

East Village


Magazine

August 2024



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Commentary
This year's Supreme Court rulings: Presidential immunity, Chevron and beyond

By Paul Rozycki

After the assassination attempt on former president Donald Trump, the Republican National Convention, and the turmoil over President Biden remaining on the Democratic ticket and subsequently leaving the race, it's been difficult to focus on any other political topic but the presidential election this summer.

But as the Supreme Court entered recess in late June, it left us with a legacy of major rulings that may be just as significant as those recent events.

The presidential immunity ruling (Trump v. United States)

The case that captured most public attention this summer saw the Court grant the president immunity from criminal prosecution while performing the office's "official duties." That immunity does not extend to the president's "unofficial duties," however, and where the line is drawn between official and unofficial duties will be a key point for courts to resolve in the years to come.

By any measure, the ruling expands the powers of the president, and there is serious debate about whether that expansion could lead to a dictatorship. The ruling also casts doubt on several criminal charges facing former President Trump in his attempt to overturn the 2020 election.

The full implications of the immunity case have yet to be seen

and deserve a separate column, but other cases that received less attention may be just as important in the years to come.

The Chevron case (Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo; Relentless v. Department of Commerce)

This case answers one basic question: when a law that grants power to a governmental agency is vague or unclear, who should decide what it means—the agency with the expertise or the courts? The Court's new ruling answers: the courts.

In what may be as significant as the presidential immunity case, the Supreme Court threw out what is known as the Chevron doctrine, which said that federal courts would defer to the expertise of federal agencies when interpreting unclear laws. It had been a major principle of American law since 1984 when *Chevron U.S.A., Inc. v. Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc.* was decided.

Legal experts say the case was one of the most important in administrative law, having been cited more than 18,000 times in the last 40 years.

While the ruling seems like a piece of "inside baseball," of interest only to legal professionals, it has the potential to overturn a great number of critical policy decisions and delay others with long court battles.

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Cover: A summer's day on Avon Street. (Photo by Edwin D. Custer)



Photo of the Month: Pedestrians stroll down Saginaw Street in downtown Flint. (Photo by Edwin D. Custer)

Education Beat Proposed transparency legislation targets Michigan's charter schools

By Harold C. Ford

Expanding options

New legislation proposed in the Michigan Senate aims for greater transparency in public charter schools' operations and financial reporting.

The package of bills comes at a time when such schools' enrollment is high and options for the state's school-age students are vast, but the legislation's sponsor, Senator Dayna Polehanki (D- Livonia) says she's "optimistic."

Modern public-school systems, including Flint Community Schools (FCS), now compete with multiple school enrollment options that were not available a few decades ago.

For most of the 20th century, the choice for most students and their families was binary: the local public school system or parochial schools that operated under the aegis of the

Roman Catholic Church.

Today, options for Michigan's kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) students have grown to include over 3,500 local public schools; possible enrollment in public schools outside the student's home district via the state's Schools of Choice program; 900 private schools, a majority of which (74 percent) are affiliated with a variety of faith traditions;

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Education Beat ...

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virtual/online courses; homeschooling; and charter schools – the focus of recently proposed transparency legislation.

Choosing charters

In the 2023-24 school year, charter school enrollment in Michigan rose for the 17th time in the last 18 years, according to a February Bridge Magazine report.

"People are leaving traditional public schools and a lot of them are choosing charter schools," said Tara Kilbride, interim associate director of Michigan State University's Education Policy Innovation Collaborative, in the same report.

Assessments of student performance in charters compared to public schools have been mixed. However, a June 2023 article in Education Week reported that charter school students "now show greater academic gains than their peers in traditional public schools ... From 2014 to 2019, charter school students gained, on average, the equivalent of 16 days learning in reading and six days in math over their peers in traditional public schools."

In Genesee County during the 2023-24 school year, 14 public charters were listed by the Michigan Department of Education. The combined enrollment of those charters – 6,442 students – made it the second largest school population in the county, trailing only Grand Blanc, Mich.'s public school system.

Last school year, those charter students represented \$61,894,736 in state aid that might have funded the county's 21 public school systems otherwise, as EVM previously reported.

Overall in the 2023-2024 school year, about 11 percent – 152,000 of Michigan's approximate 1.4 million K-12 students – attended charter schools.

Assuming the state aid formula will remain the same, about \$1.5 billion in state aid will be sent to charters from Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer's proposed \$20.6 billion school aid budget for 2024-25.

Charters' history & structure

Bluff View Montessori School in Winona, Minn. emerged as the nation's first charter school in 1991. The charter school movement slowly grew from there, making its way to Michigan in 1994 and later boosted by the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act from the George W. Bush administration.



Michigan State Senator Dayna Polehanki

(Photo courtesy Michigan Senate Democrats)

According to a June 2021 academic report in Hoover Digest, "forty-four states — plus the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Guam — have public charter school laws on their statute books, laws that have led to more than 7,500 schools employing 200,000-plus teachers and serving 3.3 million students."

During the 2023-24 school year, there were 363 charter schools in Michigan.

As for their structure, Michigan's charter schools have always been a sort of public-private hybrid.

Their existence in the state requires an authorizing institution, often a public university, that provides some oversight. Additional governance may be provided by non-profit boards and management companies that are often for-profit organizations.

In a 2023 opinion piece, former president of the State Board of Education Cassandra Ulbrich noted that more than 80 percent of charters in Michigan are managed by for-profit companies – companies which can handle all of the functions at the school or perform individual functions such as payroll, hiring, and budgeting.

Like public schools in Michigan, public charters receive state funding, are required to administer standardized tests required by the state, and must be open to all students in terms of enrollment. They are also required to comply with public records laws, and their affiliation with religious institutions is forbidden, as is religious instruction.

Promoted by Republicans, a transparency target for Democrats

During decades of dominance in Michigan's state government, Republican Party officials fostered a charter system, in part, to promote competition in the state's education marketplace.

But with so much state funding now going toward that system, Democrats are seeking greater oversight of charter schools.

"We do love our charter school kids, the parents, the teachers, the support staff, the principals," Senator Polehanki told East Village Magazine in early July 2024. "However, when over 80 percent of charter schools in Michigan are run by companies that use our taxpayer dollars to turn a profit, because that's what companies do, it's important that they're not allowed to continue to do so in secret."

That's why Polehanki intro-

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Education Beat ...

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duced a legislative package in June – Michigan Senate Bills 943 to 947. The bills would introduce the following provisions:

- Charters would be subject to requirements of the Open Meetings Act and the Freedom of Information Act;
- Detailed financial reports by educational management companies (EMCs) would become mandatory;
- Contracts with EMCs would require financial audit reports;
- The lease or purchase of buildings from an EMC would be prohibited;
- A charter school board that leases or purchases a building must demonstrate fair market value;
- Charter schools and EMCs would be required to follow a bidding process similar to that of traditional

public-school districts;

• A representative of the charter school authorizer would be required to attend two school board meetings each school year and present an overview of the work they're doing to provide oversight for the charter school.

Other requirements that may emerge from the Michigan House, Polehanki explained, include a requirement that charter schools must post their high and low average teacher salary range on their websites, and any signage or marketing materials must indicate who a school's authorizer is.

"My bill package doesn't do away with charter schools," Polehanki added. "What it does do is bring charter schools closer to the transparency required of traditional public schools."

The move toward greater transparency requirements for charters has

already garnered the support of other public officials, including Michael Rice, Michigan's superintendent of instruction.

"Parents should be able to choose whether they want their children educated in traditional public schools, charter schools, private schools, or parochial schools, or at home," Rice said. "However, charter schools, like traditional public schools, are publicly funded and should operate in an open and transparent fashion with the involvement of their local communities."

While it's too soon to tell if Polehanki's transparency legislation will pass, the Flushing High School graduate told EVM she's "optimistic."

The bill package is currently being considered by the Senate Education Committee, over which Polehanki presides. ●

Commentary ...

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In her dissent, Justice Elena Kagan, along with Justices Sonia Sotomayor and Ketanji Brown Jackson, wrote that the ruling was an expansion of judicial power. She said by overruling Chevron, the court had, in "one fell swoop," given "itself exclusive power over every open issue — no matter how expertise-driven or policy-laden — involving the meaning of regulatory law."

Kagan added that the ruling "will cause a massive shock to the legal system."

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is one of the groups that could be affected by the ruling.

As it stands, the EPA could see many of its rules on air pollution, toxic chemicals, global warming, and water pollution being challenged in court, undoing years of progress in those areas.

Yet the Court's ruling goes far beyond the environmental arena. It is likely to have a similar impact on regulations that deal with health care, consumer safety, nuclear energy, guns, employment policy, and government benefit programs.

In a future epidemic, would a government agency be able to apply regulations over vaccines or masks, to issue recalls over auto safety issues, or be able to forgive student loans? Right now, all of those answers are unclear.

So far, the Court's decision has been supported by a number of conservative groups, such as the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute. Those groups and

past Trump administration officials see the ruling as a way to combat what they view as "deep state" administrative policies that they've long opposed. Like many recent Supreme Court rulings the vote was 6-3, with the six conservative justices in the majority.

In his majority opinion, Chief Justice John Roberts said federal judges "must exercise their independent judgment in deciding whether an agency has acted within its statutory authority."

Justice Neil Gorsuch concurred, adding, "The Court places a tombstone on Chevron no one can miss." (In an ironic twist, it was Gorsuch's mother, former EPA Administrator Anne Gorsuch, who helped shape the policy that the Supreme Court upheld in 1984.)

Under the ruling, those who object to a federal administrative mandate would be able to take

their case to a court in the hope that a politically-appointed judge would overturn the action. In essence, overturning the Chevron rule opens the door to litigation that could

delay or prevent the application of administrative rules and could tie up the court with endless years of litigation.

Like the court decision on presidential immunity, it may take some time to assess the full impact of this case, but its potential is significant. It's possible that Congress may attempt to write more specific laws and guidelines for government agencies or that attorneys who support or oppose particular rules will attempt to seek out sympathetic

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Unclassified Ads

Apartment for Lease

Two-bedroom second floor apartment on cul-de-sac Avon St. near Kearsley St. Features appliances, dining set, laundry, off street fenced parking, large back yard, garden plot. On site management. \$850 a month plus electricity. Heat and water included. No pets. References and credit check requested. E-mail: ecuster@sbcglobal.net or write: Apartment Box 1, 720 E. Second St., Flint 48503.

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Three-bedroom two story apartment. Features hardwood floors, appliances, 1 1/2 baths, laundry, garden plot, off street fenced parking. In the center of it all on cul-de-sac Avon near Kearsley St. Walk three blocks or less to UM-F, MCC, Cultural Center, parks, Downtown. References and credit check requested. On site management. \$895 per month plus all utilities. No pets. E-mail: ecuster@sbcglobal.net or write: Apartment Box 9, 720 E. Second St., Flint MI 48503.

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The U.S. Supreme Court
(Photo by Fine Photographics on Unsplash)

THIS MONTH IN THE VILLAGE

A selection of events available to our readers is highlighted — beginning after our publication date of August 1. It's a sampling of opportunities in the city. To submit events for our September issue, email info about your event to pisenber@gmail.com by August 20.

Tunes at Noon
Now through Aug. 16, 11:45 a.m. to 1:15 p.m.
There's still time to bring your lunch to the park and enjoy 90 minutes of free music featuring jazz, blues, gospel and more by Michigan musicians.

Flint Artwalk
Fri., Aug. 9, 6-8:30 p.m.
Walk around in downtown Flint and visit the merchants, galleries restaurants and St. Paul's Lutheran Church who will be displaying art by local artists. There is always music and open houses offering refreshments. This monthly event is organized by the Greater Flint Arts Council the second Friday of every month.
Free
For more info visit greaterflintartscouncil.org or call 810-238-2787.

Sproutside Summer Party
Aug. 9, 5:30-8:30 p.m.
This annual adult event in the FCM's Sproutside Gardens is a summer party you don't want to miss! Inspired by the whimsical exhibit Enchanted Wonderland, the event will feature a signature drink, food, and an auction with 35+ baskets themed for families or connoisseurs of various hobbies!
Price: \$75 per person
Flint Children's Museum
1602 W. University Ave., Flint
For more info visit flintchildrensmuseum.org or call 810-767-5437.

Bacchanalia Block Party
Sunday Aug. 11 from noon to 4 p.m.
Queens' Provisions in Carriage Town is celebrating its one year anniversary by closing down Second Avenue between Lyon Street and Garland Street for a "Bacchanalia Block Party." The event will feature locally-owned food trucks, a DJ, games, and more.

2024 Coloring Party
Aug. 13, 5-8 p.m.
Flint Handmade sponsors coloring parties which occur monthly on the 2nd Tues. of each month each with a different theme. The August theme is Pet City with Adopt-A-Pet.
Free
Tenacity Brewing
119 N. Grand Traverse St., Flint
For more info visit flintchildrensmuseum.org or call 810-767-5437.

"Scream"
Aug. 15, 7 p.m.
This R rated movie is a spoof of '80s slasher films.
Tickets: Adults \$7, Children (12 and under) \$2
Genesee County residents get 50% off
The Capitol Theatre
140 E. Second St., Flint
For more info visit thefim.org/capitol-theatre or call 810-237-7333.

Haunted Hotels of Michigan Book Release Party
Aug. 16, 5-8 p.m.
This book by Roxanne Rhoads will be celebrated with a presentation, author Q & A, a book signing and light refreshments.
Totem Books
620 W. Court St., Flint
For more info visit totembooksflint.com or call 810-407-6402.

Michigan Renaissance Festival
Saturdays and Sundays from Aug. 17 to Sept. 29.
"The 16th Century European Village" of Hollygrove comes alive with 17 stages of entertainment including musicians, magicians, jugglers and jousting plus over 100 artisans showcasing and selling their wares. The festival takes place in Holly, Mich. and tickets start at around \$14.
More info at www.michrenfest.com.

Genesee County Fair
Aug. 20-25
This annual, family fun event featuring carnival rides, live stock, crafts, games and more including daily Grand Stand events.
6130 E. Mt. Morris Rd., Mt. Morris
Call 810-687-0953 or visit gcf.org.

Crim Festival of Races
Saturday, Aug. 24 | First Race at 6:45 am
The Crim Fitness Foundation's annual event will feature a 10 mile, 5 mile, 5K and 1 mile race throughout the morning, along with a "Teddy Bear Trot" for youngsters at 12 p.m. Most races start in downtown Flint at the intersection of Kearsley and Saginaw. For more information visit crim.org/races/hap-crim-festival-of-races/.



Ed Custer's East Village Magazine logo is reimaged for each issue by Patsy Isenberg.

Commentary ...

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judges who will rule in their favor. It's also possible that government agencies will become more hesitant to issue new rules and regulations for fear of legal battles.

Bump stock ban overturned (Garland v. Cargill)

Two weeks before the Chevron ruling, the Supreme Court issued a decision limiting the power of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF).

The Court ruled that bump stocks, attachments that serve to convert a semi-automatic weapon into a machine gun, are permitted, overturning a Trump administration ban on bump stocks that went into effect after a mass shooting in Las Vegas in 2017.

In a related case, the court upheld a federal law which bars people with domestic violence restraining orders from owning guns. (Rahimi v. United States)

Homeless camping banned in city parks (City of Grants Pass, Ore. v. Gloria Johnson)

In another 6-3 ruling, the Supreme Court determined that local governments have the power to prohibit people experiencing homelessness from camping in public spaces and that such laws are not a violation of the cruel and unusual punishment prohibition in the Constitution.

Abortion pills remain available (Food and Drug Administration v. Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine)

Following the Court's controversial 2022 decision in Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization which overturned the 1973 Roe v. Wade case that guaranteed the right to abortion, the issue of abortion has been a critical one for the court and campaigns in this year's election.

In this case, the Court ruled that Federal Drug Administration guidelines for distributing a commonly used abortion pill, mifepristone, could stand, and the drug could be available by mail or telemedicine. The court ruled unanimously that the plaintiffs did not have legal standing, though a dozen states do have total or near-total bans on abortion and future challenges are likely.

In a related case, the Supreme Court also ruled that emergency abortions to stabilize patients must be allowed in Idaho hospitals that receive federal funds, even though Idaho state law bans all abortions. (Moyle v. United States)

A review of just a few of this year's key Supreme Court cases reminds us of the importance of this year's presidential election and the court appointments that follow. Those appointments have an impact far beyond the years a president is in the White House. ●

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Realism
Holly Richardson
Piano

September 13 6-8:30
Janice Harden
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Larry MacDonald
Piano
and Nancy Dahle
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thefim.org/indiestars

FIM Capitol Theatre

Gaming the System: Flint native captures the reality of the Sit-Down Strike in a new board game that mirrors today's struggles

By Gordon Young

Flint isn't exactly associated with fun and games. So it's fitting that a new board game centered on Vehicle City tackles a seminal event in its history that was defined by violence, corporate greed, and worker revolt.

Striking Flint is the creation of Flint native John du Bois and immerses players in the drama of the 1936-1937 Sit-Down Strike, a confrontation that established the United Auto Workers union as a force that would reshape American life.

"We're still fighting this idea that unions are just trying to get more money out of their companies for less work," du Bois said. "The big message I would like people to get out of Striking Flint is that workers put themselves at great financial and physical harm. They really had to fight tooth and nail to get all these things we take for granted now."

To state the obvious, this is not Candy Land. Board games for intense hobbyists like du Bois are multilayered and often reference historic events. They require more dedication than a quick game of

Clue, and the instructions won't fit on the back of the box.

Striking Flint is a cooperative game, meaning players are all on the same side, working together against a common adversary — the General Motors Corporation (GM).

A deck of event cards based on pivotal moments in the strike drives the action. Players control various worker committees that have their own advantages and disadvantages in the battle against GM. But management has resources of its own — pliant police and city officials, vast financial resources, hired thugs, and a sympathetic press.

publisher's game description reads.

As such, Striking Flint probably won't appeal to anti-union, pro-management types. (Monopoly would be a better choice for anyone who would happily cross a picket line.)

The game grew out of du Bois' determination to honor his local roots. He was only two when his family moved to Flint in 1984 after his father, an electrical engineer, took a job at AC-Delco. They lived in Mott Park near the municipal golf course.

"One of my father's great frustrations is that we moved within two blocks of a golf course, and I hated golf," du Bois joked.

He didn't play many board games while growing up. As a student at Powers Catholic High School, he was more interested in choir and the school's annual musical theater productions.

But after graduation in 2000, he discovered Dungeons and Dragons as a student at Eastern Michigan University.

More specifically, du Bois gravitated to a variation called

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Striking Flint ... (Continued from Page 10)

Living Greyhawk that explored a specific campaign fantasy world. He was soon writing and editing for the campaign creators.

"And then I got married to someone who didn't want to play Dungeons and Dragons," he said. "We started playing board games instead."

Du Bois began a career as a speech pathologist and settled in Troy, Mich. with his wife and two children. In his spare time, he channeled his energies into creating his own board game.

The first result was Avignon: A Clash of Popes, set in 1378 when rival popes vied for control of the Catholic church. It's the sort of game you might expect from a Catholic school kid with a love of history.

"Avignon is very fast and quite simple, yet there's some room for strategy," according to a review in Games Magazine. "With a cunning move a game can be finished in minutes, but that's part of the appeal."

When du Bois started thinking about his next project in 2015, there was an ongoing discussion across the country and in the gaming world about diversity. Most games were dreamed up by white men, and du Bois contemplated what his responsibilities were as a creator.

"Could I justify pitching games to become yet another white man making board games?" he wrote in a designer diary on Board Game Geek, a popular online forum. "What could I contribute to games that nobody else, or very few people, in the industry can contribute?"

He chose to focus on the local history of the place where he grew up, the place that shaped him, and the Sit-Down Strike had all the drama and significance he needed.

As du Bois refined his idea, he

created various prototypes.

In an early version, he used LEGO figurines as stand-ins for various pro-union strikers. Thor was a "brawler" and Abraham Lincoln was a "rabblrouser," to name a couple. The various corporate agents who opposed them got a less flattering moniker — "scabs."

He submitted an early version of Striking Flint to a gaming contest, and the feedback was positive but called for more details related to specific events rather than broad themes. Du Bois intensified his research on the strike, reading books by Sidney Fine, Ted McClelland and others; listening to oral histories of sit-downers; and reviewing contemporaneous press accounts. He spent hours poring over microfiche in the Thompson Library at UM-Flint for details that would make the game more realistic.

While fine-tuning Striking Flint, du Bois worked simultaneously on another idea that he developed after suffering a severe concussion in a 2015 car accident: a solitary game related to his rehabilitation process called Heading Forward.

Instead of a fantasy world, the game is decidedly realistic.

"To win, you must relearn and develop skills, achieving goals in at least three different areas in the time you've been allotted by your insurance company," according to the publisher's description of the game, which came out in 2022. "Fail to do so, and they will discontinue payment, resulting in your loss."

When he resumed work on Striking Flint, du Bois realized that the goal of the strikers was really

to just hold out. It was all about survival, and the game needed to reflect that premise.

"The UAW won the Flint strike simply by not losing for long enough," he wrote in his designer diary. "Once GM realized they were losing more money with these factories shut down than it would cost to work with the union, they came to the negotiating table. I needed to do the same thing; to win, the players just needed to last until a certain period of time was over."

As he put the final touches on Striking Flint, which premiered this year, he couldn't help noticing connections to conflicts happening around him as graduate assistants went on strike at the University of Michigan and students protesting the war in Gaza were being forcibly removed by police at some colleges.

"I literally can't stop seeing parallels to what was experienced in Flint in 1937 and what is happening today," he wrote. "I do hope that I've created enough verisimilitude that people buying and playing it notice the fights they're simulating on their tables aren't just an artifact of history — they have an appearance of truth and accuracy that has echoes in events today throughout the country and the world." ●

Gordon Young is a journalist who grew up in Flint's Civic Park neighborhood and attended St. Mary's grade school. He is the author of "Teardown: Memoir of a Vanishing City," and his work has appeared in The New York Times, Slate, Politico and numerous other publications.



Striking Flint is a board game about the UAW sit-down strike of December 1936 - February 1937.

(Photo courtesy John du Bois)

"You'll need to work together to weather the forces arrayed against you — fending off attempts at eviction, the effects of exhaustion, and the presence of strikebreakers — while occupying factories in the plant complex," the



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Village Life

A feast of inspiration

By Kate Stockrahm

There are certain things that can only happen in shared spaces of apartment complexes — some good, some less good.

The less good things include a mess left behind when someone's trash bag breaks in the stairwell, the smells of uncertain origin as you walk down the hallway to your unit, or when the elevator is out (again).

But the good things have always outweighed the bad for me.

In shared spaces, like the yard near my complex's parking structure, neighbors coordinate impromptu potlucks on Saturday afternoons. When 50 folks live in the same place, there's always someone to text when you realize (only after you've already made your meatloaf mixture) that you actually threw out that baking tin two years ago. And, at least here in my building, we have an area that I've lovingly dubbed our "Table of Requirement."

The Table of Requirement sits, unassuming, in the corner of our basement laundry room, and I've never seen it host the same items twice.

It's not a dumping ground of tenants' unwanted stuff so much as a space curated with deeply-loved but no longer needed treasures from the lives lived in the apartments above.

At various times over my three years in this building, the table has played host to crockpots, spare furniture, artwork, and quilts. There have also been whole cutlery sets, jewelry pieces, board games, cleaning supplies, and books stacked high atop it or spilling onto the floor.

I'm sure our property manager hates the Table of Requirement, which can certainly look like a big mess to outsiders. But to me, like the Harry Potter series for which I've named it, it's magical.

One time, for example, I just couldn't find a vase that was the right height for my birthday flowers, but the table downstairs had three options ready.



The "Table of Requirement" at East Village Magazine editor Kate Stockrahm's apartment building.

(Photo by Kate Stockrahm)

Another time, a friend visiting from London told me we'd been invited to a jungle-themed surprise party the evening he arrived, and we needed to find something to wear ASAP. Wouldn't you know it, a neighbor had left a dozen animal-print scarves on the table that very morning, and we got to the party that night with cheetah, snake, and zebra-striped items for 10 other attendees to wear, too.

While these moments brought me unexpected delight, I know the table may not always provide for me like its namesake "Room of Requirement" from a fictional wizarding

world — a room which always changes into whatever the entrant needs it to be at the time.

Here in reality, our table is sometimes nearly empty, whether cleared by our frustrated landlord or a new tenant who needed that blender and dishware from the day before.

Such was the case this afternoon when I went downstairs in the hope of inspiration for this very column.

To my dismay the table held only a smattering of items: two gray cushions, a mop with no mop pad, a chair, a sweater, and a framed picture. Perhaps my luck at the Table of Requirement had run out.

But then, I saw a booklet of daily prayers tucked beneath one of the cushions.

I opened it, curious what God might have for me if the table was lacking, and landed on an entry from July 23. The quoted passage was Luke 15:23 — "Let's have a feast and celebrate."

Whether that message was from God or the strange, shared table in the basement of my apartment building, it reminded me to celebrate what was right in front of me: a feast of inspiration.

I walked outside to the yard by the parking structure and said hi to my neighbors sitting with their dogs in the sun. Our elevator was working, but I took the stairs back up to my apartment and didn't encounter any trash or odd smells along the way.

And now, sitting here and reflecting on the magic of shared spaces, I know I got just what I required from my trip downstairs. ●