

The *TIMES* of.... SKINKER DEBALIVIERE

Vol. 54, No. 4

February - March 2025

<http://SDTimes.org/index.html>

The oldest neighborhood newspaper in St. Louis

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Journey from Skinker DeBaliviere to Germany

By Cecelia Nadal

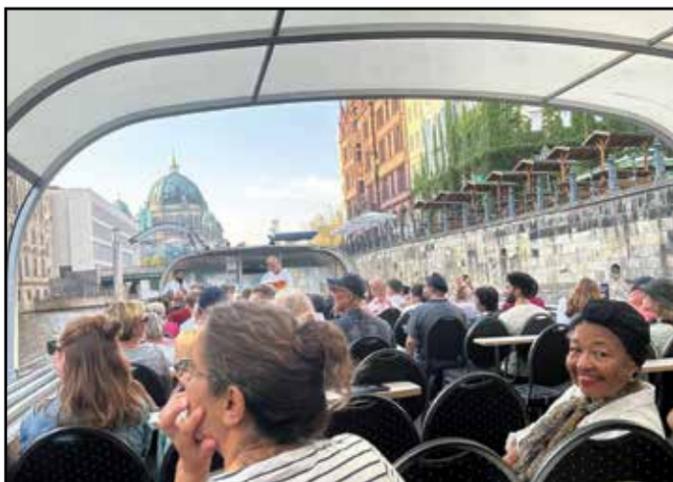
I have always thought that potato salad had its origin in America and of course that “spicy delicious kick” that I was accustomed to was a variation inspired by my African ancestors. So much for assumptions! I would learn on my recent three-week trip to Germany that the origins of potato salad came from Deutschland!

When my plane departed St. Louis for Berlin potato salad was the farthest thing on my mind. I was one hot mess needing desperately to detox from the daily dose of bad news about the political and moral health of America. How could we possibly be at a point when democracy was being threatened? I was on a plane flying at an altitude of 36,000 ft. with a view of spectacular cloud formations and I would see the Atlantic Ocean below, yet, all I could think about was the infamous 2025 plan! It took most of the 7 ½ hour flight to Germany to think about other topics like the Transatlantic Slave Trade-that didn’t help at all!!!! Eventually I returned to the history and extraordinary circumstances that influenced my visit to Germany.

It was hard for me to believe that for seven years I had focused on the little-known fact that there were Germans in Missouri and across America that were abolitionists. The impact German immigrant abolitionists had was so significant that the world-renowned Black Abolitionist, Frederick Douglass said this, “Many noble and high-minded men, most of whom were swept over by the tide of the revolution of 1848 have become our active allies against oppression and prejudice. A German has only to be a German to be utterly opposed to slavery.” Even then Douglas received tremendous support from Germans such as journalist, Otilie Assing, who helped him to get his book *My Bondage and My Freedom* published and translated in German.

My interest in the contributions of German abolitionists in Missouri would take me from St. Louis to mostly rural areas throughout the State. I’d learn that St. Louis has the largest concentration of Germans in the State of Missouri and many Germans have contributed to the culture and prosperity of the St. Louis region. What I learned led me to write the play, *An Amazing Story: German Abolitionists of Missouri* and to organize a series of Symposia and speaking engagements about the shared history of German immigrants and African Americans in Missouri. Incredible to think that this experience now had me on a plane headed to Germany! It was this inspiring history that moved me to stretch and challenge my comfort level.

At a moment when the stewardess was making an announcement, I laughed out loud thinking



about my first trip to Hermann, an early 19th century German settlement on Highway 100 and now thriving tourist favorite! There I was Black and alone on a road where I saw one or two cars or trucks every few miles! What was I thinking!?!? I remember feeling very alone and nervous about whether the rural towns I was entering had a history with the Klu Klux Klan. Fortunately, the people in Hermann would allay my fears and I’d meet incredible human beings across the State.

Skinker DeBaliviere to Germany
continued on page 4

Thank you to our generous donors who responded to our latest fund raiser!

MANY THANKS

- Joseph Buell
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WANT TO HELP OUR NEIGHBORHOOD STAY GREAT? Get involved!

Standing Committees Reporting to SDCC Board of Directors

FINANCE COMMITTEE – YVETTE KELL, CHAIR

Provides financial oversight for the organization, to include budgeting and financial planning, financial reporting, and the creation and monitoring of internal controls and accountability policies.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT – NICOLE BLUMNER, CHAIR

Community Development Standing Committee shall be responsible for maintaining and planning the neighborhood’s residential and commercial areas in accordance with

Editor's Notes

By Linda Cross

We are approaching my favorite time of year! Days are getting longer, the sun is shining more, the long-lived ice is melting away (finally). However, this time is also coming with a lot of struggles for our neighbors. The political climate from the Capital all the way to our own City Hall is discouraging and even dreadful. It is frustrating when leaders of the same political party cannot come to common sense solutions to support their constituency, much less when leaders from opposing parties try to work on issues. Prices, already too high, will likely rise causing our neighbors to tighten their already tight belts. Immigration and race matters hit our neighborhood and surrounding areas more than other areas that are not as diverse as this place in which we all wanted to live. My family was lucky in that my in-laws had already chosen Skinker DeBaliviere in which to live, and we decided that we loved it and wanted to stay. Our space has such a mixture of economics, cultures, and colors. Our family has thrived and grown in an area that I consider progressive, open minded, and kind. We will need to bring these characteristics to bear to help our friends who will need more support in meeting basic needs and alleviating the fears of those who are anxious about being targeted because of their citizenship. As we all start getting outside more, let's remember to check on our neighbors, but also to celebrate what makes us great. Check out some upcoming Loop activities, check out the blooms that will peek out in the gardens, have a chat with your neighbors after you mow the lawn. Community is what makes us great and will make us thrive.

Guidelines for Submitting Copy

The Times welcomes unsolicited articles and letters. Because of the small size and volunteer nature of the writing staff, the quality and range of the *Times* has always depended in large part on submissions from non-staff area residents.

The writer is responsible for the accuracy of the data, including times, dates, location, and particularly the spelling of names. The editor retains the right to omit or alter any material. Opinions expressed in Commentaries are the opinion of the author.

Deadline for next issue: March 15, 2025 for our April - May issue. Please send copy by e-mail to Linda Cross, lcross@sdtimes.org.

The TIMES of... SKINKER DEBALIVIERE

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Marvin Nodiff	Tom Hoerr	Katy Gordon

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The Times, c/o 6229 Washington, 63130, or call 314-359-9771.

Readers are welcome to send us e-mail or letters commenting on any of our content. Send to lcross@sdtimes.org.

FREE MULCH:

Thanks to the efforts of parishioners Andy Cross and Bob Dowgwilllo, the City's Division of Forestry has delivered mulch for just this purpose. The mulch is located on the 6100 Block of Pershing and is free for the taking. Please help yourself.

Help Our Neighborhood Stay Great *continued from page 1*

the Skinker DeBaliviere Master Plan, adopted by the Board on October 13, 2014, as may be amended; and shall review proposed residential, commercial and public infrastructure development and redevelopment proposals to determine the proposal's compliance with the Master Plan. Further, the committee shall be responsible for periodic review of the Skinker DeBaliviere Master Plan and recommend updates and revisions to the Board. Find out more in the by-laws.

HISTORIC DISTRICT REVIEW – ANNAMARIE BLISS & JAMES HOLZER, CO-CHAIRS

Historic District Review Standing Committee (HDR Committee) shall be responsible for ensuring the preservation of the historic character of the neighborhood through various means. Also, it helps review proposed public infrastructure development and redevelopment proposals to determine the proposal's compliance with historic standards. Find out more in the by-laws.

COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS – JAKE BANTON, CHAIR

Responsible for monitoring development in the Delmar and DeBaliviere Commercial Areas to ensure compliance with the "Delmar Link" Redevelopment Plan, the Skinker DeBaliviere Neighborhood Urban Design and Development Plan, as well as any future development plans approved for use in the Skinker DeBaliviere neighborhood; proposing amendments to the ordinance to the Board; and for reviewing conditional use applications, zoning variance appeals, building code appeals, liquor license applications and changes, and proposed zoning amendments; and shall perform other tasks that may be assigned by the Board. Find out more in the by-laws.

SECURITY COMMITTEE – GRADY VAUGHAN, CHAIR

Security Standing Committee shall be responsible for increasing neighborhood security awareness through meetings, communications, alerts and educational programming. The Committee shall serve as liaison with SLMPD 5th District, University City Police, Washington University Police, Bi-State/Metro Police, the Central West End Neighborhood Security Initiative and the Neighborhood Stabilization Team. Find out more in the by-laws.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE – VACANT, CHAIR

Helps residents get to know each other, organize fun block events, communicate sensitive and real-time information and build partnerships with the police and city government. Ideally, every block unit has a Captain or Co-Captain, who provides direction, schedules meetings, organizes volunteers and promotions block unity.

RESIDENTIAL HOUSING & ZONING – VACANT, CHAIR

Monitoring residential zoning issues, overcrowding and the increased footprint of renters in Skinker DeBaliviere, supports City of St. Louis efforts to enforce housing and historic ordinances in the neighborhood, and educate landlords and investors and advance dialogue around

Help Our Neighborhood Stay Great *continued on page 7*

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**SKINKER DEBALIVIERE
COMMUNITY COUNCIL (SDCC)
November 11, 2024 Meeting Minutes**

Board Members Present: Tracy Granneman (President, Rosedale), Molly Rater (Secretary, Kingsbury Square), Yvette Kell (Treasurer, Washington Heights), JoAnna Schooler (Washington University), Jeff Stokes (Grace Methodist), Mike Stephens (Parkview), Michelle Davidson (at large) Jim Holzer (Rosedale), Tim Woodcock (Rosedale), AnnaMarie Bliss (at large), Nathaniel Rivers (Washington Heights), Kathryn Bulard (Busey Bank)

Not Present: Carl Merritt (Cote Brillante), Roger Harris (Washington Heights), Stefan Pabst (Parkview Agents), Linda Cross (Rosedale)

Visitors: NIS Max Magee, Andy Cross (Beautification), Kevin Koenig (6000 Washington), Grady Vaughan (Security Committee), Carynn Smith (Wash U Cares)

Project Manager: Victoria Headrick

Alderson: Shameem not present

Meeting was called to Order at 7:03 PM in the SDCC office. Quorum with 12/16 board members present

Public Comment: None

Aldermanic Reports: None

Approval of October Minutes: Yvette made a motion to approve and Mike seconded. Minutes were approved

Financials: Yvette reported that finances were

solid and we will end the year in the "black". Yvette has managed to untangle Quick Books. She proposed a rough budget for next year that will be voted on in the beginning of next year. We will break even next year if we make 10,000 in Friends Donations and 10,000 in grants. We currently have 60,000 dollars in savings, 20,000 in CD and 22,000 in Operating Expenses. She shared the financial report with the board by email before the meeting.

Project Manager Report: Fall concert event on November 1 was a successful event with an estimated 70 people attending

Working on website, social engagement

Sending out weekly Newsletter

She is now working on Wintermarkt: Sending letters to vendors, marketing and gathering volunteers. She is planning a soft launch of Friends Campaign at Wintermarkt

Dan Hudspeth will try to install 3 bowl sink by end of week. He has a lead on a refrigerator for 250 dollars if someone can pick it up. He is donating Rosedale funds for office improvements.

SDHDC: Tracy reported that there were recent issues with water leaking into the office basement from a supply line. She was not aware of the problem until the leaking had been going on for a few days. She called Gary and he suggested she call the Property Management Company (that no one on Board knew we had). It was eventually fixed by the city but Tracy is concerned about the musty smell from the basement affecting air quality in the office. No property of the SDCC was damaged but some of the SDHDC files got wet and will

need to be removed. Tracy reported that there was a dehumidifier in the basement but not sure how well it was working.

Mike Stephens made a motion to send a letter to Gary Boenkhe asserting that he as landlord was responsible for safety of building for his tenants (SDCC). Jim Holzer seconded that motion and the motion carried. Mike Stephens will draft the letter. He would like a copy of the lease first.

Form Based District: Approval was stalled with the city for several months but has been active recently. The SDCC FBD may be a prototype for a city wide FBD. There is also a discussion about a city wide FBD that would override all other Form Based Districts. AnnaMarie Bliss has been asked by the city to look at the document-may affect historic ordinances/need for variances. City asserted that the Historic District had never given their approval on the FBD (before AnnaMarie was on the Historic District Committee). The city is requesting an editable version of the FBD and H3 has asked us to sign a release allowing this and ending our relationship. Tracy suggested that the SDCC take itself out of financial activities like this in the future due to potential liability.

SDCC playground: Kevin Koeing is the point person and has been in contact with the city parks department and they have been very responsive. Playground is old and in need of repair. The materials are old so need to be replaced, not repaired. New materials are being used for playgrounds now. The cost for a new playground would be 200-300,

Skinker-DeBaliviere Community Council

continued on page 4



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AM/PM schedule	Free play, circle time, outside, food
Outside time	Two 45-minute periods per day
Kid/teacher ratio	5:1
Food	Breakfast, lunch, 3 snacks per day
Experience	30+ years combined for David and Fei
Positive parenting	Yes!
Potty training	Of course!
Part-time hours	No
Montessori	Mixed ages, home setting, student-led
Vaccinations	All shots required (including covid and flu)



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www.lionsprideacademy.com



David: (323) 868-7000 | Fei (314) 308-2627
info@lionsprideacademy.com

Skinker DeBaliviere Community Council *continued from page 3*

000. 25% should come from ward funds and 75% from city funds in 2025. Kevin plans on talking to Shameem about this.

Board Commitments: Tracy announced at the last meeting that she will be stepping down as President after 2 years of service. She will stay involved with the board and the SD community. She was thanked for her service. Molly asked that all current board members report to her whether or not they will be staying on the board.

AnnaMarie Bliss and Tim Woodcock announced that they will also be stepping down. AnnaMarie will continue to chair the Historic Committee and Tim will continue on the Porchfest Committee.

Board members committing to stay on included Yvette Kell, Molly Rater, Jeff and Karen Stokes, Kathryn Bulard, Nathaniel Rivers, Michelle Davidson, Jim Holzer, Mike Stephens, JoAnna Schooler. Victoria sent out a call for new board members on a recent email blast and got two respondents. The call for new board members will continue to be posted on the email blast.

Wintermarkt: Andy reported that he is working on committing bands and emails have been sent to vendors. The blacksmith is not available this year but Josh Peck will have a printing machine instead. The menu and a shopping list has been compiled. Search for volunteers will be sent out. Victoria is compiling a computer file with all of the Wintermarkt information (and for other events too)

Washington University: Neighbors Day will be held at Francis Field this Saturday before the football game. Neighbors are asked to pre-register so they can plan for food. Carynn says that she will put Wintermarkt in the upcoming Wash U Newsletter.

Washington University Accreditation event: Tracy attended this to speak as a supporting community organization for their every 10 year accreditation

Insurance Committee: JoAnna had no report and said this was still a work in progress

Art Club: Tim Woodcock proposed the formation of an art club at the office to work on various art projects. Victoria will post in next email blast. Victoria is working on new tables for the

office to give it a more welcoming feel.

Committee Reports:

Security committee: Meeting minutes post to SDCC website under committee reports

No meeting last week due to election but will be meeting this week.

Calls for service down to 26 calls last month. Captain Marks is now Major Marks and will be replaced by Captain William Brown. He is our new commander and will be invited to a future SDCC meeting.

JoAnna reported that Secure Platform work had started at the Delmar MetroLink Station. Anna Marie suggested that neighbors might like MetroLink Rep Missy Webb to speak to them about the new secure platforms.

Beautification Committee report:

Andy is working on Wintermarkt Sat Dec 7, see above Wintermarkt report

Historic Committee:

AnnaMarie reported that the committee's job was to enforce ordinances. She has mostly been dealing with complaints about ordinance violations lately and requests for permits are down. She tells those with complaints that the first step is to report to the CSB. She has been in contact with SDHDC to help with home repairs but they have no liquid money right now. Potential selling of a property has not happened. October meeting minutes will be available under committee reports on the SDCC website.

Housing and Zoning Committee: Not meeting

Commercial Districts: JoAnna reported that there will be a meeting Wednesday about Euphoria Cannabis Restaurant. Tracy reported that city made an error on application that business had requested a liquor license

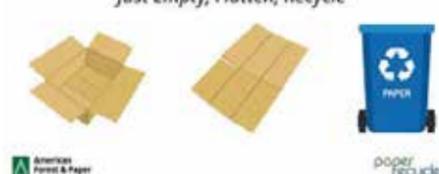
Old Business: None

New Business: None

Meeting adjourned at 8:11 PM

Minutes submitted 11/11/2024 by Molly Rater, SDCC Board Secretary

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- 2.1 - Manos PanAmerica
 - 2.6 - Captain Bulkhead & the Portholes
 - 2.13 - Playadors "Show for Lovers"
 - 2.15 - Acoustik Element: Valentine's Show
 - 2.20 - Electric Orchid Showcase
 - 2.22 - Denise Thimes "A Tribute to Roberta Flack & Nina Simone"
 - 2.25 - Brothers Lazaroff (6:30pm show)
 - 2.27 - The Dhoruba Collective
 - 2.28 - Samba Bom "Brazilian Carnaval"
 - 3.6 - Blvck Spvde
 - 3.13 - Hudson & the Hoodoo Cats
 - 3.15 - Acoustik Element: World Percussion
 - 3.20 - The Song
 - 3.22 - Mo Egeston All-Stars
 - 3.27 - Surtsey
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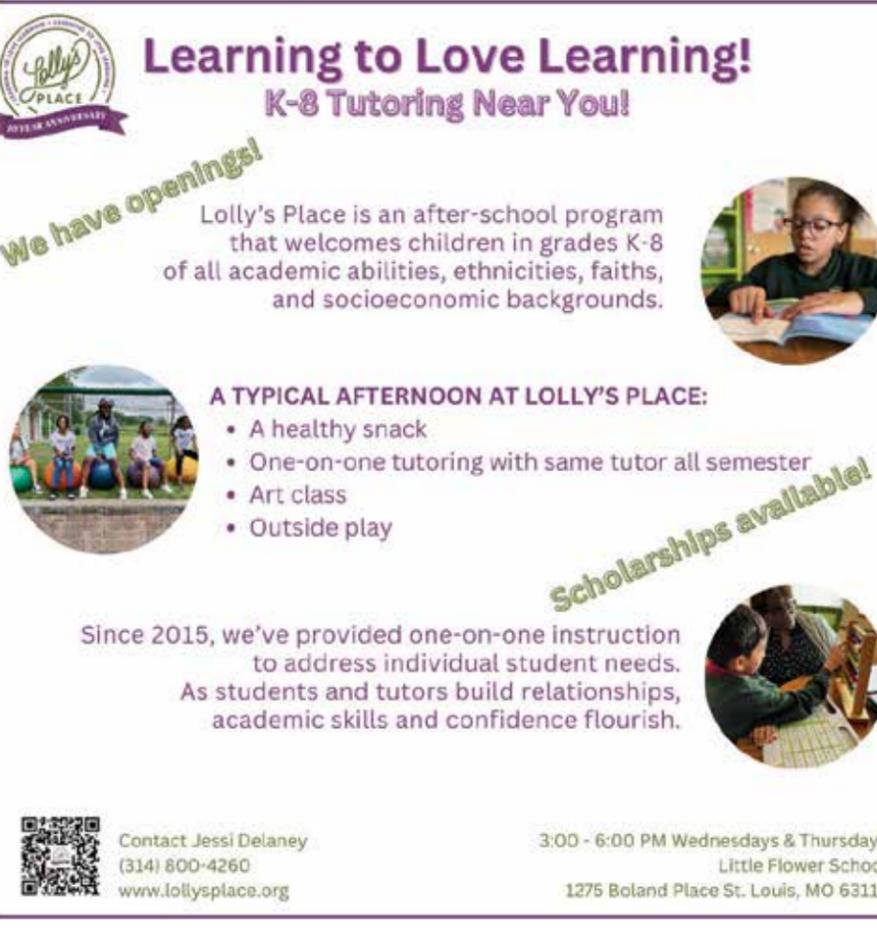
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Skinker DeBaliviere to Germany *continued from page 1*

We often allow our fears to impede or stifle our engagement with people that are culturally different and we assume that large swaths of a population fall within a specific and often biased narrative.

Thinking about the Klan was one thing but given the polarization in our country, if I had known at that time that approximately 85% of those living in rural Missouri were Republican I don't know if I would have had the audacity to present a play about German immigrant abolitionists back in 2018 during the rise of MAGA. I was fortunate that it all worked out in places like Hermann, Missouri where the audiences loved the play and engaged fully. I was reminded that even a liberal African American social critic can be biased!

Entering the space of another culture and community is not easy but the process can definitely be incredibly and immensely gratifying if we harness our assumptions.

My trip to Germany included immersion into the cultural landscape of cities like Berlin, Hamburg and Frankfurt but included excursions into small villages in Old Saxony. In East Germany I would hear Germans speaking Russian and German rather than English and German in Berlin. I was amazed by the rich history of Berlin with more than 200 museums! Berliners intentionally balance their love of nature and technology by protecting green spaces and waterways and supporting impressive and extensive transportation systems. I was impressed by the many weeping willows along the Spree river. Oddly, Berlin reminded me of why I moved to Skinker-DeBaliviere many years ago! I loved Forest Park and being close to places like the St. Louis Art Museum and the Research Library at the Historical Society on Skinker. One of my favorite meditation spots is near a small man-made lake in Forest Park where there are weeping willows nearby. It is surprising how a tree that originated in northern China can now be found all over the world!

Traveling to the world-renowned Emigration Museum in the port city of Bremerhaven by the North Sea was important to my on-going study of the early 19th century German emigrants. It was at this port that tens of thousands courageously left their homeland headed for America. Some had never seen ships the size and scale of those crossing the Atlantic nor had they been close to the vast ocean and sea. Some families actually turned around and went home because they were so frightened.

I would learn much about the shifting sands of German history and experience the food culture of bread, sausages, fleischsalat (Bologna salad) and beer in Germany. The food was terrific ranging from popular street foods like currywurst to Schnitzel and Pork Knuckle with sauerkraut. The diversity of foods in Germany is astounding including influences from France, Turkey, Italy and many other countries. Before going to Germany, a beer was just a beer but when I returned to St. Louis and reconnected with friends in the Loop I had a better understanding of their choices.

When I got back to St. Louis, I was running some errands between Union Blvd. and DeGiverville and recalled reading that during WWI one of the streets in that area was changed from Berlin Avenue to Pershing Avenue due to anti-German sentiment in St. Louis. I knew of this history and had learned that in Missouri many towns with German names were renamed because of the war and Hitler. There were even POW camps for German soldiers in the Show Me State! I began making interesting connections between people and places. For example, Dr. Selam Deutschmann, a highly regarded Chiropractor on Delmar Blvd., whom I have known for years, is originally from Ethiopia and carries the last name Deutschmann! Why? Selam chose to honor his German adoptive parents from Iowa who were pivotal to his success!

When I boarded the plane from Frankfurt to return home, I was reminded that when we are engaged in work that brings people together and we stretch to look for opportunities to do so in unlikely places there is not time to allow the news to affect our dedication. Our work of nurturing authentic relationships with love is the radical remedy for protecting democracy. In an upcoming article, I will share some of the experiences I had in Germany that left a profound impact on me. I will share how Germany and America have tackled their original sins of the holocaust and slavery.

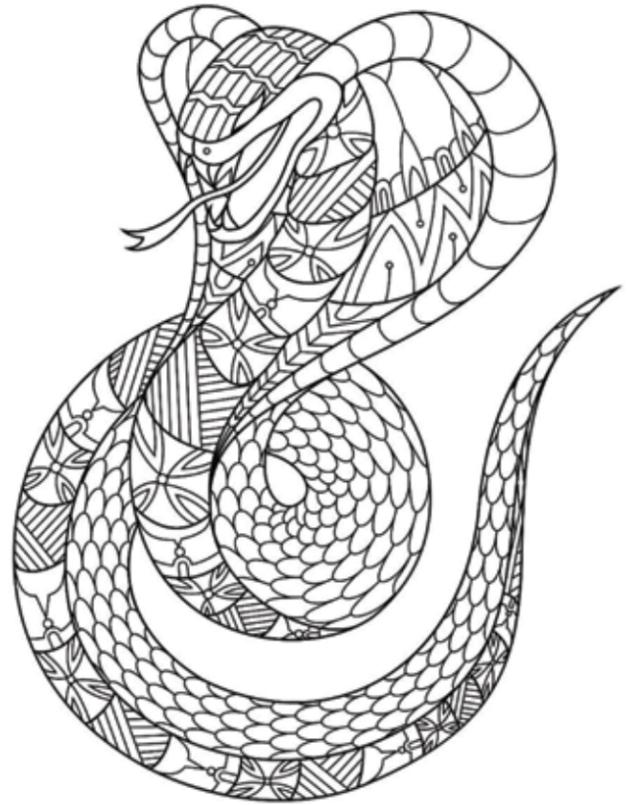
Finally, just a friendly reminder, potato salad is from Germany and "German Chocolate Cake" is wholly American! Enjoy the small things and love with the example of President Jimmy Carter.

KIDS CORNER

By Jenny Matthews

2025

HAPPY NEW YEAR



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THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND - Prune your shrubs and trees!

By Mark Banaszak

Late winter (February to March) is a good time to prune shrubs and trees. People have known for thousands of years that cutting a plant back could improve it. According to one ancient legend, a donkey introduced the practice of pruning to people. When the donkey fed on a wild grapevine, people noticed that the vine produced more grapes. Today there are four main reasons why people prune - to maintain health, to remove damaged or diseased parts, to improve or maintain the size and shape, and to improve flowering or fruiting.

Removing new adventitious growth can often be helpful to a plant because plants often dedicate too much energy to producing new growth. Removing new branches like suckers or water sprouts will allow a tree to send more energy to existing leaves, flowers, and fruit buds. Branches that cross or rub against other branches are also removed to limit the risk of damage from rubbing, which gives pests a route to the inside of the plant.

Branches damaged by pests or heavy weather, like ice or thunderstorms, can damage or cause disease. Removing these damaged parts prevents further injury to the healthy parts of the tree. On large trees, you can often spot disease before trees even leaf out from the presence of fungi, differences in bark, or the lack of small twigs.

Many shrubs and fruit trees can be rejuvenated or renewed by the right kind of pruning. Shrubs that you have had for a long time and no longer look nice can be reborn by pruning them down to the ground. Examples are forsythia, weigela, privet, honeysuckle, and hydrangea. This is typically done in late winter. Shrubs can also be renewed by less aggressive, selective pruning, where you remove 1/3 of the oldest stems yearly for three years.

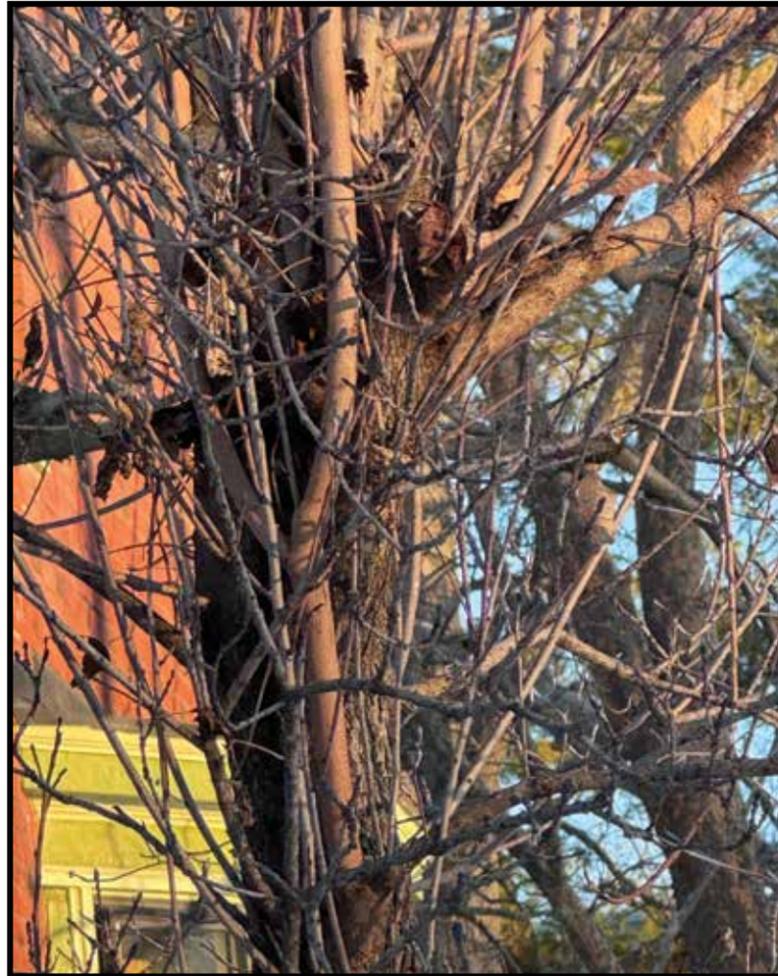


For the health of the tree or shrub, it is important to recognize the branch collar when you are pruning. The branch collar is a slightly raised ring, noticeable where a branch attaches to a larger stem. Often the collar's surface looks slightly different from the rest of the branch. It is considered best practice to prune at the branch collar. You do not want to leave a stub or cut too flush on the

larger branch. Either one can prevent the plant from recovering from the pruning cut. The branch collar allows the plant to properly compartmentalize the wound, keeping out weather, insects, and disease.

The most useful tools are hand pruners, loppers, and small pruning saws. It is important to use sharp and clean tools to prevent unnecessary damage or disease. Experienced pruners often carry a spray bottle of disinfectant to clean tools before moving to a new plant.

Hand pruners are most effective on branches up to 3/4 inch thick. Larger than that and you risk



tearing bark around the cut, causing injury. Loppers generally cut well up to 1 1/2 to 2 inches, but again beware that cutting larger branches may increase the chances of tearing the bark and causing injury. For larger branches, use a pruning saw. Often, people prune larger branches with the three-cut method. This involves first cutting 1/3 of the way through the bottom of the branch (this prevents bark from being torn off), followed by a cut further up the branch (to take it off), then a final clean-up cut near the branch collar (to give the plant a chance to compartmentalize). Using this method, the bark collar is more likely to grow over the cut, repairing it.

You can use this method for larger branches too, but be aware that your safety is the most important priority. Leave branches very large or high in a tree for professional arborists. For full-grown trees, an arborist is a smart idea. The larger the tree, the more valuable it is, and arborists are experts at detecting the signs of problems early, saving a tree.

While pruning is important, over-pruning can be bad for a plant. Overpruning can cause wild growth, introduce decay through wounds, and removes the leaf area necessary for the plant to photosynthesize. Most recommendations are for a max of 15-25% of leaf area pruned in a season.

Late winter is a good time to prune because plants are not actively growing, which provides several advantages. Because most plants are bare, it is easy to see where plants would benefit from pruning. Many plant diseases are not active in cold weather. Shrubs and trees are still dormant - they are not allocating much of their energy to producing leaves, flowers and fruit, so they can spend their energy to repair wounds. So get outside; it is time to prune your shrubs and trees.

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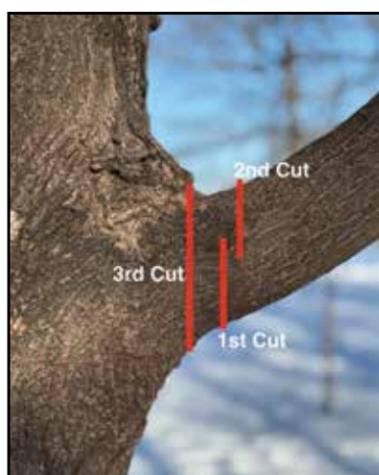
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Help Our Neighborhood Stay Great continued from page 1

housing issues.

Committees Reporting to Executive Director

Concert Series Committee – Andy Cross, volunteer organizer

Assist in planning, implementing and funding the neighborhood’s annual summer concert series, which usually consisted of 3-4 concerts.

SkinkerD Taste Committee – Rotates every 1-2 years, co-chairs

Assist in planning, implementing and funding of annual Homecoming, one of the neighborhood’s largest gatherings and fundraisers

PorchFest STL Committee – Rotates every year

Assist in planning, implementing and funding of annual PorchFest STL music festival – St. Louis’ first neighborhood wide music event.

Fundraising & Marketing Committee – Board Chair

Email us for details.

Fundraising & Marketing Committee shall be responsible for: identifying new sources for funding for SDCC; annual fundraising events and programs; coordinating the scheduling of special events and fundraisers; and developing marketing strategies and communications to effectively position and promote Skinker DeBaliviere throughout the Greater St. Louis Area.



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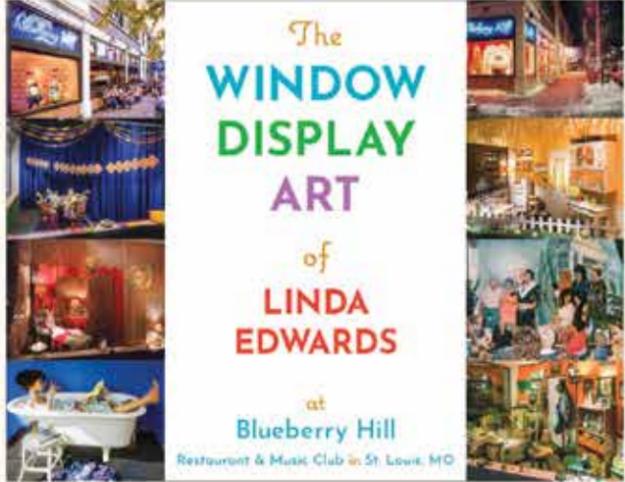

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IN YOUR EAR

By Hawkeye Z. Hoerr, Commentary in the TIMES since 1980

What if you could communicate with a loved one who is no longer alive? Well, you can, sort of.

I decided to leave the techno-dark ages, so I've been playing with ChatGPT. Yep, AI. Artificial Intelligence is already here, of course, and it's quite pervasive. You don't think that your phone calls to businesses are answered by real people, do you? And what about spell-check, Alexa, and Siri?

But ChatGPT is AI at a higher level. To see what it could do I asked the free version to create a conversation with my mom, Rita, who died in 2011. Thinking back to the many meals I had with her, over Chinese food, I began by pasting this portion of her obituary in the ChatGPT comments box: "Rita was known for her positive attitude and always presented a smile as well as a flair for tasty desserts, noisy clocks, and flamboyant decorations. She enjoyed life to its fullest. Rita loved seeing movies, particularly disaster films. Later in life, she said that an advantage of having a bad memory is that she could watch movies over and over while still enjoying them. She most recently resided at Meramec Bluffs Senior Citizens Home and had many fond memories of its staff and residents. She always remembered their birthdays with a card and a cookie."

I then typed, "Create a conversation between Rita and her son, Tom, in which she asks about his dogs and retirement and talks about her friends." ChatGPT's response, sent to me within five seconds, follows.

"Rita: (smiling) Tom! It's so good to see you, sweetheart. How are my granddogs? Are they still causing trouble?"

Tom: (laughing) Oh, you know them, Mom. Max is still chasing squirrels like he owns the yard, and Daisy... well, she's just as spoiled as ever. She'll do anything for a treat.

Rita: (grinning) That's Daisy for you! Always after food. Just like her grandma! I hope you're spoiling them like I taught you.

Tom: Of course! They get plenty of treats. They'd love to come visit you sometime by the way.

Rita: Oh, I'd love that! You know how much I adore having them around. They always brighten up the place. (pausing) Speaking of visits, how's your retirement going? I bet you've got all kinds of time on your hands now.

Tom: (chuckling) It's good, Mom. I'm still adjusting to not having a packed schedule. I've been working on the house and finally started that garden I've been talking about. It's nice to slow down, but I'm still figuring it all out.

Rita: A garden, huh? That sounds wonderful! What are you planting?

Tom: Mostly vegetables. Some tomatoes, cucumbers, and a few herbs. Nothing too fancy.

Rita: Well, that sounds delicious! You know, when you've got a nice batch of tomatoes, bring some over and I'll make you one of my famous tomato pies. I still remember the recipe, thank goodness!

Tom: (smiling) Deal, Mom. I'll bring you a whole basket.

Rita: Perfect! Now, let me tell you about my friends here. You know, it's never dull at Meramec Bluffs. Margaret just got a new clock that chimes every hour—loud as a church bell! Drives everyone nuts, but she loves it. And Edith, oh, she's still the best card player around. Keeps winning our little poker nights!

Tom: (laughing) Sounds like you've got quite the crew there!

Rita: Oh, we do! And you know what? I never forget their

birthdays. Every single one gets a card and one of my cookies. They say I'm the Cookie Queen around here.

Tom: (teasing) Cookie Queen, huh? That sounds like a fitting title for you.

Rita: (grinning) Well, I do my best! You know me, Tom—I like making people smile. And honestly, it keeps me busy and happy. You've got to keep busy, even when you're old like me.

Tom: You're not old, Mom. You're timeless.

Rita: (laughing) Oh, stop it! But really, I'm lucky. The people here are good to me, and I've made some wonderful friends. We look out for each other. It's a blessing.

Tom: I'm glad to hear that, Mom. You deserve to be surrounded by people who care about you.

Rita: (softly) I am, and that includes you, Tom. Don't ever forget how much I love you. Now, enough of this mushy talk—how about some cookies for the road?

Tom: (smiling) You know I can't say no to that."

OK, deep breath here. It's Hawkeye again, not ChatGPT. First, WOW. The reason for my deep breath is that this conversation feels a lot like my mom. Her positive tone and reference to a clock are typical, and "Cookie Queen" is a fitting title. She would love it! Of course, these details were in the information that I submitted, so that makes sense. Still, this dialogue with my mom feels quite natural.

However, ChatGPT, as it will quickly tell you, is prone to errors and that is certainly the case here. My mom would never ask me about my garden because I'm averse to greenery, she certainly didn't cook, and she had incorrect names for my dogs because I hadn't given them to her, I mean to ChatGPT. But it did feel like her. And if I entered a longer and more specific prompt our dialogue would be even richer. If the "discussion" continued, ChatGPT would learn from what I wrote and use that in making mom's comments more lifelike. It would weave what I said into mom's AI consciousness.

But this is just the beginning. Soon I'll be able to have an in-depth conversation with a life-sized hologram of my mom (and I'll be smart enough to give her my dogs' names). She and I will chat regularly. I also look forward to discussing today's politics with Abraham Lincoln.

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