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Cuts with a Cop, Year 2

by Cynthia Sowden

New pencils, new books, new teachers. Some elementary and middle school students from Columbia Heights, Fridley and St. Anthony started the new school year with a new haircut.

For the second year in a row, the Columbia Heights Police Department sponsored “Cuts with a Cop” at Moler Barber School, 6554 University Ave, Fridley. This year the Heights officers were joined by officers from the Fridley Police Department. The event gave kids a chance to meet their local cops and get a free haircut before heading back to school.

Sgt. Justin Pletcher, CHPD, said 30 to 40 kids received new haircuts in 2018. This year, “We had 15 kids in the first hour!” Pletcher said the event is a “great way to interact with kids. We give them stickers and cookies and talk about school.”

Cuts with a Cop also gives Moler students a chance to practice haircutting as they work toward earning a barber’s license.



Ahmed, a second-grader at Wilshire Park Elementary, sat still for a student barber.

(Photo by Cynthia Sowden)

NKB to sell

by Margo Ashmore

Developers have sought the Northrup King Building (NKB) for some time, but its fate became more clear Friday, Sept. 13 with Artspace’s announcement that it will acquire the former seed company headquarters.

Senior Vice President of Properties for Artspace, Greg Handberg, told the Northeastester that their priority is preserving the existing artists space and expanding arts activities on the 1500 Jackson St. NE site, while having no specific plans for what is now about 235,000 square feet of undeveloped space in eight vacant structures. The developed area houses approximately 317,000 square feet of commercial space, working artist studios and galleries.

Artspace bought, built and operates multiple buildings in the Twin Cities and across the country where artists live and/or work, including Artspace Jackson Flats apartments and the Grain Belt buildings at 77 and 79 13th Ave. NE, that house studios

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Robinett and Stille face off in November

Robinett vows transparency

by Cynthia Sowden

Nancy Robinett began her campaign for mayor of St. Anthony Village early. For weeks now, she and a handful of volunteers have been knocking on doors of homeowners and apartment dwellers, six days a week (Fridays excluded) from 5:30-8 p.m. “I wanted to get to the entire village,” she said during a recent interview.

She said she decided to become involved in St. Anthony politics after the shooting of Philando Castile and the eviction of the former Lowry Grove tenants. “I felt I could really contribute to this town that I live in,” she said. Robinett lost her bid last year to replace Jan Jenson on the City Council by two votes. Now she’s running against long-term council member Randy Stille for the mayor’s seat in the November election. Current Mayor Jerry Faust is not running.

She describes herself as a “big picture” person: “I don’t have a small-picture agenda.” She is an attorney in private practice and feels her perspective could be helpful to the city.

“When I found out the Council was violating the open meeting law [by holding



Nancy Robinett
(Provided photo)

meetings outside the city], I notified the Minnesota Department of Administration, and [the council] stopped the practice. I realized that the things I talked about resonated with a lot of people, so I decided to run for mayor.”

One of her primary goals as mayor is to help the city become more transparent and accountable to its citizens. “The mayors of St. Paul and Minneapolis are wrestling publicly with their budget scenarios with the people and in the media,” she said. “They talk about why they

want fewer police officers or more police officers. Our town needs the public body to play their role more robustly. People think about their pocketbooks first. If we could really talk about the budget ... it just astounds me that there are no discussions.

“The city’s budget goes up every year and our taxes go up every year. We need to have more engaged discussions about police, fire and public works.” She said people are being “priced out” of their homes, and said she’s heard “whispers” of tear-down projects [tearing down older homes and replacing them with bigger,

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Stille sees opportunities

by Cynthia Sowden

Randy Stille, a 16-year veteran on the St. Anthony City Council, sees opportunities ahead for the city. He hopes to help those opportunities come to fruition if he’s elected mayor in November.

One of those opportunities is the re-development of the WalMart site. (The City Council approved the preliminary plan put forth by Doran at its Sept. 10 meeting.) “We’ve tried the big boxes [retail] twice,” Stille said. “The city does not own the WalMart site. Now our patience has paid off. We’re not going to strike out. It’s good to have developer interest in the site again. We have a chance to get it right.”

“Getting it right” is one of the challenges of affordable housing, Stille said. “St. Anthony is not going to solve the world’s problems, but we can be part of the solution. We have to take into account the capacity of our schools before we develop affordable housing. We don’t have that much land available for construction. We have just two sites.”

He cites some statistics: “People need to realize where we are: 64% of our housing is affordable at 80% AMI [Area Median Income]; 16% is deeply affordable to people



Randy Stille
(Provided photo)

who make 30% AMI. Deeply affordable housing is available to only 11% metrowide. We’re doing better than the region, on a percentage basis.”

As a senior vice president at Associated Bank, he’s often put together financing packages for developers. “When I look at proposals like Doran’s, it’s not intimidating to me,” he said. “I put together financing like that all the time.”

Stille said he wants St. Anthony to be “a place people want to move to. Sixteen years ago, I campaigned on code enforcement. Now I want to make it easier for people to improve their homes.”

Stille majored in agribusiness and he loves the outdoors. Early in his time on the Council, he worked with the St. Anthony School Board to lobby Hennepin County Commissioner Mark Stenglein for funds to light the city’s ballfields. “We were short on the budget at that time,” he recalled. “With Mark’s help, we were able to expand our use of that facility beyond daylight hours.”

He’s thrilled that St. Anthony residents have willingly taken on the challenges of environmental sustainability. “The City Council

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Minnesota's largest art complex to stay for arts

1 ◀ NORTHROP KING BUILDING

and businesses.

NKB manager Debbie Woodward sent letters notifying tenants. She told the Northeast that she had approached Artspace after it became clear that other developers might have said they were for the artists, but with Artspace "it is their mission" to (from Artspace's statement) create, foster and preserve affordable and sustainable space for artists and arts organizations. "It was a patient process," she said, "about a year and a half looking at this thing."

"For us, we'll be spending time with our tenants to make sure they're comfortable, extend leases, etc." She said she'd been receiving many "beautiful emails" with gratitude that the building would stay for the arts. NKB was hers to run for 23 years.

At the building, some are taking a "wait and see," with questions to be answered at two tenant-only meetings. Others are worried about rents eventually increasing; others are excited.

Loretta Bebeau said she makes, stores and sells a volume of work from a space that is not likely to be able to share with another artist. If she is displaced, "my career is done."

Rollie Reis-Mather, of Goldenflow and

Artactile Gallery, said Woodward "knew the artists so well, instinctively knew who should have what space. A new person isn't going to know that. But also, 'I'm looking forward to seeing Artspace take it to the next level, like putting in a coffee shop or restaurant would be great.'"

Woodward said the parties have been meeting weekly to share information about how the building runs. It's expected that the maintenance staff will stay on and be supplemented by Artspace's team.

She would be available for questions but not be on site, looking forward to "taking a little break and deep cleaning my house." The death of her father, building owner Jim Stanton - Shamrock Properties, and the need to settle his estate put any of her and her husband Paul Woodward's ideas about hiring people and making changes on hold.

Woodward said she looks forward to how the new owners piece it all together and make it work. She doesn't want to tie their hands by extracting promises. "They'll know what's right for their moment in time."

The purchase agreement for the



A popular Instameet Jan. 9, 2016 brought dozens of people into a Northrup King boiler room.

(Photo by Margo Ashmore)

Northrup King Building would not have advanced without a partnership with Intermedia Arts, which is providing \$1 million in grant funding in support of the acquisition. In a news release from Artspace, Intermedia Arts Board Co-chair Omar Akbar stated, "Intermedia Arts is honored to support Artspace in preserving and expanding affordable space for the broader Twin Cities

creative community. We believe this is a powerful way to preserve Intermedia Arts' vision, and invest in the future of emerging and underrepresented artists in Minneapolis for generations."

Intermedia Arts sold its South Minneapolis building, and a portion of the proceeds will go into the deal, which still has some details to work out but is expected to close by the end of 2019.

In the news release, Minneapolis Ward 1 Council Member Kevin Reich is quoted: "The Northrup King Building is a cornerstone of the Arts District; a foundational element of the District's history and its current activity. I applaud the next phase for this iconic building ... Artspace has been a longstanding partner in growing our Arts District, which gives me great confidence going forward."

To say that Woodward sounded "upbeat" on the phone would be an understatement. Handberg spoke glowingly, "Debbie and the family are so committed to the arts. The building could have been sold ten times faster and for more money. It is humbling to be able to do this here, and it's important to do it nationally."

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