman bundled for the weather with clip board in hand. That had to be her. Eric Greifenstein suggested we take a walk down the trail. Kelly Coffman, with a smile on her face, apologized. She then stated she would prefer to conduct business at the top of the trailhead. She pointed to her tennis shoes, which of course were not conducive to walking in the snow.

Ward 11 Cleveland City Councilperson Nikki Hudson joined the group. Eric Greifenstein spoke of Councilperson Hudson's familiarity with the trail, "She has hiked the trail a handful of times since beginning her run for City Council. She first walked the Snake Hill Trail on August 25th, 2025, when my wife, Lorelei, and I introduced her to it by hiking it head to tail."

Councilperson Hudson "found that the efforts by the Friends of Snake Hill to advocate for a plan for long term care of the trail, met three of her primary areas of interest: history, connection to green space, and grass roots organizing." (*Plain Press*, November 2025).

Kelly Coffman passed out a map of the trail. She explained what role the MetroParks would have in revamping trail, who owns what sections of the land, and what their plans for the area would be. Possibly a concrete trailhead along Muriel could be used for parking.

Coffman said, "The trail is approximately 2000 feet long, so a little under a half mile for purposes of a ballpark estimate...the grading, drainage, and paving could cost between \$500,000 - \$1M if it was engineered and built by a contractor."

It was suggested that only the top be paved, the trail going down be stone, gravel, or pebbles for the purpose of remaining safely walkable during rain or snow. West Creek's trails going from parking lots to nature center, pavilion, and around Bluebird point are paved and flat. All the connecting trails that lead to hills, remain natural or regraded with stone. This helps to prevent slipping into nearby ravines.

Eric Greifenstein suggested fencing might be nice in areas to prevent people from walking off the trail. He noted that there are flora and fauna throughout the trail. He was especially concerned about a fox den near the bottom of the ravine not being disturbed. He said deer routinely cross the path. As he spoke a deer was seen crossing the

RENEE GOOD PROTESTS continued from page one

Reverend Lois Annich, the president of AMIS -- a group that assists asylum seekers in Cleveland,-- introduced speakers and a singer at the candlelight vigil. Reverend Annich also read a poem by United States National Youth Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman titled, *They say she is no more*. Gorman wrote the poem for Renee Nicole Good after the shooting in Minneapolis.

Speaker Subodh Chandra, a civil rights lawyer and former law director of the City of Cleveland, said he has been a legal representative on both sides in law enforcement shootings. He said he had looked at a frame-by-frame analysis of the shooting by the *New York Times*. He said the video clearly shows that Renee Nicole Good had turned her front wheel away from the ICE agent and was "simply trying to move her vehicle out of the way." Chandra called the shooting of Good a murder.

Ohio State Senator Nickie Antonio (District 23) expressed concern about the Trump Administration creating a fascist state. She urged Clevelanders at the vigil to "stand up

path near the top of the trail.

That day Chris Feighan posted a video on Friends of Snake Hill's Facebook page of "...a pair of Great Horned Owls, engaged in courtship that was spotted on December 7, 2025, at dusk, in the Eastern Hollow of the Snake Hill Unit!" Who would have known.

Alex Manuk and Eric Greifenstein of the Friends of Snake Hill said they hope that the Cleveland Metroparks will take over maintenance of the trail and make it part of their trail system connecting the Edgewood Neighborhood to Brookside Park.



PHOTO BY GREG ROSENBERG
Saturday, January 3, 2026; Tres Reyes Magos Family Crafting Workshop, Julia De Burgos Cultural Arts Center, 2800 Archwood Avenue: Julia De Burgos staff members (L-R) [Samantha Diaz](#) and [Victoria Arriojas](#) are ready to help those participating in the workshop.

to fascism."

Kathy Wray Coleman, publisher of the *Cleveland Urban News* blog and organizer of the Cleveland Women's March, said, "Trump must go." She invited Clevelanders in the crowd to attend the Cleveland Women's March on March 8th at 2 p.m. She predicted that by then President Donald Trump will have done something else that is terrible that we can protest.

Sue Dean Dyke of Mobilize The Vote NEO read some of the comments of Becca Good, the wife of Renee Good who was in the car with her when she was killed. Dyke said Becca Good was interviewed on National Public Radio and said that Renee was a "super kind" person, who was "rejecting hate and choosing compassion."

Following the speakers, those at the vigil marched down Lorain Avenue to W. 28th Street, north on W. 28th and then back to W. 25th and Lorain Avenue. Escorted by Cleveland Police, the group carried a variety of signs and shouted slogans including, "No Hate, No Fear, Immigrants are Welcome Here", "Hey, Hey, Ho-ho, Kristi Noem (Homeland Security Director) has got to go."

Signs carried by protesters included: "Remember Renee", "From Cleveland to Minneapolis, Stop ICE Terror", "ICE murderers Out of our cities", "It's Above 32° F,

Let ICE Melt", "Immigrants Make America Great", "ICE murderers Out of our cities", "ICE melts under resistance", "Trump must go now", "Justice for Renee Nicole Good", "Abolish ICE", "Enraged, Engaged, Resistance is Critical", "Stop the Repression Abolish ICE Now", "Abolish ICE 4 Good", "We Stand with Minneapolis", "Justice for Renee Nicole Good, Murdered by ICE", "Veterans Against Fascism", "Justice for Renee", "Stop ICING People", "Defend Our Democracy", "ICE Out", "Dissent is Patriotic", "Impeach, Remove Fascist GOP", "Defend Our Democracy", "ICE must Go! Whole Trump Fascist Regime Must Go Now!", "Blood on their hands. R.I.P Renee Good. Murdered by ICE", "Hate will not make us great", "Justice for Renee Nicole Good, unarmed, murdered U.S. citizen. Stop ICE cruelty", "ICE agents are the domestic terrorists", "Fight Truth Decay, No More Lies or Democracy Dies!", "Fetch Justice not Deportation" and "Ohio needs leaders who understand the cost of living."

In addition to this protest, some Cleveland leaders weighed in with comments about the tragedy in Minneapolis. On January 7th, Cleveland City Council President Blaine Griffin, in addition to offering his condolences to the Good family, said he also **continued on page 8**

Attention:

Non-Profit Organizations, Government Offices and Public Officials!

The Plain Press Community Guide will be published in our March Issue.

The guide offers free listings of names and phone numbers – additional information can be placed in the guide by purchasing a square in the guide.

For more information contact **Ed Tishel** at plainpressads@yahoo.com

Plain Press Community Guide

Be There! Buy a Square!

KeyBank Produce Arcade opens at West Side Market

On Friday January 9th the newly renovated KeyBank Produce Arcade opened to the public. The next day, on Saturday the 10th of January, the KeyBank Produce Arcade was filled with shoppers marveling at the West Side Market merchants' colorful displays of fruits and vegetables in their new digs.

The KeyBank Produce Arcade is on the east side of the West Side Market. It stretches from Lorain Avenue to the parking lot. Customers can enter either from Lorain Avenue or from the West Side Market Parking Lot.

The KeyBank Produce Arcade will now house eleven produce merchants. The stand names of the produce merchants are Greg's Produce, Luca's Produce, Mena's Produce, Brothers Produce, Harb's Produce, Habib's Produce, Ehab's Produce, Boutros Brothers Produce, Angelo's Produce, A-1 Quality Produce, and A & J Produce.

In addition to the produce stands, shoppers will find Greenleaf Floral's stand and a West Side Market information stand by the Lorain Avenue entrance to the Key Bank Produce Arcade.

Over the past seven months this portion of the West Side Market has been closed for the renovation. The renovation of this portion of the produce arcade represents the first piece of a \$70 million dollar transformation of the West Side Market

planned by the Cleveland Public Market Corporation, a nonprofit corporation that has now been given the responsibility of managing the West Side Market.

The newly renovated KeyBank Produce Arcade represents a vast improvement in the working conditions for West Side Market produce merchants. The produce arcade is now enclosed with glass windows and doors. It has a heating and cooling system that makes for more comfortable working conditions for the merchants whom in the past braved the Cleveland weather conditions with little to protect them from the elements.

Merchants also have running water and refrigeration units. The new stands are at waist level to allow for easier access for customers.

The West Side Market Transformation Project's website says the next phase of the West Side Market's renovation will be the basement overhaul. It says, "More than \$30 million of the project budget addresses long-needed updates and improvements to the Market's more than century-old basement. These include the construction of an entirely new network of food storage coolers, updated and expanded cleaning and prep spaces, and the creation of the Market's first-ever onsite commercial kitchen."

Once the basement overhaul is complete, produce merchants will

have easier access to food storage in the basement.

While the basement renovation is underway, Cleveland Public Market Executive Director Rosemary Mudry says the North Arcade, which is now closed to the public, will be used to serve some of the functions that merchants now do in the basement.

On the Transformation Project website, Mudry explains each phase of the transformation project in short videos. (transformationproject.west-sidemarket.org)

Mudry says the Market Hall will benefit from a new Heating Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) system, new electrical services, elevators up to the office spaces and new first floor restrooms.

She says the women's locker room will be converted into a teaching kitchen and educational space.

Mudry says the alley between the Market Hall and the North Arcade will feature an outdoor seating and gathering space.

The men's locker room space, Mudry says, will become an event and programming space that will feature a mezzanine with public seating with views of both the Market Hall and downtown Cleveland.

Once the other renovations of the West Side Market are complete, Mudry says the North Arcade will reopen as a food hall where local culinary businesses can offer on-site served food and drink.



PHOTO BY DEBBIE SADLON
Saturday January 10, 2026; West Side Market's Key Bank Produce Arcade: The first Saturday at the new Key Bank Produce Arcade which opened on Friday January 9th. Kerlos Salib, owner of the Habib's Produce stand, offers some vegetables to a customer.

Historic buildings still standing at Pearl and Memphis

by Lynette Filips

The months (and years) go by quickly and thus another month has passed with seemingly nothing having moved forward with the projected demolition of the doomed buildings in the Old Brooklyn Community Development Corporation's (OBCDC's) revitalization plan for the northwest corner of Memphis Ave. and Pearl Rd. Sheets of new plywood are visible on some of the windows on the building exteriors, but the northern half of the former St. Luke's United Church of Christ complex, the two Greenline buildings, all of Pearl Road United Methodist Church (PRUMC) and the pre-Civil War house south of PRUMC are all still standing. And PRUMC is still conducting its Sunday worship services in the sanctuary it created decades ago in part of its school building.

PRUMC, however, is moving toward securing a temporary worship space when they must vacate their 4200 Pearl Road home. And since January 9th when they viewed

that potential new space in the former Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, 8235 Memphis Avenue in Brooklyn, the members of the congregation are feeling much more positive about the forced move. It's just west of St. Elias Melkite Greek Catholic Church, 8023 Memphis Ave.

PRUMC's trustee Tom Hite found the space, and along with the man who is PRUMC's treasurer, he has been in negotiations with the building's owner. (The building has some issues which must be addressed before the City of Brooklyn will issue an Occupancy Permit for it.) Interestingly, the current building owner is St. Elias Melkite Church. An online search of the address brings up former "for sale" ads, "for rent" ads, and a catering business in that location after the Lutheran church sold the property to St. Elias.

Some of the reasons that PRUMC congregation like what will likely become their new temporary worship space are that it's close by, it's in a good location, and it's a church

(not a storefront). It has a beautiful sanctuary space, like their own, and comparable "church" areas — a Sunday School classroom, an office, a meeting area, plus a good parking lot.

But presently they have no idea when they might move there. We can assume that the rent will not be inexpensive, but no doubt that is all included in the deal PRUMC made when they gave their building to OBCDC. They will need to bring the altar and cross from their current church to the new space as the sanctuary is empty. But having those things there will help it to seem more like home.

The Historical Society of Old Brooklyn (HSOB) is also still in negotiations for a new space. At this point they do not want to name the hoped-for site, but it is in Old Brooklyn — as it must be! Complicating their situation is that the president has been majorly ill for months.

Some of the other officers and members of the Historical Society of Old Brooklyn have stepped up to the plate and are conducting business as the Relocation Committee. One good thing is that they are not responsible for the cost of moving the contents of the Museum and the monthly fee at the storage facility. As it is, they are a small, unsubsidized organization and will ultimately need assistance from still undetermined sponsors to be able to afford the monthly rent in a new location. The

subsidy they are receiving per the terms of the move will not last long and the alterations they will have to make to the potential building will be expensive.

I have not read anything online about OBCDC receiving the \$13 million in TIF (Tax Increment Financing) money they requested from the County via the City last Spring. (They may even have a bigger deficit than that by now). Nor have I heard that they've secured any more parking places for the apartments.

I need to learn how to request documents from the Public Record for the project. My understanding is that it can be done via the City of Cleveland's website through the Law Department. Apparently, anyone can do it. No matter which way this project ends, we will want to have the records of all the proceedings related to it in the Historical Society of Old Brooklyn's archives.

Since I have repeatedly seen the following monetary amounts for OBCDC's Memphis Pearl Project, I feel comfortable reporting them here. These were posted online on June 11, 2025 —

- In July of 2023 Cuyahoga County Council awarded them \$250,000 of ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funds — a GRANT.
- In August of 2023 Cleveland awarded them a \$3 million Community Development GRANT.
- In September of 2023 Cleveland City Council awarded them a \$2.5 million pre-development GRANT.
- In October of 2023 they secured a \$19 million LOAN from the AFL/CIO pension fund. HUD (the federal government's department of

Housing and Urban Development) insured it, which is why the project is now bound by HUD regulations. (What are the implications if OBCDC defaults on the loan and HUD takes it on?)

• In August of 2024 the Cuyahoga County Land Bank in combination with Ohio's Department of Development awarded them a \$2,042,027 Ohio Brownfield Remediation GRANT. That is the money which supposedly required the start of demolition before the end of the 2025 calendar year.

Now do the math. If it's a \$41 million project, there're still over \$14 million needed to complete it. (And a big chunk of loan money to repay.)

OBCDC's new executive director, David Robinson, spoke about the organization at the January meeting of Old Brooklyn's Crime Watch group. During the "Question and Answer" period he mentioned that March is when to realistically expect that the demolition of the 4-1/2 buildings will start. Time will tell. I still think that adequate parking and funding should be in place before OBCDC is allowed to demolish any neighborhood buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Till next month, if you want to refer back to any previous *Plain Press* articles about this historic Old Brooklyn corner, access them on the *Plain Press'* website, <https://plainpress.blog> or on the Historical Society of Old Brooklyn's website, www.oldbrooklynhistory.org. In time the HSOB also hopes to be able to share news on its website about its progress transforming another building into a museum.

Fairview Park's 1977 Yvonne Regier cold case is still cold

Authorities are still looking for any information to help find out what happened to the teenage girl that went missing in 1977 from Fairview Park. Yvonne Regier went missing from a Sunoco gas station located on Lorain Road. She was a resident of North Olmsted. It was early afternoon on August 8th when she disappeared while working alone at the gas station. The case baffled the Fairview Park authorities because of the lack of evidence left at the scene. Her purse and belongings, along with large amounts of money, in the cash register, were left behind.

Back in 1977, "serial killer" was still a new phenomenon. The last thing city authorities were thinking

about was a serial abductor on the loose. This is especially true in a blimpish suburb such as Fairview Park. However, besides several serial killers on the loose across the country in 1977, there were several serial killers operating just in the State of Ohio alone.

After the first couple of months, because of a lot of distorted facts, the detectives working the case concluded that she left on her own accord. However, today they are convinced that she was taken against her will and are asking the public for help. In 2016, authorities

released to the networks, an age composite of what the 17-year-old would look like if she were still alive. They are asking anyone with information about the disappearance of Yvonne Regier to call Fairview Park Police at: 440-333-1234

To learn more about the case, a documentary will air in February 2026, on Cox Cable Thursdays at 9 p.m. on Channel 45 and Cleveland Spectrum on Mondays at 9 p.m. on Channel 1025. For further information you can call Kevin at: 216-230-1840 or email him at: Kevin@ShockerEnterprises.com.

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Cleveland fell in National Cultural Standing, report says

by Bruce Checefsky

Cleveland ranked 50th overall and 23rd among large communities in the 2025 Southern Methodist University (SMU) Arts Vibrancy Ranking. The SMU index measures arts supply, demand, public support, cost of living, and population size. In past years, Cleveland reached as high as 12th among large communities, yet it falls behind for independent artists and arts-based businesses, ranking 32nd of 39 and 233rd overall.

This is not necessarily good news for independent artists in Cleveland.

SMU DataArts, the National Center for Arts Research, analyzes vast datasets to understand sector trends, publish reports, and offer business intelligence to arts practitioners, funders, and policymakers. The research strengthens nonprofit arts and cultural organizations, enabling leaders to make informed decisions, improve their financial health, and build vibrant communities through evidence-based research, according to SMU.

SMU DataArts released a study of the broader ecosystem in which individual arts organizations operate, identifying a range of community-level factors that influence organizational success. The study offers a framework for understanding where cultural ecosystems thrive beyond their financial performance, attendance patterns, and operational structures.

Highlights from the analysis found small communities among top performers, including Jackson, Wyoming; Nantucket, Massachusetts; and Juneau, Alaska; contradicting the notion that vibrant arts ecosystems are determined by population size. Small communities with strong cultural infrastructure rank among the nation's top communities.

California dominated the cultural standings in San Francisco-San Mateo-Redwood City (#2), Los Angeles-Long Beach-Glendale (#12), and San Rafael (#19). Southern arts centers showcase the South's vibrant cultural scenes, including Nashville-Davidson-Murfreesboro-Franklin, Tennessee (#8) and New Orleans-Metairie, LA (#16).

The Greater Cleveland Music Census conducted a survey in 2023 of over 2,700 music professionals (musicians, venue staff, etc.) to understand the scene's economic/social impact, revealing a strong but struggling industry in need of more advocacy and marketing support. Challenges include low pay and the need for a music commission. A majority of Greater Cleveland musicians held non-music jobs, and a significant percentage of venues were unprofitable, citing marketing and talent costs as issues.

Over 76% of respondents supported a music commission for advocacy, grants, and live programming. Top concerns for musicians included low/uncertain pay, lack of benefits, and the increasing cost of living.

Rhonda Brown, Senior Advisor, Arts & Culture, City of Cleveland, said, in response to the data, "The City allocated \$3 million through our Transformative Arts Fund last year—an unprecedented investment by the Bibb Administration, as it was the largest grant program (in terms of award amounts to individual artists) in Cleveland's history."

Despite the SMU DataArts findings, Cuyahoga Arts & Culture (CAC) awarded over \$12.9 million in 2025 to 300 organizations, including General Operating Support (GOS) for 70 groups and Project Support for 217 projects.

Assembly for the Arts, in close partnership with CAC, distrib-

utes funds to individual artists in Greater Cleveland through various programs, with specific amounts varying by grant, such as \$10,000 for the Creative Impact Fund (for established artists) or \$5,000 for early-career artists, and smaller \$1,500 Boost Fund grants, alongside project-specific grants like Rapid Action Grants (up to \$2,000). The Transformative Arts Fund awarded \$3 million in grants of \$250,000 to \$500,000 to artists last year.

Several contentious public CAC meetings in 2023 forced the agency to increase the number and amount of grants available to individual artists.

The CAC board voted in December of that year to approve \$400,000 for the Assembly to manage the Support for Artists program, adding another \$100,000, but only after the board president, Nancy Mendez, publicly admitted CAC had not paid out grants to individual artists in 2018 and 2019, and again in 2021. She said the artist's money went into the general operating support. A public records request by *CoolCleveland* confirmed the financial discrepancy. Mendez eventually left the board presidency.

Jeremy Johnson, president and CEO of the Assembly for the Arts, added that Cleveland continues to rank in the top tier nationally for arts and cultural vibrancy, placing in the top 5% of more than 900 U.S. communities. The latest rankings reflect a change in DataArts' methodology, he said, which now compares communities of all sizes together rather than by population. "Indicators related to independent artists and arts-based businesses are based on national datasets. SMU DataArts is best positioned to explain how those measures are constructed and how recent methodological updates affect the results," said Johnson.

"Locally, our focus remains on long-term growth—strengthening nonprofit arts organizations, supporting individual artists, and expanding creative businesses across Greater Cleveland."

When asked about the decline in ranking for Cleveland, Jill Paulsen, executive director of CAC, referred the question to their contacts at SMU, Liz Quinn and Allison Heishman, noting that "SMU can speak to the methodology of their research (and any changes in their approach over the years)."

In an email response, Kathie Ingersol, SMU DataArts director of communications, engagement, and strategy, provided additional context by advising caution when interpreting year-to-year shifts in the rankings.

"Rankings convey the relative position but not the magnitude of difference in the metrics between communities," she said. "The actual differences between ranked places can be much larger or smaller than the rankings suggest, and shifts over time may reflect small changes in the underlying data."

"Changes in rankings do not always directly correlate to changes in a community on the underlying measures. Instead, other places may have changed or seen slower growth in population or faster increases in cost of living."

Ingersol added, "There was also a change in the geographical boundaries under consideration for the Cleveland area in the 2025 index. We use Core Based Statistical Areas (CBSAs) to calculate the index, and the boundaries of some of these CBSAs changed in our 2025 edition because of an update from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB)."

She noted that while SMU DataArts only publishes rankings for

the top 100, there are 948 CBSAs across the country, so a ranking of 233 is still within the top 25% nationally.

Sean Watterson, co-owner of Happy Dog in the Detroit-Shoreway neighborhood, head of the Cleveland Independent Venue Association, and key architect for the Greater Cleveland Music Census, agrees that Cleveland is near the top in some of the nonprofit categories but "near the bottom in the individual artist and arts-based industries."

"The numbers for arts and cultural firms, or for-profit businesses, are even worse," said Watterson. "We rank 37th among large communities and 243rd overall. The biggest room for improvement is helping individual and independent artists and art-based industries."

Artist Liz Maugans, faculty at Cleveland State University School of Art and Design and curator & director of YARDS Projects, said Cleveland's recent decline in national rankings for individual artist support reflects long-standing structural challenges and trust issues with Cuyahoga Arts and Culture and a lack of investment and priority by the City of Cleveland.

"CAC funding has always prioritized nonprofit institutions, with less than three percent of cigarette tax revenue reaching individual artists and arts-based businesses—a share that has remained largely unchanged," said Maugans.

The local art activist continued, "Artists working within nonprofits are experiencing wage stagnation and staff reductions in this volatile economic climate. The region lacks consistent data. As the population continues to decline, we need to communicate the value of creatives. We need to understand the resources available to them; coordination between arts leadership and investment to reverse this trend is desperately lacking."

COMMUNITY BOARD continued from page 2

or about to be shut off? The Home Energy Assistance Program's Winter Crisis Program, now administered by Step Forward, may be able to help! This program provides a one-time benefit per heating season to help eligible Cuyahoga County households restore or maintain heat and electric service during the winter months. Households at or below 175% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines (about \$52,500 for a family of four) may qualify if their service has been disconnected, they have received a disconnection notice, or they have 25% or less bulk fuel remaining in their tank. Assistance is available on a first-come, first-served basis and is designed to help households stay safe and warm throughout the winter season. Call our 24/7 hotline at 216-480-HEAP (4327) to schedule an appointment, or visit stepforwardtoday.org/winter-crisis-program to learn more. The program runs from November 1, 2025 to March 31, 2026.

VOLUNTEERING

CASA VOLUNTEERS NEEDED: CASA stands for Court Appointed Special Advocates. CASA volunteers are everyday citizens, from all walks of life,



PHOTO BY CHUCK HOVEN

Saturday January 10, 2026; Ain't Hurtin' Nobody: An Evening of the Songs of John Prine to benefit the Greater Cleveland Food Bank, Dunlap Corner Bar, 3258 W. 32nd Street: Musician Landen Kearns of Akron, Ohio plays a John Prine song while raising funds for the Greater Cleveland Food Bank.

FOOD BANK BENEFIT continued from page one

volunteer. Due to federal changes in work requirements to obtain eligibility for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, federal reductions in United States Department of Agricultural food distribution, and State of Ohio reductions in funding for local food banks, this upcoming year is expected to be an especially challenging one for the Greater Cleveland Food Bank. The Food Bank is located at 13815 Coit Road in Cleveland. The phone number is 216-738-2265.

who are trained and appointed to advocate for the best interests of children who are victims of abuse or neglect. CASA volunteers frequently become the most consistent adult presence in the child's life, due to the demanding caseloads of the other court-appointed professionals. Volunteers must be at least 21 years old, complete the screening process, and complete pre-service training. To apply to serve, visit www.cfadvocates.org or email us at info@cfadvocates.org.

CLEVELAND INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL is seeking volunteers to help put on the 50th edition of the festival, which will run from Thursday, April 9 to Saturday, April 18, primarily at Playhouse Square (1501 Euclid Ave.). A wide variety of opportunities and shift times are available, and volunteers typically receive two free vouchers (which can be exchanged to see any film at the festival) for each shift they work. For more information and to sign up, visit clevelandfilm.org/support/volunteer.

DOCENTS WANTED: The Cleveland Museum of Art is recruiting for the docent class of 2027! Docents are trained volunteers who engage visitors of all ages in conversations about art—both in the galleries and out in the community. Being a docent is a rewarding and meaningful commitment that combines

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WANTED

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love of learning, teaching, and storytelling. The application deadline is April 26. Visit clevelandart.org/volunteer to apply.

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PHOTO BY CHUCK HOVEN

Friday, January 9, 2026; Candlelight vigil in memory of Renee Good, Market Square Park, W. 25th and Lorain Avenue: Ohio State Senator Nickie Antonio (District 23) urged protesters to continue to “stand up to fascism.”

RENEE GOOD PROTESTS
continued from page 5

wanted “to send a message to the people of Minneapolis. We share your grief and anger. Cleveland stands with you.”

Griffin went on to say, “Donald Trump’s decision to arm thousands of unvetted, minimally trained recruits and unleash them on our cities made this kind of violence inevitable. The thuggery ICE regularly displays has no place in America. Anyone with a conscience should be outraged. Only those without a conscience would immediately – and dishonestly – blame the victim as the Trump administration has.”

On January 9th, the *Cleveland*

Urban News blog by Kathy Wray Coleman published comments by Ohio (District 13) Congresswoman Emilia Sykes criticizing “President Trump and Vice President JD Vance for their support of the ICE agent who murdered Renee Nicole Good.”

In the *Cleveland Urban News* interview, Sykes said, “The video of the shooting death of Renee Nicole Good is devastating to watch and raises questions about the use of deadly force. This event must be treated professionally and with a full investigation and complete transparency.”

In her January 22, 2026 online newsletter Congresswoman Shontel Brown (District 11) said,

“I voted no on legislation to fund the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency (ICE) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP).” Elaborating on the reasons for her no vote, Brown said, “I will not support another cent for agencies that continue to terrorize our communities, commit abuses, and escalate violence.” (unfortunately the bill passed the House on January 22 because all but one Republican voted for it.)

The national media has also weighed in on the Trump administration’s immediate claim of immunity for the ICE agent and its lashing out against Renee Good, calling her a “domestic terrorist.”

On January 9th in a *Democracy Now* story titled “What are you hiding?”, Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison says ICE killing of Renee Good must be investigated.”

The *Democracy Now* online story says, “Minnesota state investigators

say the Federal Bureau of Investigation is blocking them from investigating the ICE shooting of Renee Good. The federal government’s claims of immunity for the ICE officer – identified as Iraq War veteran Jonathan Ross – go against precedent, as does its refusal to cooperate with state authorities, says Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison, who is demanding a local and state-led investigation into Good’s homicide. ‘This is Third Reich stuff,’ adds Ellison, decrying the escalation in aggressive tactics employed by

“Donald Trump’s decision to arm thousands of unvetted, minimally trained recruits and unleash them on our cities made this kind of violence inevitable. The thuggery ICE regularly displays has no place in America. Anyone with a conscience should be outraged. Only those without a conscience would immediately – and dishonestly – blame the victim as the Trump administration has.”

-- Cleveland City Council President Blaine Griffin

federal immigration officers in Minneapolis and throughout the country. ‘This is an unprecedented attack on American institutions.’”

The violence of ICE agents caught

on many videos and reported widely in the news has turned public opinion against the agency. On January 18th, the online publication *Daily Kos* published an article by Andrew Mangen titled “‘Abolish ICE’ hits record-high support.”

The article says, “new data shows that, not only is the public increasingly open to eliminating ICE, but now more people want to burn it down than save it.”

The article by Mangen says, “46% of American support abolishing ICE, while 43% oppose it, according to the latest YouGov/Economist poll. An overwhelming 77% of Democrats support abolition, as does a plurality of independents 47%. Even 14% of Republicans want to melt ICE.”

Mangen’s article points out that just last summer the same polling organization reported that “only 27% of Americans supported abolishing ICE and replacing it with another agency.” The spike in the opposition to ICE occurred after the January 7th shooting of Renee Good. The poll takers found that 69% of Americans have viewed the video of Renee Good being shot and another 22% are familiar with the video but haven’t viewed it. Another poll by Quinnipac University found that “82% of registered voters have seen the video. And in both polls, around 50% say the killing was unjustified, while around 30% say it was justified – a roughly 20 percent gulf in public opinion.”

The article also notes that “just 31% of Americans believe ICE’s actions are making cities safer, according to a new Cable News Network/SQL Server Reporting Service poll. A majority (51%) say ICE is making cities less safe, while 18% say ICE is having little effect either way. Altogether, this suggests that nearly 7 in 10 Americans don’t see a benefit to ICE’s brutality.”

Heather Cox Richardson in her *Letters from an American* blog on January 21st, 2026 notes the latest ICE caused death in ICE detention Camp East Montana in El Paso, Texas. She says that the El Paso County Office of the Medical Examiner ruled the death of 55-year-old Cuban born Geraldo Lunas Campos was a homicide.

Richardson also noted the brutality of ICE and the inhumane conditions in its detention facilities have resulted in numerous deaths over the past year. She said, “Douglas MacMillan of the *Washington Post* reported that at least 30 people died in detention last year, the highest number in twenty years. Six people, including Lunas Campos and another detainee at Camp East Montana, died in the first two weeks of 2026.”

Editor’s Update: On January 24, Alex Pretti, an Intensive Care Unit nurse who worked for the Veterans Administration hospital in Minneapolis, was killed by masked federal agents in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Reporting on January 24th, following the murder of Alex Pretti, Heather Cox Richardson in her blog *Letters from an American* said, “Video from the scene shows Pretti directing traffic on a street out of an area with agents around, then trying to help another person get up after she had been pushed to the ground by the agents. The agents then surround Pretti and shoot pepper spray into his face, then pull him to the ground from behind and hit him as he appears to be trying to keep his head off the ground. An agent appears to take a gun out of Pretti’s waistband during the struggle, then turns and leaves with it. A shot then stops Pretti’s movements, appearing to kill him, before nine more shots ring out, apparently as agents continued to fire into his body.”

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