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Tony Wagner retiring

by Margo Ashmore

Tony (Anthony) Wagner moved his office every few years, a good way to avoid having 34 years of clutter at the end of an era. The outgoing president of Pillsbury United Communities (PUC), Wagner, in a similarly focused fashion, talked with *NorthNews* about some of the current and future challenges and opportunities facing North Minneapolis and the social service community in general.

His successor, PUC's current Chief Learning Officer Chanda Smith Baker, was named in February after a national search, from 100-plus candidates and two rounds of interviews. Wagner said he was only involved in that they came to him at the end asking if he had any objections to anyone on the list. He said he's thrilled with the choice.

"We pay a great deal of respect to growing our own," Wagner said. He himself, born and raised on the North Side, was first a client of the agency. "It's not just that. She is eminently qualified. The connection to community is real important. Chanda as a child went to Oak Park and she still lives on the North Side." They put together a 60-day transition plan. The first 30 days, she dealt with wrapping up her current commitment, and "for the last month she's been really out there" meeting people and taking the reins, Wagner said. His exit date: May 1.

He'll continue working on projects for PUC, writing at home the preliminaries for a capital campaign that was postponed three years ago because of the economy. Pillsbury United Communities operates four neighborhood centers in the Settlement House tradition, plus a theater, sponsors charter schools, has multiple affiliates and satellite locations listed on their website, www.puc-mn.org. Settlement houses originally helped immigrants assimilate into their neighborhoods, now the neighborhood centers provide a wide variety of social and community services. PUC's nearly 200 employees are "working to create choice, change and connection for people from all walks of life," serving nearly 35,000 individuals each year, according to a news release.

On the economy, government, philanthropy and hope for the North Side:

The general mood in the country has changed, the value system of the people in charge. "The biggest change is the arrogance of people in power over issues of poverty and race. There used to be more conversation with people in the trenches like, 'gee, maybe we don't

TONY WAGNER ▶ 3

North High School Redesign advisors meet

by Margo Ashmore

They got to know each other a little bit, got invited to send six people to visit New York schools, and heard that Peter Christensen, the current principal at North High School is willing to stay another year to three years. The New North High School Advisory Committee had their first meeting with ISA (Institute for Student Achievement), the consultants chosen to help a new, small school structure and practice get going.

As the group considered, April 20, what categories of people need to be involved in focus groups to be held in

May, the first thing consultants Gerry House and Vincent Brevetti did was rename the group "Redesigned North," a nod to the school/community sentiment that "the last New North was the building with banners on it," as Gwendolyn Kinsman put it.

Though a few members are a bit hesitant, the general mood in the room was "hopeful" or "passionate," as summed up in the brief check-in at the end of the meeting. Committee members are listed later in this article. It was more than a house-keeping meeting, but was not meant to reach any immediate decisions.

One of ISA's and the committee's big tasks is to recruit a school leader—they said the characteristics the community wants to see in such a leader will also reflect how they want the school to feel. It was said, "we're willing to hire the new principal for 2012 as early as this fall." It could be Christensen, or someone else. School Superintendent Bernadeia Johnson will make the decision from a short list of names from the committee and consultants.

NORTH HIGH SCHOOL ▶ 8

Governor gets back to the North Side



Governor Mark Dayton, aides and other state leaders met with an overflow crowd at UROC for an economic summit March 30. Dayton promised, and delivered, a response within nine days. Published and private reactions to the 27-page letter were guarded; a lot of the new governor's response was background on what is now in place, and promises to convene meetings or look into changes. *NorthNews* will do our best to monitor progress and dialog.



(Photos by Pat Carney for Northway Community Trust)

Park triangles due for improvements

by Kerry Ashmore

The small plots at 22nd and Irving avenues N and in the Humboldt Greenway at Humboldt Avenue and Humboldt Lane N are set to get some attention from the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB); even though the long-term

goal might be to pay less attention to it.

They're among eight MPRB-maintained areas that will benefit from a \$50,000 budget item to buy and plant ornamental shrubs and hardy perennials "strategically planted to reduce operation costs, in-

cluding mowing in selected locations. In addition the plantings will increase habitat for birds and butterflies," according to a memo to the board from Park Operations Director Lisa Beck.

PARKS ▶ 5

Online photo album builds one day at a time

by Margo Ashmore

What do these things have in common? Lao New Year in Harrison, tulips coming up, construction cones, PYC student protest collages, North Commons park, graffiti under Glenwood, bicycles—Nice Ride and other.

They're all subjects of photos posted in the Northside365 project. Launched April 1 with no significant monetary expense or fanfare, but

with seven digital photographers each committed to taking a day of the week, the collection unfolds at <http://northside365.tumblr.com/>

On the site's "About" page: "Northside365 is a collaboration of photographers, amateurs and professionals, coming together to tell the story of north Minneapolis through a daily photo exhibit.

If you are interested in being involved please email ariah@ariahfine.com

This project was inspired by a similar one, Powderhorn365." Ariah Fine and I attended a free training session offered by the Powderhorn group. He recruited photographers, others found him through notes in previous *North News* papers. It was agreed to test-run for a month before making any major splash, but it showed

NORTHSIDE 365 ▶ 5

Arts/development leaders focused on Juxtaposition

by Margo Ashmore

"Has our community changed for the better in the last 15 years? Physically, nearby, yes," said DeAnna Cummings of Juxtaposition Arts, setting a tone for the Bruner Loeb Forum in Minneapolis. "But for African Americans, no." In fact, she said, our worst disparities are some of the highest in the country. "We know arts and culture are avenues to change those outcomes, and that was the gist of our studies at Harvard."

DeAnna and Roger Cummings started Juxtaposition Arts, known as "Juxta," in 1995 with another artist, Peyton, in the old public housing projects. This is about the same time they started having children. In 2007, they and the kids relocated to Massachusetts (DeAnna with a Bush Leadership Fellowship, Roger with a Loeb Fellowship) for a sabbatical year and then traveled, all to get knowledge that would help them set a new and even more useful direction for their arts school.

Juxtaposition has started acquiring more buildings and eventually plan to rebuild their corner of Emerson and West Broadway with specialized spaces. But on April 15 and 16, they were the gracious hosts, the focus and the stepping off point for a by-invitation national conference staged by two organizations from Cambridge, Massachusetts, the Rudy Bruner Award and the Loeb Fellowship Program.

At the conference, called *Putting Creativity to Work: Stronger Communities through Locally Rooted Art & Design*, local and out-of-town arts administrators and public officials tried their hand at a mapping exercise that might be helpful for West Broadway redevelopment. Also "Table talks" exercises let groups network across disciplines to find out more about each other and how they think.

Speakers throughout the days distilled their talks into 8-minute segments to keep things lively. And a chocolate-dessert-charged bus tour brought highly animated participants to Franklin Avenue's All My Relations Arts gallery as well as West Broadway and Juxta on an otherwise frigid Friday.

Here's some of what I found interesting and helpful from the two-day conference:

Theaster Gates, trained as a city planner, detoured through ceramics training, bought five properties after Section 8 landlords suffered vacancy and foreclosure, started a bookstore with inventory from a company that went out of business, for \$4,000, and added records at 15 cents a disc. "It felt like an art gestural moment. I wanted to make the cultural elite in my city feel stupid because they've not done anything."

Gates said he was tired of urban renewal and blacks moving away from the poverty problem. "What if I stayed?" Several confer-



One of the professors at Harvard researched how much income has to go into a family, to take them from moving all the time, to being able to put down roots—"\$3,500 is the difference to help them do something," DeAnna Cummings reported during the Bruner Loeb Forum field trip to their building. Roger Cummings explained that Juxtaposition Arts, 2007 Emerson Ave. N. now offers five different arts concentration areas: Visual Art Literacy Training, textile design, photography, graphics, and environmental design. Jeremiah Allison, a summer art instructor at Juxta, explained the mural on the side of Juxta's building: "The point of doing a mural is to teach getting a point across without being literal." Part of the graphic looks like a zipper being unzipped, like releasing all sorts of thoughts and dreams. Seitu Jones, at right, and Allison narrated the bus tour. Many North Minneapolis organizations sent representatives to the Forum. (Photos by Margo Ashmore). The Juxtaposition.org website, under construction, directs viewers to their Facebook, or 612-588-1148.

ence participants stated that this was the most important thing they heard. Three years after he started, he was able to get a \$4.5 million grant to do more.

Tom Borrup, who used to run Intermedia Arts and is now consulting and working on his PhD, said we all embrace the idea that arts help overcome economic disparities, but "The Creative City bandwagon has brought about greater economic disparity." (Creative City, the work of Richard Florida.) He said that in order for arts to work to improve communities, the communities have to be functional. "We have to find ways to help them be functional."

Many of the speakers talked about taking an asset-based approach, rather than a deficit approach. (They endorse reinforcing and using what's already working in a neighborhood, rather than coming in with assumptions about what's bad and fixing it by some outside prescription.) Borrup said there have to be three assets to balance off every deficit.

Sheila Smith, from Minnesota Citizens for the Arts, did a quick primer on how the "legacy" amendment got passed. Several unrelated constituencies came together because their values "had in common a belief in quality of life, and the outdoors." She said the environmental groups have a national system for helping local initiatives, and 90 percent of such initiatives get passed when these systems are used. "We have voters who did stuff. Environmentalists and artists are voters."

Cynthia Harnisch runs Inner City Arts in the heart of skid row, Los Angeles. It's really called Skid Row, and "we have to sanitize the sidewalks every morning." The surrounding school districts every bus in close to 10,000 kids a year because the streets are too dangerous for the kids to walk in. Her boss said, "I want you to make our neighborhood safe and clean." The building is a tall white beacon of pro bono architecture, the first project of a now famous guy; it started out as a run-down 1930s garage and kept growing.

Harnisch, answering questions at our table while the rest of us drew pictures and captured key words, to be incorporated into a joint art project, said "Ceramics is the best way to increase language." It's tangible. "We saw huge increases in math, and reading. By third grade, there [can be] a shutdown of the ability to see the future for oneself. Maybe for others, but not for oneself." Arts work as an antidote, create what doesn't exist, whether it's a play, or something else, she said. "We're not just playing with art supplies, this is highly research driven to help kids stay in school."

On the bus tour, Justin Huenemann, president of Native American Community Development, Institute. (www.nacdi.org) on Franklin Avenue picked up the "assets" theme. "Land is power. We have moved from a concept of ownership," geographic identity. In what was predominantly a Native American skid row with "5-6 liquor stores and a porn shop within half a mile," Native

"What if we believed diversity outperformed homogeneity?"

Neeraj Mehta, wrapping up the conference

Americans have acquired properties in what has become known as the American Indian Cultural Corridor. The negative influences, Sneders Liquor the last of them, have been shut down. "People are returning to the streets. Children, and elders."

Echoing a theme from an earlier conference speaker, Huenemann stressed the importance of consistent community engagement, "listening to folks. They articulate a vision, stand back and listen. We didn't offer a meal, just coffee and cookies."

The conference sponsors included Juxtaposition Arts, Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA), Nexus Community Partners, The U of M's College of Design in Landscape Architecture, C + S Architects, 4RM + ULA, Minnesota Humanities Center, Family Housing Fund, The Uptake, The McKnight Foundation, and The University of Minnesota Imagine Fund.

Superintendent: "Start out small, then...do another"

1 NORTH HIGH SCHOOL

There's also the matter of a community-based liaison or "coach" that ISA will help select to do groundwork when they are not in town, to be selected when the principal comes.

Committee member Kerry Felder promoted the idea of "enroll the 97 students who are here, who haven't chosen a school, to be part of the 100 to 108" (the lowest number ISA recommends for a class). Kale Severson and others brought up the Carver, Atlanta High School which now has 1,600 students

(at capacity, similar to North's capacity). That campus houses four different school programs of 400 each, Gerry House of ISA explained.

Johnson explained that the search for consultants specified wanting someone with expertise in smaller schools. "Start out small, then you can do another." The question of whether this new configuration would be at the current North building was left vague.

"And then there's another elephant in the room, the MCP/Noble charter high school," opening at Lincoln School (one of the former feeder schools for North) said Buzzy Bohn, an

alternate. "Everyone we talk to says 'well, there goes North'" with that in the offing. "I'd like the school board to take back that vote." Johnson said MCP is not opening in 2011, Severson said it's what's posted on their website. "I'll make a call," Johnson said.

Members of the group discussed whether it's helpful to "get closure" on how North got to where it is, from being a successful, venerable institution to the brink of being closed...or whether looking in the rear view mirror while trying to drive the car leads to a crash.

The word "trust" surfaced many times. The

ISA consultants underscored that the committee members have been chosen by the community because they are trusted, and that it will be up to them to "carry the message of hope throughout the community."

Brett Buckner, a committee member, said "we have some of the oldest alumni, and pretty powerful. We will have to drum beat it to everybody." Felder said "I'm excited about this. The community is excited. There are people willing to come in and do summer programs, for free. It's a trust issue that people are willing to work free."



Leola Seals and consultant Gerry House discussed a point at the April 20 meeting. From left at the table: Buzzy Bohn, Susan Young, Gwendolyn Kinsman, Seals, Mark Bonine, Rose Brewer, Eric Molho, Scott Redd, Bernadeia Johnson, House.

(Photo by Margo Ashmore)

Meet the Advisory Committee

From a Minneapolis Public Schools news release:

"Minneapolis Public Schools is pleased to announce that the following nine community members will serve on the committee: Ariah Fine, Brett Buckner, Deanna Williamson, Kale Severson, Kerry Felder, Kim Ellison, Marcus Owens, Rose Brewer and Susan Young. The advisory committee is comprised of 14 total members, including the following MPS leaders: Associate Superintendent Mark Bonine, Director of School

Improvement Eric Molho, Executive Director of Family and Community Engagement Scott Redd, Director of Strategic Planning Maggie Sullivan and ex-officio committee member Superintendent Bernadeia Johnson. Community alternates for the committee include Buzzy Bohn, Erika dos Santos, Leola Seals and T. Williams.

Twenty-three interested community members submitted applications to be considered for the committee, of which four community members were se-

lected by the joint district-community interview team that selected the North redesign consultant. Five others were elected by the community at a public meeting" April 14.

The school district contact for the process is Eric Molho, MPS Director of School Improvement, at 612-668-0549 or eric.molho@mpls.k12.mn.us.

For more information on the consultants, go to their website, www.studentachievement.org.