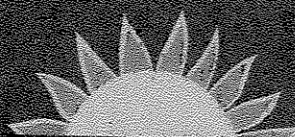


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THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2008

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INSIDE YOUR SUN

SCOOP DU JOUR



BACK AND BETTER THAN EVER

Page B3

BEST OF THE BLOTTER



Three men ran from a Shaker Heights apartment building parking lot Saturday after seeing police officers. Find out why in THE BLOTTER, A2.

SHOP TALK

SLIP-SLIDING AWAY



JIM OLEXA/SUN NEWS

Above, Ian Howe, 2, of Shaker Heights speeds down the slide at Riverside Park in Chagrin Falls while his brother Dylan, 4, watches. At right, Dylan, enjoys playing with his bright yellow ball at the playground. This week, children exchanged balls for sleds as the Heights got the season's first measurable snowfall.



Animal control goes regional

By Ed Wittenberg
ewittenberg@sunnews.com

UNIVERSITY HTS. — In an effort to save money, the city will take a regional approach to animal control.

On Monday, City Council approved an animal control services agreement with South Euclid. Richmond Heights has contracted with South Euclid for animal control since January.

Brian Miller, a full-time employee of South Euclid's service department, will serve as animal warden for all three cities.

"This three-city cooperative will provide enough volume to keep one animal warden busy with full-time work," Police Chief Gary Stehlik told council.

The four-year agreement is effective Jan. 1. Stehlik said the city will finish the year

with Greg Miller Animal Control Service, an Oakwood-based company.

"I certainly think this is a step in the right direction, communities working together," Councilman Steve Sims said.

Brian Miller is the brother of Greg Miller. He worked under Greg until they had a falling out some years ago, Stehlik said.

The city's Safety Committee recommended approval Oct. 27 when Stehlik and James Rohal, the city's deputy chief of police, discussed the idea.

"We have become increasingly dissatisfied with the cost of our ongoing contract with Greg Miller Animal Control Service," Stehlik said.

Stehlik noted the city pays Greg Miller a retainer of \$1,150 a month, which in

See ANIMAL, A8

New Song Church gets city's blessing

By Kristy Napier
knapier@sunnews.com

CLEVELAND HTS. — Cheers erupted from the crowded City Hall's Atrium Monday as City Council unanimously

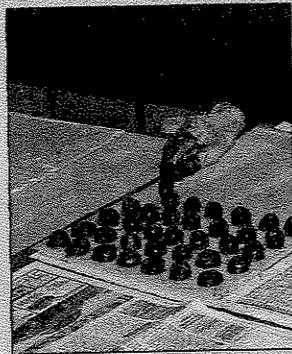
Church member Roberta Kitchen was overjoyed.

"I am ecstatic. This is an answer to prayer," she said. "We want to minister and reach out to the people of Cleveland Heights. We just

TAKE A RIDE TO PADDOCK SADDLERY

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SUN LIFE



CANDY CIRCLE MELTS AWAY AT 95 YEARS

Page B1



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Strapped charter school shuts doors

By Ed Wittenberg
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CLEVELAND HTS. — Financial problems have led to the shut-down of Greater Heights Academy, a charter school with locations here and in Cleveland.

Superintendent Joel Friedman said operation of was suspended Monday by its sponsor, the Ashe Culture Center of Cleveland.

He referred all questions to

Bess Vrettos, spokesperson for the culture center.

"There is no longer any revenue to operate the school," Vrettos said.

Grades K-5 were housed at the Taylor Road Synagogue building, 1970 S. Taylor Road, and grades 6-12 were in a building on Prospect Avenue in Cleveland.

Ashe closed the academy after the Ohio Department of

See SHUTS, A10

Latest regional woe: idling RTA buses

By Kellie Tayer
Correspondent

SHAKER HTS. — It wasn't the Medical Mart, the National City Bank crisis, Eaton Corporation's heading to Beachwood or the dead \$550 million Wolstein redevelopment that sparked passionate discussion at a community forum Sunday.

It was a question about the environment.

The forum, "NEO Politics: Gridlock, Compromise or Reform," took place at the First Unitarian Church of Cleve-

land.

It started when David Young of Shaker Heights asked how citizens can improve air quality. He said RTA buses idle for long periods outside his home, polluting the air with their exhaust.

"I call the EPA every day and their hands are tied. I've made a plea to the drivers to turn off their engines, but they won't do it," he said.

"Our public employees are so unresponsive. We're the fifth most polluted city in the country, yet when you go to

See RTA, A5

Time takes toll on Heights landmark

CHHS alums begin drive to restore school's 1926 clock tower

By Ed Wittenberg
ewittenberg@sunnews.com

UNIVERSITY HTS. — Time may be running out for the clock tower at Cleveland Heights High School, a long-time symbol of the school and the school district.

Eric Silverman, president of the Cleveland Heights High School Alumni Foundation, wants to do something about it.

The foundation seeks to raise \$250,000 to restore and renovate the clock tower. It's hoping the school district can kick in.

"We know this is above and beyond what the district is responsible for," Silverman told the school board recently. "There are millions of dollars of repair work to be done in the district.

Stephen Shergalis, the district's director of business services, has estimated the entire project's cost at \$400,000.

He said \$250,000 could be enough to restore the clock tower. He said the district might cover remaining expenses — to secure the building envelope, install scaffolding and keep the construction area safe.

The school board gave Silverman its blessing to start fund raising even though no official approval was needed.

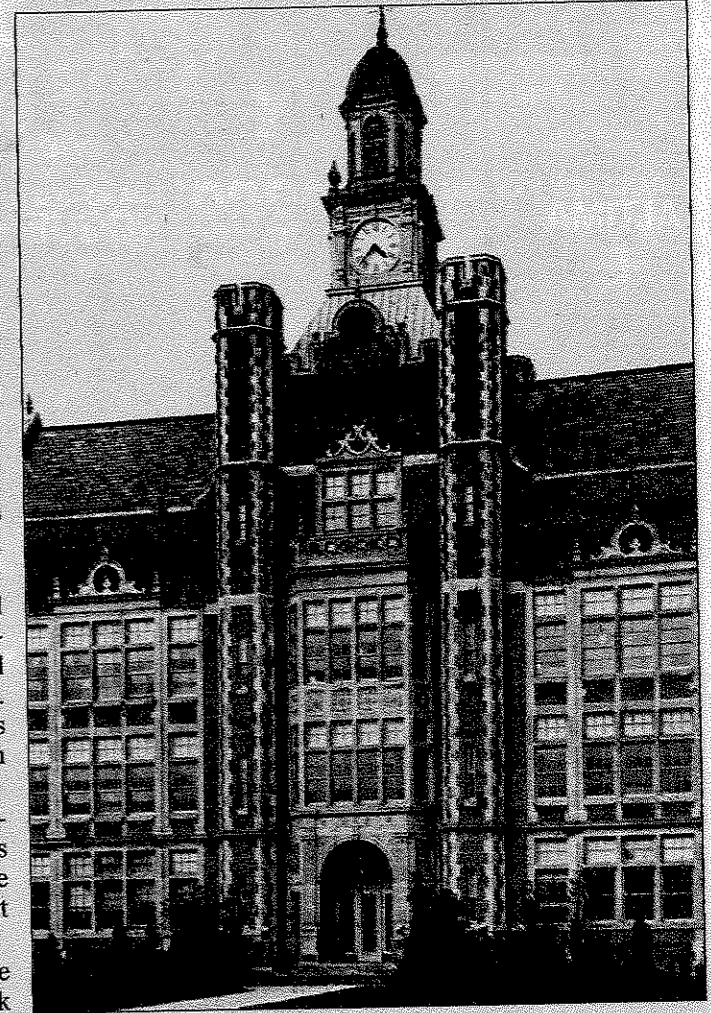
"It's very exciting that the

New Song and for the city, said the mayor.

"It has diversified what's happening here in Severance Town Center. They're great people, and many of them live right here in our community."

The church expects to hold its first service here on Dec. 7.

The Rev. Ronald C. Bradley, senior pastor of New Song See SONG, A4



CHHS ALUMNI FOUNDATION/SPECIAL TO SUN NEWS

The clock tower at Cleveland Heights High School, shown here during the 1930s, was built with the school in 1926. "You can see Lake Erie from up there," said Eric Silverman, president of the school's alumni foundation.

alumni foundation is taking on this worthwhile venture to preserve the district's historic landmark," Shergalis said.

Silverman, a 1987 Heights

High graduate, said it will be the largest fund-raiser to date for the foundation.

"This gives us a chance to test the waters," he said. "If

See TIME, A9

RTA

From A1

them, they just shrug.

"I was told they're allowed to let their engines idle for 20 minutes at each stop. That's hundreds of thousands of dollars going up in smoke. It's a waste of taxpayers' money," Young said.

No RTA officials were present to respond. Instead, sitting up front were Jeffrey Hastings, the chairman of the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections, and state Rep. Barbara Boyd, D-9, of Cleveland Heights. Moderator was Brent Larkin, editorial page director of *The Plain Dealer*.

Boyd was a last minute replacement for Cuyahoga County Commissioner Peter Lawson Jones, who was called unexpectedly out of town.

Larkin started by debunking two myths surrounding the recent Barack Obama presidential win. Myth #1: Obama won because he received the monolithic black vote.

In fact, Larkin said, "He got 7,000 fewer votes than John Kerry did in 2004, and he got more white votes than Kerry did in 2004."

Myth #2: wealthy voters favored McCain.

In fact, "52 percent of voters for Obama earn more than \$200,000 annually. McCain got only 46 percent of voters in that income bracket," Larkin said.

Hastings said he was surprised by the lower-than-expected turn-out on Election Day.

"Republicans didn't come out, and Democrats didn't come out because they thought it was locked up. The weather was perfect so the low-turnout was a surprise.

"But it was a fair, honest and transparent election," he said.

Boyd called the election of the nation's first African-American president "like a tidal wave...no...more like a tsunami went through our community. He is putting together a group of people like no other."

Boyd, an early supporter of Hillary Clinton, said that "as he approached Denver, I became a believer."

Boyd was a delegate to the Democratic National Conven-

tion in Denver, and she knew then that he was going to win. But that knowledge also brought forth a fear.

"Our biggest fear is, will he survive it?" Boyd said, referring to a possible assassination attempt.

She has decided not to go to Obama's inauguration in January because she fears that the millions of people there pose safety concerns for Obama.

She praised Obama as a listener and a communicator.

"I hope he follows the path

of Gov. Ted Strickland in which directors talk to each other, rather than everybody staying in their own corners and doing their own thing."

Hastings, asked about the future of the Republican Party, said, "Well, it was embarrassing how John McCain and Sarah Palin were giving these one-line platitudes at their public appearances.

"What we need is youth and energy. We need to regroup and get fresh ideas from our youth."

Regarding so-called "one-

party rule" in Cuyahoga County, Boyd was quick to say that she doesn't believe it's the cause of the alleged corruption that is under investigation.

"Every agency — sewer, housing, etc., — is a target of federal criminal investigation," she said.

"I think people become overconfident and get comfortable. Now it's time to make some people feel uncomfortable. I think good people made bad decisions," she said.

Hastings believes we get the government we deserve.

"Politics is the art of associations," he said.

He noted that when he was running for judge, a non-partisan position, dozens of people asked him about his party affiliation.

"It's all about public service and doing the right thing," he said.

"We need an informed electorate. So many people voted only for president and left the rest of the ballots untouched. We get what we deserve," he said.

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SHUTS

From A1

Education withheld its November payment to GHA due to concerns about its finances, Vrettos said.

"Looking at their finances, even if they had received payment (in November), they would have run into financial difficulties," said Scott Blake, a spokesman for the ODE.

The school received \$6.8 million in state funding in 2007-08, Blake said.

Red flags about the school's financial status were raised Friday when teachers and other staff members did not receive their paychecks.

Displaced students

GHA had a total of about 750 students from about 450 families at its two campuses, Vrettos said. She said school officials were trying to help them find new schools.

"We have contacted the other Ashe-sponsored (charter) schools to see if they offer open enrollment, and four of them said they do and would try to accommodate these children," she said.

Vrettos said the four schools are all in Cleveland.

About half of GHA's 88 em-

ployees were teachers, Vrettos said.

"We hope some of the schools with open enrollment will reach out and (hire) them," she said.

GHA will remain closed at least through the end of the academic year, Vrettos said.

Lawsuits a factor

Lawsuits contributed heavily to the school's financial problems.

In August, the academy was sued for nearly \$600,000 by First Student Inc., a Cincinnati-based bus company. The lawsuit is pending in federal court.

Another company, Community Bus Services of Youngstown, sued for \$831,128 in September. The court basically seized the school's assets, tying up state funding for October.

That led the ODE to withhold the November funding, which might have been seized as well, Blake said.

Transportation was a major expense for the school, and it got worse with the rising cost of fuel, Vrettos said.

"95 percent of all students were transported at the school's expense," she said.

This fall, for the first time, students at the Cleveland campus took public transportation at the school's cost, she said.

Vrettos noted Friedman brought in donations and contributed his own money to pay salaries and other bills in October.

Academic woes

GHA had academic deficiencies as well. It was ranked in academic emergency on the ODE's report card for a third straight year, having met none of the 29 standards in the past school year.

Michael Cicero, president of the Cleveland Heights-University Heights Board of Education, said that — combined with GHA's unstable financial position — was why the board took no action when Friedman offered to buy the vacant Milikin School building in January for GHA.

"It didn't make sense to me that an entity would want to buy a building when it had serious financial issues and could be closed by the state."

Friedman also expressed an interest in buying the vacant Coventry School building this summer, but no formal offer was ever made, Cicero said.

Cicero said the GHA had 14 students who live in the CH-UH district and would be eligible to attend its schools.

"The district would welcome any of those students and their families," he said.

Complaints

Katie Feldman, a staff attorney with the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland, said her organization filed three complaints against the school with the ODE's Office for Exceptional Children during the past year.

Feldman said it was discovered that GHA was providing minimal special education services last year and no services this school year.

One complaint last year, she said, was the school had no special education class-

rooms for elementary school students at the Cleveland Heights campus.

"The family was concerned because (the student) would be separated from his peers," Feldman said.

Melanie Shakarian, of the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland, said in an e-mail, "We have ongoing concerns about the ability of charter schools to provide appropriate special education services to students with disabilities, but Greater Heights' complete lack of services this school year has by far been the most egregious example."

The Legal Aid Society handles education law cases for people with low income.

Enrollment grew

This was the fourth year of

operation for GHA. According to the Web site, schooldigger.com, its enrollment grew from 438 students in 2005 to 1,041 in 2007.

The Web site also indicated 99 percent of the school's student population was African American.

Friedman, of Mayfield Heights, bought the Taylor Road Synagogue building in 2003 for \$1.5 million. He initially used it for Raintree Academy, a private school he had operated since 1975.

In 2005, he closed Raintree and opened GHA in the same location.

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