

SUNNYSIDE

Neighborhood News

September 2023

SUNNYSIDE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

SunnysidePortland.org

board@sunnysideportland.org

News from the Vice President

*By Hannah Wallace,
SNA Vice President*

Hi neighbors! I'm writing the column for Chris this month, as he is visiting family. As I write this in mid-August, we're going through another mini-heat wave. I hope you all manage(d) to stay cool during this oppressively hot weather. And I hope you had a restful summer—maybe with some fun travel thrown in—and are ready to get back to school/work/community with renewed energy.

At our August Board meeting, we discussed a letter to PBOT written by Rob Galanakis. Rob is a father of two on the board of the Mount Tabor Neighborhood Association who bikes everywhere. Like many of us, Rob was horrified to learn of the senseless death of librarian Jeanie Diaz, caused by a drunk driver who struck her as she was waiting for a bus on Cesar Chavez Blvd. Jeanie's death was the seventh traffic death in eight days, in the most deadly month for traffic in our city's history. And it was totally avoidable.

With four lanes of traffic, vehicles traveling at a high speed (despite a posted speed limit of 30 mph), and narrow sidewalks, this area of Cesar Chavez is extremely dangerous. It was just a matter of time before someone was hurt or killed. In his research, Galanakis learned that PBOT has already identified a stretch of Cesar Chavez (from I-84 to Stark) to receive a Rose Lane—a dedicated bus lane—in each direction. Rose Lanes not only reduce delays for bus routes, they keep cars and trucks from driving continuously on the outer two lanes of the road. (Cars and trucks can enter the Rose Lane only

when turning right onto a neighborhood street.) In his letter to PBOT director Millicent Williams, Galanakis asks PBOT to immediately extend the Rose Lane south to Division or Powell. (Galanakis will also send copies to everyone on the City Council.) Rose Lanes are quick and cheap projects. "Rose Lanes require no hard infrastructure, and are some of the cheapest projects to implement, with a per-mile cost of about \$200,000. It may be convenient to point to PBOT's ongoing financial woes as a reason to do nothing, but such an attitude is the reason we have dual crises in budget and human safety in the first place. These sorts of low-cost, high-benefit projects are absolutely essential to pursue and prioritize," he writes in the letter. The letter can be read in full on Sunnysideportland.org.

After discussing the letter and knowing that there are additional safety measures PBOT should, and could take, the SNA Board decided to sign onto this letter. However, the week after our meeting the Richmond Neighborhood Association opted not to sign it and are taking time to do more research and get community input. The SNA (and the Mount Tabor Neighborhood Association) believe it's important that all the neighborhoods surrounding Cesar Chavez agree on one unified message. So, at our Sept. 14th General Meeting we hope to get your feedback on the specific traffic calming and safety measures PBOT should implement along Cesar Chavez.

We have a lot planned for our Sept. 14th General Meeting. Continuing the theme of pedestrian safety and traffic calming, both State Rep. Rob Nosse and (hopefully) Jonathan Maus of Bike Portland will share their ideas (and listen to ours) on how we can advocate for, and

get, safer streets — particularly along Cesar Chavez and other busy Portland arterial roads. Rep. Nosse will also give us an overall update on his work in the Legislature, touching on housing, homelessness, addiction treatment and behavioral health issues. Come and bring your input and ideas!

The SNA will staff a table at the Belmont Street Fair. Stop by Saturday, September 9th and introduce yourself and consider getting involved in one of our many Sunnyside projects!

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Upcoming Meetings

**Check sunnysideportland.org
for location details and agenda.**

September

Sept. 14th:

7:00-8:30pm SNA General Meeting

8:30-9:00pm SNA Board Meeting

No SNACC or LUTC meeting

October

Oct. 5th: 6:30-7:30pm SNACC Meeting

Oct. 12th: 7:00-8:30pm Board

Meeting (No General Meeting)

Oct. 26th: 8:00-9:00pm LUTC Meeting

Sunnyside Mennonite Montessori School Welcomes You

*By Paula Brunk Kuhns, SMMS
Board Chair*

In 1978, Portland Mennonite Church dreamed of a way to serve the Sunnyside neighborhood in their effort to “bring peace to the city” (referencing a verse from Jeremiah) and thus Sunnyside Mennonite Montessori School (SMMS) was born. For 45 years, it has provided high-quality, half-day Montessori preschool for children ages 3-6. With the financial support of the church, SMMS is able to offer a sliding scale for tuition making the preschool experience affordable for all families.

SMMS is a single-classroom school with approximately 20 students each year. Using the educational philosophy of Maria Montessori, teachers provide a safe, loving, nurturing environment, facilitating learning opportunities for the children to grow in their independence. Lead Teacher Denée Longan has close to 20 years of teaching experience and enjoys the challenge of meeting each child’s unique needs. Assistant Teacher Eric Zimmerman brings his passion for children’s theater to SMMS and is inspired by the creativity and energy in the classroom. Check out their website at smmspdx.com or email smms.pdx@gmail.com to set up a tour in the coming weeks. They’d love to show you around and welcome your family into the SMMS community.

Help Start A New Children’s Museum!

*By Valerie Kahn, FLIP Board
Member and SNA Member*

The Board of The FLIP Museum is looking for volunteers. FLIP is a 501(c)(3) that seeks to open one or more multicultural children’s museum(s) in the Portland area. Its Board formed to give local children a place to learn through play, with a special emphasis on accessibility, inclusivity, and fostering connections between children and their caregivers. FLIP seeks to create a place where children of all backgrounds, abilities, and identities can learn and connect with their communities through play. FLIP is a young organization, but it has begun this project by creating a mobile exhibit (a play food cart) which it brings to community events in the Metro area, free of charge. FLIP intends to create more mobile exhibits in the future, and has just secured funding to hire its first Executive Director. To learn more about FLIP, check out its website: flipmuseum.org.

FLIP is currently looking for new members of its Board and Advisory Board, as well as volunteers who are interested in helping staff events. The time commitment is variable depending on how large of a role an individual wishes to take on, but FLIP is hoping to build a team of people willing to volunteer long-term. FLIP is particularly interested in people with backgrounds in fundraising, grant writing, event planning, early childhood education, marketing, or nonprofit development. If you are interested in helping bring a new children’s museum to Portland, please email volunteer@flipmuseum.org. FLIP welcomes donations of any size. To donate, please visit flipmuseum.org and click on the Donate Now button.

Sunnyside Neighborhood Getting to Know Your Neighbors

*By Hannah Wallace,
SNA Vice President*

Q&A with Paul Susi

I first got to know Paul Susi when I attended an Oregon Humanities event in 2021 about housing and belonging. Susi was a skillful facilitator—asking questions to get us all thinking about the subject in a broad way. He also impressed me as a deep listener. A few months later, he emailed that he’d started doing some vigilante social work, helping replace lost IDs for people living outside. Knowing that many of our guests at the Sunnyside Shower Project had had their wallets stolen or taken when Rapid Response removed camps, we asked for his help. It wasn’t long before I figured out that Susi, a regular contributor to *Oregon Humanities* magazine, is also an accomplished actor who performs in one-man shows and ensemble performances. A Sunnyside resident since 2010, he is also a long-time participant in the Dragon Boat Races—his team is called “No Teacher Left Behind.”

You are a writer, an actor, and an activist. You’re someone who has been an outdoor school Site Supervisor and worked at homelessness shelters. How do you describe yourself when people ask, “What do you do?”

Paul: Like most folks of my generation, it’s just a matter of survival. I’m a Portland native, a son of immigrants. I was too angry to go to college, too afraid of debt to go to college. I disappointed my parents in their American dream by not going. When I was an angry adolescent, I found that culture and theater gave me structure and meaning in ways that school wasn’t able

to provide. I felt the need to balance a life of culture with a life of service, and also I needed to pay rent. (Laughs.)

You performed Wally Shawn’s one-man show *The Fever* last August at a makeshift theater in Lloyd Center. What drew you to that play?

Paul: I’ve long been in love with that play. It felt—now more than ever—so timely. It’s a person of privilege confronting the realities that undergird his very comfortable, safe lifestyle. A cultured man—a kind, good-hearted and liberal person who, as we all do, has insulated himself from the realities of what it costs to live a life of such privilege. When I first read that play 25 years ago, I knew that it was an important wake-up call.

Somehow it made me think of the current homeless crisis and how some Portlanders insulate themselves from the realities of it.

Paul: It’s like that scene in the play: you’re having a nice dinner at a nice restaurant and right across the street is a homeless shelter. “Can we close the blinds? Because they’re harshing our mellow.”

Will you be performing anything new soon?

Paul: In August, I had a production of *Macbeth* at Salt and Sage production company at Shaking the Tree Studios. We’ll do a remount of the *Iliad*, one actor/one musician—that I toured to over 30 prisons in 2018-2019. We were commissioned to mount it by West Sylvan Middle School. There are Ukrainian and Iranian refugees attending who have been struggling with race and bullying. Their teacher has been using the *Iliad* as a tool to teach how we get caught up in cycles of trauma and rage. The sixth graders said, “Why can’t you take this back to prison again?” I thought, “Oh! I can.”

Recently, you wrote a wonderful essay in *Oregon Humanities* about how you were a host for a low-barrier shelter in 2016. You say, “Most of the guests were in their fifties or older. Many were employed, but simply had one too many marks on their rental history, or couldn’t scratch together enough to make first and last month’s rent plus a deposit.” Coincidentally, this shelter was located in the building on Southwest Washington that has recently been the site of a lot of fentanyl overdoses. What made you



*Actor, Author, and Community Activist
Paul Susi*

decide to share the story of running this shelter now?

Paul: There's been this steady drumbeat of stories in *Willamette Week* and *The Oregonian* about that block—about what they're calling Washington Center. We were mindful of tending that property. Even then there was sensitivity over a shelter there—a lot of business owners were concerned. Over the last few years, in part because of the pandemic, a lot of those businesses have left. They never received support from the city—or from their landlords—that they kept asking for.

The shelter was run by Transition Projects and we made a point of asking our participants to be respectful of our neighbors. To clear the space when we weren't operating, for example. There were never any lines, because we used a reservation system. We had a three block radius that we walked every hour, making sure no one was camping out, no one was overdosing, and asking people to move along. When we first opened, people were flabbergasted [to get access to a low-barrier shelter].

How long have you've done your mutual aid ID Assistance Project? How many people have you helped over the past two years?

Paul: I've helped more than 50, spending about \$1,000. I have a notary commission in Multnomah County—that's the golden ticket. All the big homelessness nonprofits in Portland can issue letters that waive the fees at the DMV for your driver's license. But that means nothing if you don't have ID to prove who you are. If you catch a clerk on a bad day, you need to bring two forms of ID. [Obtaining those—including copies of a birth certificate—costs money.] I walk a line between assistance and advocacy.

As a private citizen, it's not appropriate for me to go with them. I write a check to the DMV with a special checking account. I write a memo to connect the check number and its amount to the person coming in to get their license.

If you're applying for a "Real ID" the person has to have a money order or a check in their own name. [Most houseless folks do not have these.] This is one of the ways we dehumanize people. So I'm starting to develop a cozy relationship with the Post Office, which sells money orders.

My hope is that every neighborhood gets their own notary who could do this. I think it's about personal relationships, like what you guys do at the Shower Project. Building trust within communities that are already there. No one wants to go to Transitions Projects, in part, because you don't know anybody there. It's not your neighborhood—it's not where you hang out.

What do you love about Sunnyside?

Paul: All my life, I've felt we live in nine different Portlands that don't talk to each other. Each slice of Portland thinks it's the only Portland. Sunnyside is one of the rare physical spaces in Portland where it feels like several areas intersect. Laurelhurst and some spaces on Belmont and Hawthorne feel like institutions that give Portland depth and meaningfulness.

Inner Southeast has a layered, and sometimes dark, history. I remember when both the Bagdad and Laurelhurst theaters were porn theaters. Portland has always been racked with police violence and profound inequality. My grandparents were living on 30th and Stark when Mulugeta Seraw was killed. [In 1988, the Ethiopian immigrant was brutally killed by three white supremacists on Southeast 31st and Pine.] My mom was afraid of Inner Southeast. The reality of that history is here. I wrote an article last summer about an unmarked grave at Lone Fir Cemetery where Chee Gong, a Chinese migrant laborer is buried. Hundreds of people—most of them Chinese laborers or asylum patients—are buried at Block 14. For 20 years, people have been saying we should do something about it but there are still no grave markers.

What do you think could be improved upon in Sunnyside?

Paul: I think that the default assumption—not just in Sunnyside but in all the Neighborhood Associations—is that

the people who deserve to be called neighbors are the people who are housed. If I could change one thing, it would be that neighborliness doesn't recognize whether or not you have a physical space of your own. I think we're getting there.

How did you get involved in the Dragon Boat Races? And how fun is it?

Paul: It's so delightful! I've been on this team since 2011—a long time. Our team is No Teacher Left Behind—we're a bunch of middle school teachers. That original generation has retired or dispersed so while there's still a corps of teachers a lot of the members are spouses, siblings, children of teachers, significant others. When I was recruited to the team, it was about to fold. I was one of several theater people who joined at the same time.

Are you a cat person or a dog person?

Paul: I love dogs, I really do. But yeah, my ex and I adopted a cat, Sticky, in Sept. of 2020. She's very dear but very finicky.

Please consider contributing to Susi's ID Assistance Project, via Venmo at @Paul-J-Susi.

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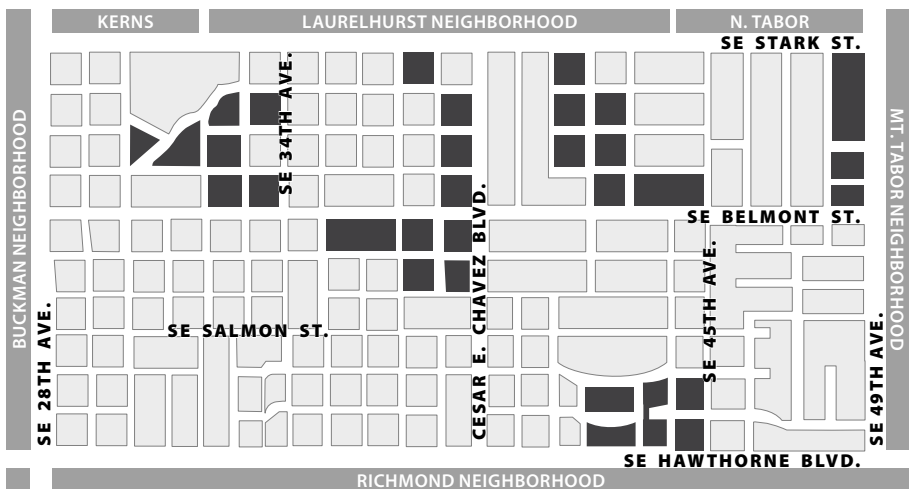
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Sunnyside Neighborhood 'Gap Map'

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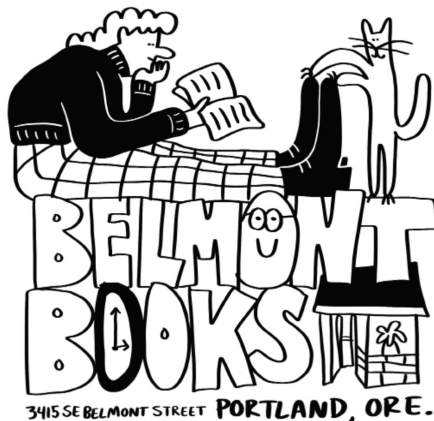
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