

# East Village Magazine

September 2024

Photograph By

*Edwin O. Carter*





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## Commentary

# Project 2025: A possible glimpse into a second Trump administration

By Paul Rozycki

**W**ant to know what a second Trump administration might look like? An overview of “Project 2025” might give you a good idea.

The 900-page plan, fully titled “Mandate for Leadership, The Conservative Promise, Project 2025,” would dramatically change the federal government and shift it to the right.

It was put together by nearly 200 Trump officials and supporters in conjunction with the right-leaning Heritage Foundation as the former president prepared to run in 2024.

At a 2022 Heritage Foundation dinner, Trump endorsed the organization and its goals, saying it was “going to lay the groundwork and detail plans for exactly what our movement will do ... when the American people give us a colossal mandate.”

And yes, I know Trump has said he doesn’t know anything about Project 2025 and a few of its leaders have stepped aside during his fall campaign. (For those who buy Trump’s denial, I know a Nigerian prince who would be willing to sell you the Brooklyn Bridge.)

But, this marks the 9th edition of the Heritage Foundation’s “Mandate for Leadership” series which began in 1981 with the Reagan administration, which itself claimed to have implemented 60 percent of the Heritage Foundation recommendations. So, there is every reason to

believe that Project 2025 could become the blueprint for the nation if Trump should win in November.

### What is Project 2025?

Covering all the details of the 900 page document is beyond the scope of a short column, but the overall goal of the project is to dramatically shift power to the executive branch and institute a long list of right-leaning programs. Many critics claim it could lead to an authoritarian dictatorship, while proponents claim it “paves the way for an effective conservative administration.”

Here’s a breakdown of some of the document’s 10 main points:

#### 1. End non-partisan civil service and make federal employment political appointments

Project 2025 would make tens of thousands of federal civil service employees political appointees, loyal to President Trump. Rather than having non-partisan civil service employees conducting the routine business of government, it would allow the president or his party to hire those loyal to him and fire those who were not. One of the major elements of the Project would be to create a “unitary executive” with greatly enhanced powers for the president. It could return the United States to the

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**Photo of the Month:** Summer's day at the lake. (Photo by Edwin D. Custer)

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## Education Beat

### ***Charter Schools: An advocate and a critic***

*By Harold C. Ford*

Chris Matheson and Vincent Price are both veteran Flint educators who are passionate about providing an excellent education for Michigan's school-age children, but they disagree on whether charter schools can offer that education as they are currently constructed.

"Charter schools have leveled the playing field and provided an opportunity to those without the ability to purchase the opportunity," said Matheson, CEO of Charter

School Partners (CS Partners), the second-largest charter school management company in Michigan.

"We have always had school choice," Matheson explained, "but prior to the advent of charters it was restricted to those with the financial means to afford a private school education."

Price, a teacher and administrative veteran of both public and charter schools, offered a different view.

"This [charter school movement] has nothing to do with equity for children," he said. "It has everything to do with capitalism ... making money off children."

#### **A brief note on charter schools' structure**

Charter schools are a sort of public-private hybrid that require an authorizing institution, often a public university, to provide some over-

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## **Education Beat ...**

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sight. Additional governance may be provided by non-profit boards and management companies that are often for-profit enterprises.

As reported by Bridge Magazine earlier this year, more than 80 percent of charters in Michigan are managed by for-profit companies such as Matheson's CS Partners.

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. Affiliation with religious institutions is forbidden, as is religious education.

### **On state aid**

In Genesee County during the 2023-24 school year, 14 public charters were listed by the Michigan Department of Education. Their combined enrollment – 6,442 students – would have made charters the second largest school population in the county, second only to Grand Blanc Community Schools.

(The only charter in Genesee County managed by Matheson's Brighton, Mich. based CS Partners was Grand Blanc Academy, which reported an enrollment of 325 students for 2023-24.)

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

As East Village Magazine previously reported, assuming the formula remains the same, Michigan's charter schools stand to get about \$1.5 billion in state aid from the proposed \$20.6 billion for schools in the 2024-25 school year.

This sparks concern for Price, who told EVM he had worked for four charter management companies

over his career thus far.

"None of them are located in Flint," he said. "State aid that is supposed to be going to our children is leaving the community."

Further, he argued that management companies and authorizers "are in bed together."

"Management companies make authorizers money, [and] they get a percentage of state aid allocation," Price said, adding that while there are some nonprofit charter school management companies, "the vast majority" in Michigan are for-profit.

For his part, Matheson said that management companies typically do receive 7-14 percent of the state aid allocated to a charter school for services like "guidance, training and support in all areas of school operation: academic performance; special education; facilities; food service; grants; compliance; budget and accounting; human resources; marketing and enrollment."

The amount charged by education management companies (EMCs or EMOs), he said, is not uniform and can vary from client-to-client depending on the services provided and the contract stipulations.

"The authorizer has a contract with the [charter] school board and the school board often hires an EMO to manage the school," Matheson explained. "The authorizers offer support and training to the school board, the EMO, and school personnel."

### **On oversight**

"There's no regulatory body within the state of Michigan to have any real type of oversight over authorizers," Price charged, noting that he believes charter schools overall need more oversight.

"Every three years or so, the state asks them [charters] some questions. I wouldn't even call it an inspection," Price continued, describing interactions with the state as a superficial review of "processes in place."

"No one really checks to see if you follow through on these processes as long as you have them written down somewhere," he said. "The information is not made public."

When these concerns were brought to Matheson, though, he disagreed.

"Charters have the same accountability as traditional public schools," Matheson said. "And they must abide by the parameters of their charter contract."

He added that authorizers are public bodies entrusted with oversight and support of the charter schools they authorize, and they answer first and foremost to the board of trustees per the charter school contract.

Further, he said, authorizers monitor compliance tasks such as monitoring required standardized tests, and they do report results to school officials and the public.

But Price pushed back on Matheson's claim that charters face the same accountability as traditional public schools.

"The Michigan Department of Education has zero evaluative power over the authorizers," he said. "There's no recourse to address the authorizers, [and] it's not based around what's best for children."

Price added that right now, charter boards "function as yes-men for the authorizer," when they really should "function as independent bodies."

And as to the frequency of evaluations charters encounter, Price said: "I've never been evaluated."

### **Proposed transparency legislation**

At least some of Price's stated concerns are now up for discussion in the Michigan Senate.

As EVM previously reported, Senator Dayna Polehanki (D-Livonia) recently introduced a legislative package to increase transparency and oversight of the state's charter schools.

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## Education Beat ...

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The legislation, if passed, would make charters subject to requirements of the Open Meetings Act and the Freedom of Information Act; mandate detailed financial reports by EMCs; and require charters and EMCs to follow a bidding process similar to public schools, among other stipulations.

“We do love our charter school kids, the parents, the teachers, the support staff, the principals,” Polehanki said. “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.”

### On students served

Among his most full-throated critiques, Price said that charter school management companies “come in and try to prey on inner city students.”

During decades of domination in Michigan’s state government, Republican Party officeholders, primarily representing rural and suburban communities, fostered a charter system, in part, to promote competition in the state’s education marketplace.

However, charters are now more common in urban areas that are often Democratic Party strongholds (places like Flint and Detroit) and often draw students from school districts that are predominantly African American.

Matheson explained the attraction of charters in the following way:

“Some families value smaller class sizes; others want an academic program that prioritizes experiential learning, like project-based learning, and others desire increased flexibility in the delivery of instruction.”

“In short,” he said, “one size no longer fits all—if it ever did.”

Matheson went on to say that families “want a strong culture,

safety, an inclusive and welcoming environment” and choosing a charter option is “about finding the right, or optimal, learning environment for the individual learner.”

But Price viewed that claim differently.

“There is no community,” he lamented. “There is something to kids staying on the same street in the same neighborhood all going to school together and being friends ... Our inner-city kids are missing out on that experience.”

### Common ground

Regardless of their differences in opinion, it is inarguable that both Matheson and Price want success for all children — no matter their school setting.

“Absolutely,” Matheson responded when asked if he wished success for both charters and public schools. “To cheer or root against either charter public schools or traditional public schools is, in effect, to cheer for the failure of children, and I just do not understand folks who choose that path.”

Price affirmed the same.

“I like the flexibility charter schools could provide,” he said. “But there has to be support given to the charter boards.”

Price added that he would have opted for increased support for

public schools as an alternative to the creation of charter schools, viewing the funding as a way to incentivize traditional public schools to be more innovative and be able to afford such programming.

“Instead,” he concluded, “you created a whole other system.” ●

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## Commentary ...

(Continued from Page 3)

“spoils system” that was common in the 19th century, where government jobs were based on politics and not expertise or competence.

### **2. Place the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Justice Department under presidential control**

It would turn the FBI and the Justice department into an arm of the executive branch that could then be used to prosecute anyone who was considered an enemy or opponent of the president. Perhaps needless to say, doing this would greatly weaken the independence of the Justice Department and the FBI.

### **3. Eliminate the Department of Education**

This part of the Project would eliminate the Department of Education and would also cut most federal support for programs such as Head Start and many programs for low-income and early education. It also would ban “critical race theory” and “gender ideology” from being taught in schools and would seek to end student loan forgiveness programs.

### **4. Limit immigration**

Project 2025 advocates new border agencies that would construct Trump’s border wall, build camps that would detain families at the border, and use the military to deport those in the country illegally. By some estimates more than 11 million could be deported under this plan. The plan would also dismantle the Department of Homeland Security and combine it with other agencies.

### **5. Block abortion access**

The word abortion appears 199 times in the document as it

outlines ways to limit reproductive freedom. It advocates making it a criminal offense to mail abortion pills or assist anyone with an abortion and would have the government keep track of miscarriages, still-births and abortions and would deny abortion options to those in the military.

### **6. Reduce climate change efforts**

Project 2025 would get rid of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric administration that tracks climate change and forecasts the weather. It would also eliminate the Environmental Protection Agency’s climate change department and encourage more fossil fuel production by urging an increase in Arctic drilling for oil.

### **7. Reinstate the military draft and ban transgender individuals from the military**

The plan considers the possibility of bringing back the military draft, which has been gone since the early 1970s, and would assure that transgender individuals would be prohibited from enlisting. It would also make it more difficult for veterans to qualify for disability benefits.

### **8. Initiate major economic changes**

The Project advocates a wide range of changes in economic policy. Among them are reductions in the corporate tax rate, replacing the income tax with a national sales tax, reducing the capital gains tax, abolishing the Federal Trade Commission (which enforces antitrust legislation) and limiting the power of the National Labor Relations Board (which protects the rights of union workers). Several proposals in Project 2025 would make it more difficult to organize unions and easier to decertify them. The plan also advocates abolishing the Federal Reserve system and returning to

(Continued on Page 9)

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# THIS MONTH IN THE VILLAGE

Below is a selection of events available to our readers, beginning after our publication date of September 6. To submit events for our October issue, email information about your event to [eastvillagemagazineflint@gmail.com](mailto:eastvillagemagazineflint@gmail.com) by September 20.

## Buckham Gallery's 40th Season Finale

Now through Sept. 30  
Buckham Gallery is celebrating 40 years with its Founders Features exhibition, showcasing retrospectives from artists Gary Gebhardt and Tom Nuzum. Gallery hours are Weds. thru Sat. from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
121 W. Second St., Flint  
For more info visit [buckhamgallery.org](http://buckhamgallery.org)

## Flint Artwalk

Fri., Sept. 13 | 6-9 p.m.  
Walk around downtown Flint and visit the many merchants, galleries, restaurants and other venues displaying art by area artists and showcasing the talents of local musicians.  
For more info visit [greaterflintartscouncil.org](http://greaterflintartscouncil.org) or call 810-238-2787.

## Dinner Under the Lights

Sat. Sept. 14, 6:30 p.m.  
This annual fundraiser for nonprofit Friends of the Alley takes place under the Edison bulbs of Buckham Alley in downtown Flint. Dress up for a multi-course dinner featuring local chefs, music, dancing, and more.  
Price: \$100 per person  
For more info visit [fotaflint.com/events](http://fotaflint.com/events)

## Beekeeping at Applewood

Friday, Sept. 20 | 1-4 p.m.  
Visitors will meet local beekeeper Jason Bey and learn about how beekeeping helps create economic opportunity and environmentally diverse neighborhoods in Flint.  
Applewood Estate  
1400 E. Kearsley St., Flint  
For more info visit [ruthmottfoundation.org/events/](http://ruthmottfoundation.org/events/)

## Genesee County Land Bank - 20-Year Anniversary

Tuesday, Sept. 24 | 5:30-8 p.m.  
The Genesee County Land Bank is celebrating its 20 year anniversary with a film on its history at the Flint Institute of Arts. Hors d'oeuvres and refreshments will be provided at this free event. RSVP by Sept. 13.  
Flint Institute of Arts  
1120 E. Kearsley St., Flint  
Learn more or reserve a space via [Eventbrite.com](http://Eventbrite.com)

## East Meets West: National Arab Orchestra and members of the Flint Symphony Orchestra

Friday, Sept. 27 | 8 p.m.  
For the second year in a row, NAO music director Michael Ibrahim will lead FSO and NAO ensembles on the stage of the historic Capitol Theatre to create an eclectic evening of musical traditions that span the globe and bridge cultures.  
140 E. 2nd St., Flint  
For more info visit [thefim.org](http://thefim.org).

## Victorian Mourning Traditions Tour

Saturday, Sept. 28 | 5:30-8 p.m.  
Local historian Thomas Henthorn will conduct a walking tour at Glenwood Cemetery while discussing the customs and rituals surrounding death during the Victorian era. Tickets \$15.  
Learn more or reserve a space via [Eventbrite.com](http://Eventbrite.com)

## Flint Handmade Halloween Craft Market

Saturday, Sept. 28 | 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.  
Featuring 20+ local artisans offering vintage-inspired jewelry, hand-poured candles, natural bath and body products, knit and crocheted items, home décor and much more. Many items will have spooky or fall harvest themes. Live music by Erik McIntyre and Alex Belhaj.  
Flint Farmers' Market  
300 E. First St., Flint

## Michigan Renaissance Festival

Saturdays and Sundays through 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](http://www.michrenfest.com).

## Drag me to BINGO

Saturday, Oct. 5 | 8-9:30 p.m.  
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Ed Custer's East Village Magazine logo is reimagined for each issue by Patsy Isenberg.



## Commentary ...

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the gold standard for the dollar. Additionally, it calls for greater restrictions on trade with China, and would prevent Medicare from negotiating with big pharmaceutical companies for lower prices.

### 9. Establish Christian nationalism

Many of the Project's policies are motivated by Christian nationalism, which would help enshrine many conservative religious beliefs into law. For example, the chapter on the Department of Health and Human Services urges the next president to "maintain a biblically based, social science-reinforced definition of marriage and family" and is concerned that federal programs will be subjected to "nonreligious definitions of marriage and family as put forward by the recently enacted Respect for Marriage Act."

### 10. End DEI programs and LGBTQ+ protection

The Project advocates the elimination of existing legal protections for LGBTQ+ people and seeks to "rescind regulations prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, transgender status, and sex characteristics." The project also seeks to eliminate the DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) policies followed by many businesses and educational organizations.

To be sure, this list is brief and only the tip of the 900-page iceberg. Each of the topics could deserve a separate column and more.

### How Project 2025 would be carried out

All the goals laid out in Project 2025 are not simply a wish list. The document also details

how to achieve its goals. The Project lays out four stages of completely reworking the federal government. The first stage, as indicated in the above list, lays out the overall goals of a second Trump administration. The second stage outlines a 180-day "transition plan" that would direct federal agencies to adopt the needed changes quickly. The third stage would begin to fill government positions with pro-Trump conservative allies, with what some have described as a "conservative Linked-In" to hire only those who support the Project's goals. The fourth stage would be the creation of a "Presidential Administrative Academy" to train future government employees to support the goals of Project 2025.

### The implications of Project 2025

Even if Trump were to be reelected, it's not certain that all of Project 2025 would happen overnight — if at all.

Some goals would take action by Congress, some might be illegal and therefore challenged in courts, and perhaps even Trump might not buy into every idea.

But the threat of even a few of Project 2025's ideas is enormous.

Trump's 2024 comment that he wouldn't be a dictator "except for day one" could become a reality if the president is allowed to fire and hire civil servants of his choosing. The FBI and the Justice Department could become the tool of revenge for those considered enemies of the president. Many of the programs that have long supported education, civil rights or the environment could be gone. The ability of workers to organize and join unions would be limited. Tax policies would shift to aid the wealthy at the expense of the middle class. A woman's right to obtain an abortion would be even more limited than it is now, and Christian

nationalism could become national policy.

If anyone has any doubts about what's at stake in this year's election, consider how Project 2025 could change the nation. Almost every four years pundits and politicians say "this is the most important election of our lives," but this year it could be true. ●



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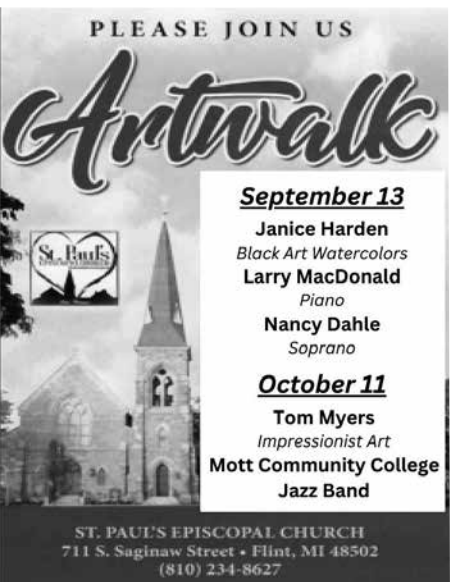
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# ***A conversation with Laurence Alexander, new chancellor of University of Michigan-Flint***

*By Jan Worth-Nelson*

In the conference room of his second floor suite in UM-Flint's University Pavilion building, Laurence Alexander was ecstatic about Michigan's weather.

The new chancellor of the University of Michigan-Flint sat down with EVM on a brilliant August day of 72 degrees and low humidity – quite the contrast from his former city of Pine Bluff, Ark., which stood at 88 degrees that same afternoon.

“Who could possibly complain about the weather?” he laughed.

The mood was surprisingly light for a man with such a serious task ahead of him. As UM-Flint's 10th chancellor, Alexander steps onto a campus beset with challenges over the past decade, exacerbated in part by COVID-19.

In 2020, UM-Flint experienced a 30% enrollment drop to fewer than 6,000 students, and a 35 percent graduation rate. In 2021, it saw a \$7.3 million budgetary deficit – threatening the ongoing existence of the regional campus.

In response, a campaign called “Strategic Transformation” was imposed by the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, with then-UM-Flint chancellor Debasish Dutta at the helm.

A national consultancy was hired and feedback was collected over two years, with concern voiced along the way by a group of faculty, staff, students and alumni who called the process too “top-down” and charged that it privileged potential employers over students, neglected the actual needs of the Flint community, and emphasized a business model at the expense of the liberal arts.

The outcomes of that transformation process were never formally presented to the public, and Dutta left UM-Flint for another role in July

2023.

Donna Fry, dean of UM-Flint's College of Health Sciences, then served as the campus's interim chancellor until Alexander was selected. He started his post on July 1 of this year.

But despite all the concerns he's inherited, Alexander seemed calm and collected while he discussed plans for UM-Flint's future.

After all, as he would soon explain, Alexander, like the city he now calls home, knows how to cultivate resilience.



**Laurence Alexander, UM-Flint Chancellor**

(Photo by Paul Rozycki)

## **“The pathway is education”**

Alexander grew up in one of the largest housing projects in New Orleans, La. with his mother, three sisters and a brother. He said he didn't know one person who had graduated from college until he was 18 years old.

“People like me who've grown up without a lot of opportunities, without the easy road, without a middle income background, we have to work harder – you have to use that grit that you gain along the way,” he said. “But I do firmly believe that there is a pathway. That pathway is education.”

Today, the former chancellor of the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB) holds four

degrees – a bachelor's degree from the University of New Orleans, a master's in journalism and communications from the University of Florida (UF), a law degree from Tulane, and a Ph.D. in higher education also from UF.

Aside from his own studies, Alexander comes to UM-Flint with over 35 years in higher ed. He served 11 years as chancellor of UAPB, and prior to that he was a professor and administrator at UF, including positions as director of the Office of Graduate Minority Programs, associate dean of the graduate school, and chair of the Department of Journalism.

“I never conceived of myself being a chancellor of one university, let alone two,” he said. “I never dreamed that I'd obtain four degrees. But I grew. I learned at every stage of development. That's the role that we can play as a university when we bring students onboard and open their eyes to the opportunities available to them if they commit themselves seriously to education and to their social and professional development.”

At UAPB, a historically Black university, Alexander grew enrollment, improved student retention, developed new corporate partnerships, acquired funding for new construction, and increased the university's endowment by 200% according to his online biography.

Settling in after just two months on the job, Alexander says his guiding goals for UM-Flint will be to “enlarge, advance, and elevate the community.”

He stressed that enrollment needs to be increased as “the most successful institutions today are those experiencing growth” – growth which he hopes to see not just in student enrollment but in

*(Continued on Page 11)*



# Conversation ...

(Continued from Page 11)

staff and faculty numbers, as well.

“Although I’ve worked in higher ed for 36 years, every institution is different,” he said. So, he plans to immerse himself in “the culture” of UM-Flint first, “so that we can be clear about our direction and we can be supported university-wide.”

## “A great responsibility”

Asserting that there are “no magic wands,” Alexander said he is in the process of engaging in a “listening tour” with faculty and staff to learn about the community, the campus, and the nature of “belonging” at UM-Flint.

“Universities don’t work in a vacuum,” he said. “They have a very important mission – teaching, research, service – but they also have a great responsibility to serve the communities in which they exist.”

He said universities serve as “important drivers” for workforce and entrepreneurial development. But, he added, UM-Flint is well-positioned to tap into partnerships with the State of Michigan and local philanthropic institutions such as the C.S. Mott Foundation, too.

“It’s not just the institution – it’s about what we can do for Flint,” Alexander explained. “Because the two are so closely related – as one goes, so goes the other.”

## “There’s no dust on it”

As to the fate of the campus’s Strategic Transformation plan, Alexander said he knows much work was done on it, and as a newcomer he’s “trying to learn everything” he can before diving in.

“Just to be clear, it’s not just sitting somewhere. There’s no dust on it,” he explained. “I’m on board now and part of my work is understanding the plan – that involves engagement with faculty, staff and students.”

From his post, Alexander reports to University of Michigan President Santa Ono, as well as being

an executive officer at UM-Flint. He said he viewed being part of the overall University of Michigan system as good, but he does have his ear to the ground.

“Of course I’ll be looking very closely to see how that benefits this campus,” he said. “My job as chancellor is to get the most I can for this institution.”

Aside from old business, Alexander said so far he’s seen a need to develop “greater vibrancy” on campus and to ensure “students are getting the kinds of development that you should get beyond the classroom.”

For now though, he and his wife, Veronica, are still unpacking boxes at Ross House, UM-Flint’s provided home for chancellors on Woodlawn Park Drive in Flint.

They’re sharing the home with one of their three sons, David, and Saint, their morkie (a Maltese and Yorkshire Terrier mix).

Aside from the weather, Alexander said he’d been drawn to Flint because the city’s struggles. Its history of survival and overcoming through determined community activism are recognizable to him – and rich with possibility.

“A place like Flint, maybe it

has seen better days, but it’s not a town that’s lost,” he said of his new home. “This is a town that’s growing – that’s thriving – in spite of everything. It’s quite resilient. It has demonstrated that resilience.” ●

## Faculty Concert Series 2024-25



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Piano by  
*Candlelight*

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Flint School of Performing Arts





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# Village Life

## *A nourishing conversation*

By Canisha Bell

Sitting at our monthly writer’s meeting for the magazine — where we pitch story ideas and talk about life, politics, and everything in between — I felt settled.

I hadn’t brought a story to pitch, as it’s not a requirement. There are always story ideas though, so if you come to our gathering without a story, most likely you’ll still leave with one.

“I thought of you for this one,” my editor said, smiling at me.

I smiled back. She was right. The story was definitely something I would’ve pitched had I heard about it: a community garden at St. John Vianney Catholic School. I was intrigued.

From there, I had the pleasure of speaking with Dr. Theresa Marshall, the principal at St. John Vianney (SJV) about the school’s community garden. Our conversation inspired me to think about my own growth and evolution – and really our shared growth and evolution as humans.

Just as a seed contains the potential to become a full-grown plant, we also have inherent potential to grow and develop into what we aspire to be.

St. John Vianney has a total of eleven garden beds, which were started last year. Eight of these beds are on the side of the building and are open to the community to harvest as they please. Many times you may see locals getting green beans, squash, garlic, or even herbs such as basil and sage from the garden. SJV students will pick tomatoes to eat as they wait for their bus at the end of the day.

Because they wanted partici-

pation from all students at SJV, three of the beds are in the school’s fenced playground area. These beds are where the youngest SJV students grow and cultivate their garden, which consists mostly of sunflowers and dahlias.

It was refreshing to hear Dr. Marshall explain how empowering it has been for the students to observe the seeds they planted grow and then



(Photo by Bonnie Kittle on Unsplash)

be able to pick them.

“It really sparked an interest in the whole idea of making something grow and then being able to do something with it ... to have them see it grow from seed, I was excited about that because many of them had never had that experience before,” she said.

Many of the parents who come to the school for a meeting or conference will leave with bags full of produce grown and harvested by their own children.

SJV received funding from the state of Michigan through the Meet Up and Eat Up program. The program works with United Way of Southeastern Michigan to provide breakfast and lunch for children 18 and younger Monday to Friday all summer long

and during some school breaks.

Being a mother of school aged children, I was familiar with the program but only through a lens of a location to “meet up” and “eat up” the pre-packaged food it provided. It was a surprise to me that this same opportunity offered an option to start a community garden — and that that’s the route St. John Vianney went.

I’ve heard the quote plenty of times “give a man a fish and he’ll eat for a day, teach a man to fish and he will eat for a lifetime.”

These children are learning to cultivate for a lifetime. They’re learning the process and life cycle of food from seed to harvest. They’re experiencing what it looks like to provide an environment for the seed to thrive and grow.

I think as humans we flourish under the right conditions — a thriving environment — as well. And I think a thriving environment may look different for us all.

For me, it’s positivity, really monitoring what I’m listening to and who I’m listening to, the food I’m eating, and the sights I take in everyday.

I’m intentional to allow prosperous words to enter my ears. I try to take in beautiful scenic views as much as possible — and there are plenty right here in Flint. I try to consume natural foods and drinks, and I am care-full (full of care) that meaningful words leave my mouth.

My conversation with Dr. Marshall was definitely nutritious. And my hope is that this article, like the garden beds her students tend, is meaningful and offers all those who encounter it a new way to think, learn, and grow – whatever way that may look for our community. ●