

Heights Library policy changes ahead

by Cynthia Sowden

The Feb. 24 meeting of the Columbia Heights City Council was cruising to conclusion. The consent agenda items had passed, and the members had reported their civic activities for the past two weeks. Then Theresa Strike, a Heights resident and vice chair of the DFL District 41B's communications committee, stepped up to the microphone during the public comment period.

Why, she wanted to know, had the DFL been kicked out of the library?

"The library staff told us they had been instructed to not let their space be used for political meetings," she said. "This meeting [on Feb. 22] had been previously set up, abruptly canceled and [was] reinstated. I earned my master's degree in library science at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. One of the things we learned is the importance of libraries not limiting viewpoints ... Libraries offer services to every group in the community, regardless of affiliations of beliefs. Professional ethics [demand it], and in many cases, it's a legal duty."

City Manager Kelli Bourgeois noted that the meeting had been reinstated because the library had not given the DFLers the required two-week notice of cancellation.

District 41 Chair Jonathan Rehlander chimed in. "Libraries are not considered to be endorsing of anything," he said. "They're not considered to be endorsing any of the groups that use the library any more than they would be considered endorsing the books on the shelves."

Resident John Bristow said, "This is really peculiar. I'm a lifelong DFLer and resident. We are the only political organization that uses the library and this policy discriminates against this particular group. I suggest you override this policy tonight."

City Attorney James Hoeft disagreed. "The policy is already in place. It's valid, legal and conforms to all First Amendment rights and nondiscrimination rights. The Council will revisit the policy."

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Julio with owner Claudia Fuentes went in for a quick mani/pedi from volunteer animal shelter workers. Read more on Page 13.

(Photo by Mark Peterson)

Reports from the ash borer battlefields

by Mark Peterson

Emerald ash borers may be coming to a tree near you.

Since the discovery of an emerald ash borer infestation near Detroit, Michigan, in 2002, the assault on ash forests has become an epidemic. Michigan alone has lost more than 30 million ash trees, and 35 states and five Canadian provinces have been affected. As the blight mounts, the financial, aesthetic and ecological consequences will be enormous.

But an article in a December edition of the St. Paul Pioneer Press reported a curious phenomenon: the rate of ash loss seems to be slowing. While the 30-million-tree loss in Michigan took place in ten years, a similar ten-year period in Minnesota (beginning in 2009) resulted in the loss of less than a third as many trees.

The emerald ash borer (EAB) is a metallic green insect with an adult life of only a few weeks. It originated in Asia and probably traveled here in shipments of wood. The beetles chew the ash leaves but do little other damage. It's their larvae that wreak havoc on the host trees. After the larvae hatch from their eggs in mid-sum-



Forestry workers were active this past week in Minneapolis felling ash trees. (Photo by Mark Peterson)

mer, they chew through the tree's outer bark to reach an inner layer of tissue called phloem, which functions as a bloodstream of sorts to transport nutrients from the leaves to the roots. As they grow, the larvae interrupt the flow of water from the roots to the sapwood. Infected ash have a 100% mortality rate.

Why should the march of death by EAB slow, and why now? Local scientists think they have an explanation.

The first infestations in Michi-

gan came as a surprise (although later testing suggests the problem began in the mid-1990s). By the time of its discovery, the EAB had already infected a large rural area, where detection is difficult. Scientists and arborists were scrambling to create treatments and identify practices to slow the problem. Minnesota's advantage was time and experience. When EAB crossed the Mississippi River, scientists knew a lot more about how the infestation worked and could plan accordingly. Plus,

it's just colder here, and no insects like cold.

Treating the trees is fairly simple: systemic insecticides are applied around the base of the tree (trial and error have eliminated some treatments that harmed nearby flowering pollinator plants). But identifying stricken trees in the disease's early, treatable stages is difficult. Rob Venette, an entomologist and director of the Minnesota Invasive Terrestrial Plants and Pests Center, said that sighting woodpeckers helps, because the birds find the EAB larvae to be a delicacy. He noted, "Woodpeckers are much better detectors than humans."

So are the EABs in retreat? Venette said he didn't want to be pessimistic about the future. "We have so many beautiful mature ash trees on the landscape, and those mature trees provide a lot of value to the community. They provide habitat for wildlife, cooling and shade and are really important for the elimination of wastewater. And currently, a lot of trees are being treated, and an unknown number, through sheer dumb luck, never get infected."

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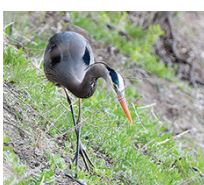
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