



CITY OF CLEVELAND  
Mayor Justin M. Bibb

# Senior Day

FLIP THE SCRIPT ON AGING







**CITY OF CLEVELAND**  
Mayor Justin M. Bibb



FLIP THE SCRIPT ON AGING: MAY 2025

## Recognizing Outstanding Cleveland Seniors

Dear Friends,

Thank you for joining us for the Cleveland Department of Aging's 35<sup>th</sup> Annual Senior Day in observation of Older Americans Month.

Our aging community is the foundation of Cleveland's progress. You have shaped our neighborhoods, mentored generations, and given your time and talents in ways that continue to benefit everyone in our city. Cleveland is a better place because of you and your contributions continue to guide us forward.

Today, I am also pleased to release the **City of Cleveland's Age-Friendly Action Plan for 2025 through 2028**. This plan reflects our commitment to making Cleveland a place where people of all ages can live with dignity, purpose, and opportunity. An age-friendly approach to city planning and community engagement is essential to our shared future. It is my hope that this plan serves as a bridge between local government and community-centered action, helping us work together to ensure every resident can thrive.

My administration remains committed to supporting older residents through continued partnership with the Department of Aging. We will keep working to provide the services and resources needed to support your health, safety, and overall well-being. If you have questions about city services or need assistance, please call our resident hotline at 311. It is a valuable resource for information and support.

We are also proud to honor **17 outstanding individuals** today whose dedication to our city serves as an inspiration. Their service, resilience, and leadership reflect the best of Cleveland. Congratulations to each of our honorees. You remind us of the power of community and the importance of giving back.

Thank you for being here with us. We are honored to celebrate with you and to recognize the essential role you continue to play in shaping the future of Cleveland. Please enjoy today's festivities and know how much you are appreciated.

With sincere gratitude,

*Mayor Justin M. Bibb*



# Age-Friendly Cleveland



## Action Plan 2025– 2028



A plan with a **VISION** to make the City of Cleveland accessible and inclusive for people of all ages and abilities.

**This plan was created with the input of nearly 1000 people who live, work, and play in Cleveland. 82% were seniors.**

1. Increase 'walkability' of public right of way in Cleveland
2. Increase accessible and affordable housing options for disabled and older adults
3. Increase access to transportation through options, education, and advocacy
4. Prepare for extreme weather emergencies by creating infrastructure for the impacts of Climate Change
5. Increase personal safety of Seniors and prevention of violent crimes in neighborhoods
6. Increase intergenerational interactions and relationship building
7. Reduce community-based risk factors for chronic disease and disability



**CITY OF CLEVELAND**  
Mayor Justin M. Bibb



# Age-Friendly Cleveland

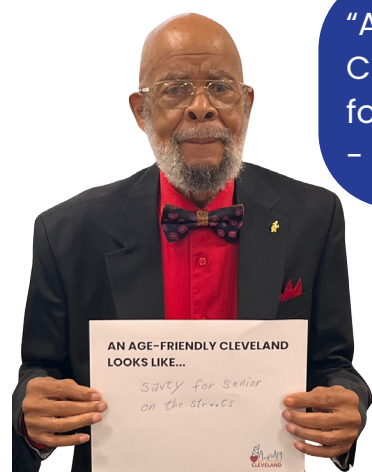


## Action Plan 2025– 2028

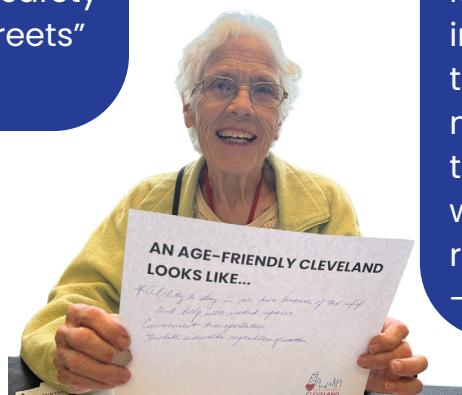


Cleveland is **one** of more than **950 communities** in the AARP Age-Friendly Network. Cleveland joined in 2014, and was the first community from Ohio. This plan is an update to our first plan which began in 2017

8. Promote economic wellness for older and disabled adults through education and service availability
9. Support inclusive, Age-Friendly customer service and communication throughout all City operations
10. Improve and expand supportive services for city employees with caregiving responsibilities
11. Create a permanent infrastructure for continuing Age-Friendly interdepartmental work within Cleveland City Hall



"An Age-Friendly Cleveland looks like safety for Seniors on the streets"  
– Luadrie



"An Age-Friendly Cleveland looks like [the] ability to stay in my own home because of tax relief, and help with needed repairs, convenient transportation, [and] walkable sidewalks, regardless of weather."  
– Phyllis

**Request a copy of the full plan, or submit a comment or question:**

Please Contact Mara Layne, Department of Aging

**Phone:** (216) 664-2480

**Email:** [agefriendly@clevelandohio.gov](mailto:agefriendly@clevelandohio.gov)

## DEPARTMENT OF AGING MISSION

The Cleveland Department of Aging is committed to ensuring Cleveland is an age friendly community by enhancing the quality of life for Cleveland seniors and adults with disabilities through advocacy, planning, service coordination and the delivery of needed services.

## OUR TEAM

**Mary McNamara**, *Director*

**Eric Anderson**, *Home Maintenance Aide*

**Nicole Barkley**, *Project Coordinator – Health and Wellness*

**Rhoda Cantrell**, *Aging Services Administrator – Options Counseling*

**Adam Cisler**, *Administrative Manager*

**Chalsie Cloud**, *Aging Services Administrator – Benefits*

**Iris Cosme**, *Project Director – Care Calls*

**Tony Dial**, *Geriatric Outreach Worker*

**Taijia Elder**, *Administrative Manager*

**Trevon Edwards**, *Aging Services Administrator – Economic Security*

**Ronald Franklin**, *Aging Services Administrator – Information and Assistance*

**Katie Gallagher**, *Project Coordinator – Medicare Outreach*

**Maria Graciani**, *Project Coordinator – Homelessness Prevention*

**Emily Holt**, *Aging Services Administrator – Supportive Services*

**Joe Houston**, *Home Maintenance Aide*

**Frank Isaac Jr.**, *Chore Services Coordinator*

**Angela Johnson**, *Intake Specialist – Home Repair*

**Theresa Kirby**, *Intake Specialist*

**Renee Lavelle**, *Project Coordinator*

**Mara Layne**, *Age Friendly Cleveland Administrator*

**Emilly Lebron**, *Hispanic Liaison*

**Tyrone Montgomery**, *Aging Services Administrator – Home Repair*

**Maurice Nunn**, *Home Maintenance Aide*

**Martha Pontoni**, *Project Coordinator – Home Repair*

**Jennifer Rosich**, *Administrative Manager*

**J Roz**, *Geriatric Outreach Worker*

**Gladys Soto**, *Geriatric Outreach Worker*

**Yahaira Soto**, *Administrative Manager*

**Chad Stentz**, *Aging Services Administrator – Age Friendly Home Investment Program*

**Edward Tytko**, *Aging Services Administrator – Senior Initiative*

**Roxie Watkins**, *Project Coordinator – HEAP*

## SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

**Age Friendly Cleveland** – The Department of Aging is a member of the World Health Organization's (WHO) Global Network of Age Friendly Cities and the AARP Network of Age Friendly Communities which includes assessing and developing a community plan to increase the age friendly aspects of the city.

**Bed Bug Assistance Program** – This program helps seniors and adults with disabilities, on a limited income, with the extermination of bed bugs in their homes.

**Benefits Assistance** – Benefits Assistance provides seniors and adults with disabilities help in securing benefits to meet their financial and health needs. The free confidential Benefits CheckUp program is used. One on one assistance to enroll in benefits is provided. Benefits Assistance is a service of the Cleveland Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC).

**Cell Phone Recycling** – The Cleveland Department of Aging is participating in a program of the National Council on Aging and Cellular Recycler to collect old cell phones, which are sold, and the proceeds support senior programs. This initiative is good for seniors and is good for the environment.

**Chore Services** – Chore services may include: general house cleaning, lawn mowing, leaf raking, snow shoveling, and installation of smoke detectors.

**Cleveland Care Calls** – Cleveland Care Calls is an automated telephone reassurance system for Cleveland seniors to check on their well-being.

**Cleveland Disability Awareness** – The Cleveland Department of Aging, in collaboration with other departments and agencies, celebrates disability awareness with programs highlighting abilities and inclusion.

**Cleveland Senior Day** – Senior Day is a citywide celebration of our older citizens with an information fair, entertainment, lunch and recognition of outstanding contributing seniors.

**Cleveland Senior Walk** – The Cleveland Department of Aging sponsors Cleveland Senior Walks in partnership with Public Safety and with Recreation.

**Cleveland Tree Assistance Program for Seniors** – This program assists Cleveland seniors and adults with disabilities by removing and trimming hazardous trees on their property.

**Courtesy Cupboard** – This service, a collaboration between the Department of Aging and the Greater Cleveland Food Bank, provides clients in need with a small supply of shelf ready emergency food until a longer term plan for accessing food is established.

**Economic Security for Cleveland Seniors** – This program helps seniors to improve their economic situation. Core services, provided through a team of partner agencies, include: assistance with public benefits, housing, employment, emergency assistance, financial counseling, legal assistance, health and mental health services, supportive and aging network services and kinship family support. Economic case management and specialized service coordination is a service of the Cleveland ADRC.

## SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

**Homeless Prevention Services for Seniors** – The Cleveland Department of Aging provides case management for persons 60 years of age and older and adults with disabilities 50 years of age and older who are at risk of homelessness to help them maintain housing.

**Information and Assistance (I&A)** – Provides current and unbiased information on services that support independence and links seniors and adults with disabilities to organizations that can help. I&A is a service of the Cleveland ADRC.

**Options Counseling** – Provides guidance to seniors and adults with disabilities, family members, caregivers and/or significant others about community services and support to fit one's need and preferences in decision making about long term support options. Options Counseling is a service of the Cleveland ADRC.

**Outreach Activities and Social Media** – Department staff attend community meetings, senior fairs, health fairs, and festivals to present and to distribute literature about programs and services available for older persons. Follow us on Facebook at Cleveland Department of Aging and on Twitter/X at ClevelandAging.

**Senior Homeowner Assistance Program & Age Friendly Home Investment Program** – Provides grants to low-income seniors and adults with disabilities who own and reside in homes needing critical health safety or maintenance repairs. Typical repairs include: roof replacement, major electrical work, major plumbing work, repair or replacing the front and/or back steps, porch repairs, and the installation of ramps.

**Senior Guest House** – Located on the campus of Fairhill Partners, this home like setting for persons 60 years of age and older provides a safe environment for seniors in residential crises or unsafe living conditions. This is a collaborative project of Fairhill Partners and the Cleveland Department of Aging.

**Senior Initiative** – The goals of the Senior Initiative are to provide Cleveland seniors and adults with disabilities assistance to prevent them from falling victim to predatory lenders or scam contractors; and to help them avoid citation for housing violations. This initiative is a cooperative effort of the Departments of Aging, Building and Housing, Community Development, Public Health and Law.

**Senior Power** – A program designed to increase knowledge and awareness among older persons in the areas of crime prevention, fire hazards, fire and fall prevention, emergency services, consumer issues, and programs for older adults. The program is a collaboration between the Departments of Public Safety and Aging.

**Senior Transportation** – Provides transportation services for seniors to medical appointments and errands through collaboration with the Senior Transportation Connection, Cleveland City Council and the Departments of Community Development and Aging.

**Supportive Services** – Helps older persons and adults with disabilities access the services, benefits and programs available to them. Examples include, but are not limited to: assisting seniors with utilities that have been or are about to be disconnected, assistance in accessing food, housing, homemaker services, personal care assistance, chore services, and home repair and maintenance services.





# Walk on Wednesday mornings with the Cleveland Department of Aging

The Cleveland Department of Aging is sponsoring 13 walks this summer. You can take these walks at your own pace but with the support of others. The walks will be outside and will start and end at the locations below. **All participants will receive a Senior Walk t-shirt and a resource bag.** Look for the Department of Aging Staff at each location. *There is no cost to participate.*

**Start time is at 9:00 a.m.**

**June 4      Zelma George Resource and Recreation Center**  
**3155 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, Cleveland, OH 44104** *(meet inside center)*

- Boxed Lunch for the first 300 walkers
- Presentation by Cleveland Fire after the walk on Fire and Fall Prevention

**June 11      Frederick Douglass Resource and Recreation Center**  
**15401 Miles Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44128**

- Boxed Lunch for the first 300 walkers
- *Silver Spokes*, a presentation about sharing the road with cyclists and an opportunity to try out some age friendly bicycles after the walk with Bike Cleveland

**June 18      League Park**  
**6601 Lexington Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44103**

- League Park Museum open and Live Music after the walk
- Cleveland Public Library joining with free books after the walk

**June 25      Cuyahoga Community College (TRI-C) Metro Campus**  
**3409 Woodland Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44115** *(meet at the track)*

**July 2      Euclid Beach Park**  
**16301 Lakeshore Boulevard, Cleveland, OH 44110** *(meet near the pier)*




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**AGING**

<b>July 9</b>	<b>Edgewater Beach</b> <b>7600 Cleveland Memorial Shoreway, Cleveland, OH 44102</b> <i>(meet at the Beach House - Lower Level)</i>
<b>July 16</b>	<b>North Coast Yard</b> <i>(new location)</i> <b>515 Erieside Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44114</b> <i>(north of Browns Stadium next to Steamship Mather)</i>
<b>July 23</b>	<b>Loew Park</b> <b>2919 Oak Park Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44109</b>
<b>July 30</b>	<b>Lakefront Reservation at the Cleveland Metroparks</b> <i>(new location)</i> <b>North of the East 72<sup>nd</sup> Exit off Interstate 90/State Route 2, Cleveland, OH 44103</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A beautiful path along Lake Erie</li> <li>• Cleveland Public Library joining with free books after the walk</li> </ul>
<b>Aug 6</b>	<b>Zone Resource and Recreation Center</b> <b>6301 Lorain Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44102</b> <i>(meet at the Gazebo)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boxed Lunch for the first 200 walkers</li> <li>• <i>Silver Spokes</i>, a presentation about sharing the road with cyclists and an opportunity to try out some age friendly bicycles after the walk</li> </ul>
<b>Aug 13</b>	<b>Halloran Park</b> <b>3550 W 117<sup>th</sup> Street, Cleveland, OH 44111</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fresh Produce Distribution from Greater Cleveland Food Bank and live music after the walk in the Gazebo</li> </ul>
<b>Aug 20</b>	<b>Clark Field</b> <b>950 Clark Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44113</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fresh Produce Distribution from Greater Cleveland Food Bank after the walk</li> </ul>
<b>Aug 27</b>	<b>Impett Park</b> <b>3207 W 153<sup>rd</sup> Street, Cleveland, OH 44111</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pickleball demonstrations, celebration of walkers, and picnic after the walk</li> <li>• Cleveland Public Library joining us with free books to take home!</li> </ul>

***Note: All Parks have flush toilets.***

## To register:

 **Call:** 216-664-6152

 **Email:** [aging@clevelandohio.gov](mailto:aging@clevelandohio.gov)

 **Online:** [forms.office.com/g/eEeuCYeITS](https://forms.office.com/g/eEeuCYeITS) *(or scan the QR code)*



***\*By registering ahead of time, you will be notified if the walk is cancelled due to inclement weather.***







*Nominated By Council Member Joseph T. Jones, Ward 1*

## *Delores English*

Ms. Delores English's secret to enjoying a long and enjoyable life is to keep moving, exercise and watch your diet. Delores also enjoys peace and tranquility and if she had to select a place to take first time visitors to Cleveland, they would visit the museums at University Circle.

Delores was born in Columbus, Ohio. With the support of her parents, Hattie and John Jamison, Delores completed East High School, in Columbus, Ohio and attended Franklin College. She has two sisters and three brothers. Delores has two sons, Drew and Dana English and two grandchildren, Dawn and Dana English.

For 26 years, Ms. English worked for Standard Oil in Cleveland, Ohio as a Business Systems Analyst. Developing systems and determining needs, space, and cost were major areas of her focus. In addition, Delores set up the library to maintain policy books, documentation, and microfilm, and established and implemented programs. She also facilitated orientation for new employees and consultations when necessary.

Delores was invited by a friend to attend a council meeting and this activity led her to voluntarily working 5 days a week doing office work and serving as a cook once a month at Harvard Community Service Center. Delores was awarded a Certificate of Participation for preparing and serving food.

Delores has served as the Street Club Treasurer and has supported March of Dimes over the years by collecting money from neighbors, and has received numerous awards and accolades. Delores was awarded the World's Best Mother certificate from the Cleveland Public Library -Lee Harvard Branch for taking children in the neighborhood to the library during summer months.

Currently, Delores prepares food for the Haiti program serving various churches in Cleveland, and she has participated in doing this work for the past 40 years. In addition, Ms. English serves as the Captain of the Stockbridge Watch Club and attends council meetings, reports back to the club, provides monthly care calls, and assists with the monthly newsletter.

***Congratulations Delores!***





*Nominated By Council Member Kevin Bishop, Ward 2*

## Joyce E. Hood

Mrs. Joyce E. Hood was born in Birmingham, Alabama and moved to Cleveland in 1964 with her parents, Louella and Robert Bell, two brothers, four sisters and one stepbrother. Joyce graduated from John Adams High School and attended Cuyahoga Community College.

Mrs. Hood has been married to her beloved husband, Mr. Daryl Hood since 1993. They have 1 son, Kelvin L. Coker and daughter-in-law Donita L. Coker. They are the proud grandparents of DeShawn L. Burgan, DyJohna L. and Kiauna L. Coker, proud great-grandparents of Josiyah L. Coker and happy godparents to Antonyio J. Boazman. Mr. and Mrs. Hood are members of Second Ebenezer Missionary Baptist Church.

Joyce is the Founder and Executive Director of K.N.O.W.L.E.D.G.E. Youth Organization. K.N.O.W.L.E.D.G.E. stands for Kind, Nurturing, Opportunity, Winning, Loyal, Education, Determination, God, and Everlasting. Joyce believes that each one of these words are needed to gain an understanding of ourselves and each other to prosper and help others prosper as well. Joyce began this important work in the 1990s. Mrs. Hood was a participant in the first cohort to complete the Neighborhood Leadership Development Program.

Joyce loves her ability to engage youth, their families, along with many organizations, businesses and city officials in their community, offering tools that help identify desires and strengths and promote learning and self-worth, which will inevitably enable youth to become strong leaders. The organization formed by simply helping youth on Mrs. Hood's street, and then assisting youth with school activities.

The organization has received many awards including the BeechBrook Helping Hands Awards, a Leadership Award from the 11<sup>th</sup> Congressional District Office, and the Trailblazer Award from MyCom. In addition, the organization has worked with numerous organizations to search for missing children, hold rallies and vigils, and serve the community to support families during this difficult time. You can find the team serving as volunteers at various food pantries, Greater Mount Calvary Church, and the Cleveland Food Bank.

Joyce desires for youth and seniors to come together on a regular basis to have the opportunity to share their experiences and to enable seniors to speak life to youth.

***Congratulations Joyce!***





*Nominated By Council Member Kerry McCormack, Ward 3*

## Mary Grace DeStefanis

Mary Grace DeStefanis is a proud lifelong Clevelander whose life reflects a deep commitment to faith, family, and community. Born into a vibrant Italian-American family, she is one of seven siblings and shares a particularly close bond with her twin brother, Harold. Her family roots run deep—her mother, Connie, emigrated from Italy at the age of 11, and the family has maintained a strong connection to their heritage, highlighted by a memorable 2011 trip to her mother's hometown with nine relatives.

Raised in an Italian neighborhood on Woodland Avenue, Mary Grace attended Our Lady of Mt. Carmel School and graduated from Beaumont High School. Her dedication to education led her to earn a B.A. in English from Bowling Green State University, a teaching certificate from Cleveland State University, and a master's degree in Integrated Studies from Cambridge College.

Mary Grace devoted over 30 years to adult education, teaching in the Cleveland and Parma City School Districts and at the Cuyahoga County Public Library. Her passion for helping adults—often at transformative points in their lives—was a hallmark of her career. Her approach was marked by patience, empathy, and a deep belief in the potential of every learner.

In the 1980s, Mary Grace made her home on Cleveland's near west side, becoming an integral part of a tight-knit, welcoming neighborhood. A devoted member of St. Patrick's Catholic Church, she serves in multiple ministries, including choir, piano accompaniment, phone volunteering, and visiting the homebound. She is also a Eucharistic Minister and participates in parish collaboration leadership with St. Malachi.

Her service extends beyond the church. Mary Grace is a member of the Catholic Worker Community, living out its values of radical hospitality and social justice. In retirement, her contributions have only expanded—she tutors children, teaches piano, gardens, walks with neighbors, and participates in a prayer group on her street. As an associate of the Sisters of St. Joseph, she continues to draw inspiration from a life of spiritual reflection and compassionate action.

Warm, kind, and deeply rooted in service, Mary Grace is a pillar of her community. Her life stands as a testament to the transformative power of kindness, faith, and education.

***Congratulations Mary Grace!***





Nominated By Council Member Deborah Gray, Ward 4

## Tamara L. Chappell

Tamara L. Chappell is a dedicated community leader, longtime business owner, and passionate advocate for civic engagement. Raised in Cleveland's Glenville neighborhood, Tamara has lived in the Shaker Square area for the past 32 years, where her presence continues to be a force for positive change.

Tamara graduated from Glenville High School and earned a degree in special education from the historic Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. While she ultimately pursued a different career path, her commitment to service never wavered. In 1989, she launched *Emerald Supply Inc.*, a Cleveland-based janitorial supply company that thrived for 33 years. Known for its quality and community presence, the company became so respected that customers requested her products by name. In recognition of her impact, October 7 was officially named *Emerald Supply Day* in the City of Cleveland.

Tamara's commitment to her neighborhood runs deep. She has served on the Shaker Square Advisory Board and is currently the chairperson for owner engagement for the Morelands Group, working with over 80 apartment building owners to ensure quality housing. She is also active in the Shaker Square Alliance, Organize Ohio and played a key role in the successful reopening of the post office on East 130<sup>th</sup> Street.

A former treasurer of the Young Democrats of Cleveland, Tamara has always been politically engaged. She once received a Citizen Award from then-Mayor Michael White after she helped police apprehend a bank robbery suspect.

She has served on the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, the board of the National Association of Female Executives, and the Cleveland Multiple Sclerosis Board. A proud member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, she has also sponsored local t-ball and little league teams.

Tamara is the proud mother of Justin Chappell, and the daughter of Frances and the late Isaac Sr. She has three siblings: Isaac Jr., Tanya Holsey, and Derek. In retirement, she enjoys gardening—maintaining a community garden at East 83<sup>rd</sup> and Woodland—traveling, biking, and walking the sidewalks of Shaker Square and paths of Shaker Lakes.

***Congratulations Tamara!***





*Nominated By Council Member Richard Starr, Ward 5*

## Luthell Perry

Luthell Perry, affectionately known as Mama, Grandma, or Mama Cookie, was born in Ft. Myers, Florida. At the age of three, she moved to Cleveland, Ohio, with her parents, Voncile and Samuel Wingo. Though she has spent the majority of her life in Cleveland, with over 35 years in the Central Neighborhood, she still maintains close family ties in Florida. Her roots run deep, and her heart is even deeper.

A proud graduate of John F. Kennedy High School, Ms. Perry pursued studies in accounting at Cuyahoga Community College. She built a long and meaningful career with the Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority (CMHA), where she worked across multiple departments including housekeeping, the training department, resident services, and HIPPY—Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters. She also volunteered with the Local Advisory Council at CMHA, passionately organizing events and collecting as many as 300 uniforms for back-to-school drives.

Luthell is the proud mother of four children—David, Kenyada, Will, and DeShawnta. As the matriarch of a beautiful five-generation family, she cherishes her role as grandmother, great-grandmother, and great-great-grandmother. Her home has always been a safe haven—full of warmth, love, laughter, and the smell of good food at one of her many cookouts. She has always welcomed everyone, especially children, helping with homework or just offering a comforting presence.

Despite facing health challenges, including a stroke that requires her to use a wheelchair, Luthell remains strong, resilient, and full of life. Her days are filled with reading, crossword puzzles, cheering on Cleveland sports teams, and spending time with loved ones.

A true pillar of her community, Luthell has touched countless lives with her kindness and unwavering spirit. She has known Councilman Starr since he was a young boy and continues to enjoy the beauty and vibrancy of her neighborhood. Her legacy is not only in her family but also in the hearts of all those she has welcomed, mentored, and inspired throughout her life.

***Congratulations Luthell!***





Nominated By Council President Blaine A. Griffin, Ward 6

## Deborah Landrum

Deborah J. Landrum is a proud Cleveland native, born and raised in the Central neighborhood and a long-time resident of University Circle for 17 years. A passionate advocate for lifelong learning and community empowerment, Deborah's journey is a testament to resilience, service, and self-determination.

She began her academic journey at Jane Addams High School and later attended Cuyahoga Community College. Although life took her in different directions, Deborah returned to Tri-C at the age of 55, where she graduated from both the general college and the Robert L. Lewis Honors College with a specialization in business. A member of Phi Theta Kappa, she was recognized as a certified scholar in philosophy and social justice.

Her pursuit of education did not stop there. Deborah went on to earn her Bachelor's degree in Business and Organizational Leadership from Capella University, followed by her Master of Business Administration (MBA). She is also a proud member of Sigma Alpha Pi, the National Society of Leadership and Success.

Professionally, Deborah has served in various roles, including positions at East Cleveland Water, Medical Mutual's downtown Cleveland office, and the Cleveland Board of Education. Her professional experiences reflect her commitment to public service and organizational excellence.

Deborah's community involvement runs deep. She is an elected precinct leader for Ward 6K and a member of the Central Executive Committee. She also founded and led the Ambleside Women's Group for 12 years, and served as president of its local advisory committee for four years.

She is the loving mother of three children—James, Jeffrey, and Tiffany Black—grandmother to five, and great-grandmother to one. Deborah was a devoted daughter of Joyce and Frederick Drake and sister to Eldridge, Cleveland, Randall Black, and the late Joyce Eddington.

A self-proclaimed "Spicy Senior," Deborah enjoys 1970s music and is a proud extreme coupon junkie. Her favorite quote, by Plato, guides her philosophy: *"We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy is when men are afraid of the light."*

**Congratulations Deborah!**





*Nominated By Council Member Stephanie Howse-Jones, Ward 7*

## *Rico Dwayne Escortt*

Rico Escortt is a proud son of Cleveland, born and raised in the historic Hough neighborhood, where he still lives today. His early years were marked by movement and change, but Hough remained a constant—and ultimately, the place he would dedicate himself to improving.

Rico attended Harry Davis, Addison, and Shaw High Schools. He built a diverse career, working in industrial manufacturing as a supervisor at PCC Airfoils, where parts for airplanes were crafted. He also served in radiology at the Cleveland Clinic and gained hands-on experience in construction alongside his uncles.

Family is at the center of Rico's life. He is the loving father of three—Taja Escortt, Mario Williams, and Rico Mauldin—and a proud grandfather to six. He is the devoted son of the late Joyce E. Scott, who passed in 2013, and the caregiver for his Uncle Robert Barkley, the last living sibling of Joyce's 15 brothers and sisters. Rico has transformed three vacant lots near his home into spaces for community events, painted in his mother's favorite colors—yellow and white. These spaces serve as gathering places for repasses, church events, and meetings, reflecting Rico's belief in community healing and connection.

Rico's heart beats for his neighborhood. He devotes his time to maintaining and beautifying Carrie Cain Park across the street from his home, where a memorial angel stands in honor of his mother.

A man of many talents, Rico won the Golden Gloves award in Cleveland in 1985 and once sang in the Scott Raven Band. He finds peace in fishing, yard work, healthy living, and learning from the wisdom of elders.

With gratitude for those who have supported him along the way, Rico continues to give back—day by day, block by block. His life is a living tribute to legacy, service, and love.

***Congratulations Rico!***





*Nominated By Council Member Michael Polensek, Ward 8*

## Christopher McGrath

Christopher Regan McGrath knows what it means to be of service to his community. Whether you find him in the church pews, the high school hallways, or on the block of his neighborhood, Christopher will be busy helping.

Mr. McGrath is one of nine children, five boys and four girls, born to Philip T. and Marjorie McGrath in Cleveland. His family has such strong ties to the city that a branch still lives in the original house they built in the 1920s. Together the family would attend Our Lady of the Lake, a Roman Catholic Parish where Christopher still serves as a Eucharistic Minister and helps to care for the church. Christopher attended St. Joseph High School, an experience so impactful that graduating in 1969 would not be the end of his involvement there. Today, he volunteers at the school, helping with fundraising, operations, and occasional substitute teaching. Because of his dedication to St. Joseph's, his photo is hanging in the Service and Commitment Viking Hall of Fame.

After high school, Mr. McGrath joined The Marianists, also known as the Society of Mary. He took his temporary vows, and moved to Kalamazoo, MI where he worked alongside other brothers and priests at a high school, maintaining the building. Priesthood ultimately was not the path for Christopher, and he came home to Cleveland to work on ore boats on all five Great Lakes, before ultimately settling into his career as a salesman of greeting cards, gifts, and religious articles.

Christopher married his wife Linda in 1979, and the pair have been together for more than 45 years. Together they have three wonderful children, Erin, Katie, and Matthew. Christopher and Linda have five beautiful grandchildren and a sixth, Ethan, who watches over them from heaven. His grandchildren are his pride and joy. He is thrilled that his oldest grandson will be attending St. Ignatius High School in the fall!

When he is not spending time with his grandkids or serving at his church or alma mater, you can find Christopher golfing with friends or attending his local Block Watch meetings. Councilman Polensek proclaims that Mr. McGrath is the "perfect example of an active senior."

***Congratulations Christopher!***



VIKING  
  
FOOTBALL



Nominated By Council Member Kevin Conwell, Ward 9

## Donald Freeman

Donald “Don” Freeman is a lifelong advocate for civil and educational rights who was born to James W. Freeman and Mary Blackmon Freeman (both deceased) in Cleveland. Don and his siblings, Kamal, Roger (deceased) and Michael grew up in the Central and Glenville neighborhoods attending Outhwaite School and Case-Woodland School. From an early age, Don’s education felt valuable, and was made even more so as he first crossed paths with his soul mate, Norma Jean in the halls of John Adams High. Eventually, he graduated from Glenville High School in 1957. Post high school, Mr. Freeman was admitted to Case Western Reserve University, and walked 45 minutes every day just to attend class. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in History in 1961.

Immediately after he graduated from college, Don jumped back into world of education, and taught social studies for four years. Mr. Freeman had his teaching career cut short when he was fired for his stances on social justice and political topics by the school board. Losing his job allowed Don to dedicate himself to a career in social services in a way that aligned with his values. During this time he would co-found the civil rights and action group, RAM.

Don and his soul-mate, Norma Jean, also an incredible social justice advocate until her passing in 2019, were married in 1965. Together the couple published *Vibrations*, a magazine covering major issues that affect the African American community. The magazine, though, was not their only baby; the couple had three sons, Kevin, Bilal, and Kwame.

Though he officially retired in 2004, Mr. Freeman was and continues to be deeply involved in the fight for Civil Rights and active in local politics. He and Norma Jean helped establish the Committee for Social Justice, a group dedicated to fighting racism, housing discrimination, excessive use of force by law enforcement, and more. Some of his personal history as an activist is covered in his memoir, *Reflections of A Resolute Radical*, which he co-published and edited with Norma Jean.

When he isn’t busy writing, advocating for change, or helping others, you can find Don listening to jazz music. He especially loves Miles Davis and John Coltrane, and will listen to Hard Bop and most other kinds of modern jazz.

**Congratulations Don!**





Nominated By Council Member Anthony Hairston, Ward 10

## Adele Nash

Adele Nash is a proud Cleveland native who grew up on East Boulevard and raised her family in the vibrant Glenville neighborhood. Today, she continues to be a dedicated community member residing in Ward 10.

A graduate of East Tech High School, Adele spent 34 years working at Glastics Corporation as a tow motor operator, demonstrating resilience, dedication, and a strong work ethic. Driven by creativity and a love for home aesthetics, she pursued her passion by launching *Designing on a Dime*, an interior design business she ran from 2004 to 2008. Though the economic downturn brought the business to a close, her passion for design still shines through in everything she does.

Adele is the loving daughter of Lavon and Ernest Simmons (both deceased) and the fourth oldest of ten siblings. Family remains at the heart of her life—she is a devoted mother to five children: Shanele, Terese, Timothy, Cachet, and Lijah. She is also a proud grandmother of 13 and great-grandmother of six. Her close bond with her siblings continues to be a source of strength and joy.

In her earlier years, Adele was deeply involved in her children's education, serving as PTA president for three years at Mary B. Martin Elementary School. Alongside her late husband Donald, she shared a love of bowling—they competed in leagues for over three decades and once bowled in five different leagues at the same time. She also passed on her love for roller-skating by teaching each of her children to skate.

Now retired, Adele continues to uplift her community through her work at Collinwood Resource and Recreation Center, where she has been active since 2012. She motivates fellow seniors to stay active, monitor their health, and eat well. From organizing monthly wellness rewards to raffling off fruit baskets, Adele's energy is infectious.

She also volunteers at the Five Point Community Center for produce distributions and is a member of the Democratic Election Board.

Adele's philosophy is simple and powerful: "*You are as old as you feel.*" She believes in living longer through movement, healthy eating, and a joyful spirit.

**Congratulations Adele!**





*Nominated By Council Member Danny Kelly, Ward 11*

## Penelope “Penny” McNally

Penelope “Penny” McNally was born and raised in Detroit, Michigan, just across the lake from Cleveland. She grew up in a large Catholic family with eight brothers and one sister. Remarkably, Penny shares a birthday with her father—a special bond that marked the beginning of a unique and spirited life.

Penny’s father accepted a position with Glidden Paint on the west side of Cleveland, prompting the family’s move from Detroit. However, Penny remained in Detroit for a time, staying with one of her brothers to complete her education before eventually relocating to Cleveland. Once settled, she began working at Dunn & Bradstreet in the iconic Terminal Tower.

A devoted mother, Penny raised four children—two sons and two daughters. Family continues to be central to her life, including the joy of being a grandmother. In a serendipitous twist of fate, her two grandsons—one born to her daughter and the other to her son—share the exact same birthday.

Penny’s work life was as dynamic as her family life. While her husband worked days at Standard Oil, Penny worked evenings, including a memorable stint at Stouffer’s Top of the Town, one of Cleveland’s most celebrated fine dining establishments. She fondly recalls serving well-known guests in an atmosphere of elegance and charm. She also played a large role when Otto Moser’s moved to Playhouse Square.

Deeply rooted in service to her community, Penny has given her time generously—serving Thanksgiving meals at St. Augustine’s Church for many years and delivering for Meals on Wheels through Our Lady of Mount Carmel. She is a devoted parishioner of St. Vincent DePaul Church, the same parish her husband attended as a child. Her husband was deeply involved in civic life, with ties to the Cleveland School Board and the city’s Athletic Commission. Together, they chose to return to the community of Ward 11, where Penny has lived since 1973.

Penny is an active member of the Ward 11 Democratic Club and is known for her high energy and zest for life. She frequents the YMCA in West Park and Lakewood, as well as Gunning Recreation Center—often attending seven days a week for cardio, weightlifting, Zumba, and more. She also enjoys playing pinochle and has participated in several Senior Walks over the years.

An avid reader, Penny is a familiar face at the Cleveland Public Library, always on the lookout for her next great read. Her heritage—Pennsylvania Dutch on her mother’s side and French Canadian on her father’s—adds to the rich tapestry of her life story.

***Congratulations Penny!***





*Nominated By Council Member Rebecca Maurer, Ward 12*

## Donna Smith

Donna M. Smith was born in Cleveland, Ohio, to her mother, Vivian Satterfield (deceased). She is the youngest of four siblings: William Satterfield, Sandra Satterfield (deceased), and Yolanda Boyd. Donna spent a significant portion of her childhood in Ravenna, Ohio, where she was raised by her late aunt and uncle, Claude and Mary Smith. She returned to Cleveland for middle school, attending St. Agnes Parish and Hough School. Her high school years were split between Ravenna High School and Jane Addams Vocational School. Donna went on to attend Kent State University for two years.

Donna inherited a love for sewing from her mother, who ran the sewing department at Vocational Guidance Services. Donna assisted her there before landing a job sewing car seats at General Motors, where she worked from 1974 until accepting a buyout in 1990.

Over the years, Donna lived in several Cleveland neighborhoods before she and her husband settled in Slavic Village in 1999. Donna and her husband, Richard Smith, have been married since 1984. Richard worked as a bus driver for RTA. Together, they had three children: Richard Smith Jr. (deceased), Tia Smith, and Patrick Smith. Donna and Richard are proud grandparents and great-grandparents. Born prematurely, Donna experienced significant hearing loss early in life and has worn hearing aids most of her life. She often jokes that they come in handy when her husband—or their cats—get too noisy.

Gardening has been one of Donna's lifelong passions. What began as a childhood hobby has grown into a mission to "beautify Fleet Avenue." For the past nine years, she has maintained vibrant plant displays along Fleet. Just two years ago, she planted 1,000 tulips along the avenue. More recently, she and a group of women added more flowers at the corner of East 49<sup>th</sup> and Fleet. Donna hopes her efforts will inspire others to start their own gardening projects or pitch in on community beautification.

A self-proclaimed "Energizer Bunny" and "Jill of all trades," Donna stays active. If she's not gardening, crafting, picking up Daisy's Ice Cream, or visiting The Darl Center for the Arts, she's likely helping her family in some way. Donna is also the primary caregiver for her husband. In partnership with their church, New Hope Chapel, Donna's daughter, Tia, founded *Tia's Closet*—a donation-based store on Fleet Avenue where people can get what they need at no cost. Donna helps with donation pickups and supports the mission however she can.

***Congratulations Donna!***





Nominated By Council Member Kris Harsh, Ward 13

## Pauline Eskut

Pauline Eskut resided in Tazewell, Virginia, before relocating to Cleveland with her husband, Michael Eskut, in the late 1950s. Pauline is one of 12 children, including her twin sister, Pearline. Upon arriving in Cleveland, Mr. and Mrs. Eskut settled on Mapledale Avenue in the Brooklyn Centre neighborhood before eventually moving to the Old Brooklyn neighborhood, where Pauline continues to reside.

Pauline and Michael met in Virginia at a church roller skating event. When the church bus broke down, Michael gave Pauline—and several other church members—a ride home. Pauline also shared that she attended college in Virginia and played on a championship basketball team.

The Eskuts' were blessed with three beautiful children and enjoyed many large family gatherings throughout their lives together, especially during the holidays. Large gatherings came naturally to Pauline, who, as mentioned, came from a large family herself. Today, she is proud to be a grandmother to eight and a great-grandmother to seven.

In addition to raising her family, Pauline worked as the parish secretary at Brooklyn United Memorial Methodist Church on Archwood Avenue for 42 years. Her family were also active members of the church. During her interview for this article, Pauline and the author reminisced about the popular street sales that once lined Archwood Avenue—traditions that continue to this day.

Ms. Eskut was nominated by her councilman, Kris Harsh, for being a kind and helpful community member and neighbor. Mr. Harsh stated, *"Ms. Eskut does an amazing job keeping her yard looking nice. She has been noted for helping a neighbor in need by pulling in their garbage cans when they were at work and unable to do so. She is an asset to our community."*

Pauline shared that she loves the Old Brooklyn neighborhood, where her neighbors are friendly and everything she needs is close by.

Today, Pauline enjoys a peaceful, quiet retirement, spending time in her garden and "being amongst the flowers." Her favorite and most prized are her roses. She shared that she was raised to be helpful and to always see the good in everyone, regardless of circumstances—a testament she hopes others will live by.

**Congratulations Pauline!**





*Nominated By Council Member Jasmin Santana, Ward 14*

## *Rick Nagin*

Rick Nagin is a dedicated public servant, lifelong activist, and longtime resident of Cleveland's Ward 14. With decades of experience in labor organizing, electoral politics, and community engagement, Rick has built a life rooted in advocacy, service, and the pursuit of social justice.

Born in Pittsburgh, Rick attended grade school there before going on to prep school in New Hampshire. He earned his undergraduate degree in biochemistry from Harvard and later received a doctoral degree from Rockefeller University. However, his passion for people and progress soon led him away from the lab and into the streets, organizing democratic movements within the steelworkers union across the country during the 1970s.

Since moving to Cleveland during that time, Rick has become a fixture in local and state politics. He served for more than seven years as Executive Assistant to Councilmember Nelson Cintron in Ward 14, where he handled over 40,000 constituent issues. He continues his service as a precinct committee person and supports Councilwoman Jasmin Santana in her work today. Rick has also run for public office multiple times and is a delegate to the North Shore AFL-CIO Federation of Labor.

Never one to shy away from "good trouble," Rick was active in the anti-war movement during the Vietnam era and has maintained a lifelong commitment to civic action. He is multilingual, fluent in Spanish and French, and continues to challenge himself—most recently by learning Chinese through free courses at Cuyahoga Community College. At 82, he even traveled to China for a month to immerse himself in the language and culture.

Rick is married to Ann, a Cleveland native, and is the proud father of two daughters, Rachel and Molly. His father-in-law, Rico Pallotta, founded the Positive Education Program, further embedding Rick in a legacy of service and community care.

A gardener, traveler, and passionate defender of democracy, Rick Nagin continues to do all he can to uplift and protect the values he believes in—locally and globally.

***Congratulations Rick!***





*Nominated By Council Member Jenny Spencer, Ward 15*

## Sandy Bozak

Sandy Bozak, is a longtime resident of the Cudell neighborhood, business owner, and community leader. Sandy and her husband, Tim, have been longtime community members and stakeholders on Madison Avenue. She is one of a few women specializing in auto repair in our community.

After graduating from South High in 1966, Sandy eventually moved to the Cudell neighborhood where she remains to this day. Sandy first opened her business on Madison Avenue on February 15, 1971. It was a Sunoco station back then. In 1985, it was changed to The Repair Co., and was remodeled from a flat garage to how it is today. In 1975, Sandy moved from the east side to W. 103<sup>rd</sup> Street, just down the street from the business, where she has resided ever since. Between 1977 and 1991, The Repair Co. offered towing services for AAA. Later, the business went high tech and they are now addressing high end technical issues with cars.

Sandy and Tim are very proud of their property on Madison, for which they received an award in 1996 from Cudell Improvement, Inc. Despite being busy business owners, they have also prioritized community involvement and served as community leaders. Sandy served as President of the Board of Cudell Improvement, Inc. in the early 1980s. In 1981 and 1982, she worked with the Cleveland Police Athletic League to turn the then-vacant Fruitland School into a haunted house to raise funds for Cudell Improvement. She and her husband were involved in the Madison Avenue Merchants Association for decades, and worked with other businesses on Madison to collect funds for a police officer to walk the beat. They have long supported safety efforts in the community and have played an important role in reporting and stopping crime in the area.

Among their many other community efforts, Sandy and Tim served on the design review board for the West Tech Lofts, when the building was being converted from a school to a residential building. They have also rescued over 40 stray dogs. Sandy credits the rescues as a group effort with friends, coworkers, and community all playing a part.

Congratulations to Sandy for not only her community spirit and business success, but for serving as a role model and inspiration for other women in business.

***Congratulations Sandy!***





*Nominated By Council Member Brian Kazy, Ward 16*

## *Josif Ducu*

Josif Ducu is a beloved and familiar face in the Bellaire-Puritas neighborhood, where he has lived since 1975. Born in the village of Alibunar in Yugoslavia—now Serbia—Josif immigrated to Cleveland in 1969 at the age of 19. He arrived with a deep work ethic, a curious spirit, and the ability to speak five languages. He brought with him a love for his homeland, which he has stayed closely connected to throughout his life.

After attending school in Yugoslavia, Josif pursued higher education in the United States, earning a degree in Industrial Engineering from Cleveland State University. His professional journey spanned 33 years with Cleveland Water, where he worked in purification and rose to the role of floor chief. He served at multiple sites over the years, including Crown Filtration in Westlake, the Flats' Morgan Division, and the Parma Control Center. He was only late to work twice in his entire career—testament to his exceptional dedication. Josif retired in 2020, leaving behind a legacy of reliability and integrity.

Josif is the proud father of three children—Roman, Valentine, and Veronica—and a grandfather to five. His parents, Livia and Valer, who are now deceased, also made the journey to America. He shares strong bonds with his siblings Aurel, Victoria, and the memory of his late brother Tibere.

A man of quiet faith, Josif is a devoted member of the Brunswick Church of the Nazarene and finds peace in reading the Bible. Since retiring, he's become a neighborhood treasure—sitting in his front yard every day, waving to passersby, delighting in seeing children on the school bus, and offering warm greetings to commuters. His daily wave has become a small but meaningful gesture of connection for thousands.

Josif also gives back through quiet acts of service—shoveling snow, mowing lawns, and keeping his neighborhood clean without being asked. His gentle presence, generosity, and genuine care for others make him a cherished neighbor and a quiet hero in his community.

***Congratulations Josif!***





*Nominated By Council Member Charles Slife, Ward 17*

## Catherine Lanning Knittel

Catherine Lanning Knittel, a proud daughter of Cleveland's Westside, has spent nearly her entire life in the West Park neighborhood—aside from a few brief years in California and Lakewood. The oldest of ten children, Catherine grew up in a household grounded in values of service, compassion, and integrity, deeply influenced by her parents and grandparents.

A lifelong advocate for education and social justice, Catherine began her own schooling at Our Lady of Angels (OLA) in 1955, where she and her siblings maintained a 25-year legacy of continuous enrollment. It was also in her teenage years that she met her future husband, Greg Knittel—both of them high school sweethearts, just like Catherine's own parents. Greg was the best person Catherine has ever or will ever meet. Their shared values, faith, and love for education laid the foundation for a lifelong partnership.

Catherine spent 36 years teaching at Saint Joseph Academy (SJA), while Greg taught for 35 years at Saint Ignatius High School. Both institutions, rooted in the Catholic tradition, played a profound role in shaping their shared commitment to education and faith-based activism. Catherine's passion extended beyond the classroom; she was a founding member of Catholic Schools for Peace and Justice (CSPJ), a network that now includes every Catholic high school in the Cleveland Diocese. Through CSPJ, Catherine empowered students to become change makers, serving "the dear neighbor without distinction" and advocating for a more just and compassionate world.

Catherine and Greg raised three children—Matthew, Mary Therese, and Peter—all of whom followed in their parents' footsteps and became educators. Her family grew to include a beloved son-in-law, Michael Cory, and daughter-in-law, Erin, along with three cherished grandchildren: Beatrice, Camilla, and Theodore, who bring joy from their home in New York City.

After Greg's diagnosis with ALS, Catherine and her family provided loving care until his passing in 2013. Through that difficult time, her strength, grace, and deep faith remained unwavering.

Now gradually stepping into retirement, Catherine continues to embrace the West Park community where she has lived on Southland for 47 years, surrounded by neighbors who have become lifelong friends. She loves to see new young families moving into West Park; many are former students who are coming to raise their family in the city. She looks forward to volunteering, writing, sewing, and giving back even more to the community she loves. For Catherine, Cleveland has always lived up to the motto: "The Best Location in the Nation."

**Congratulations Catherine!**



# THE CLEVELAND DEPARTMENT OF AGING THANKS THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL FOR THEIR SUPPORT OF SENIOR DAY.

*Mayor Justin M. Bibb*  
*Council President Blaine A. Griffin*

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Ward 1 – *Joseph T. Jones*

Ward 10 – *Anthony T. Hairston*

Ward 2 – *Kevin L. Bishop*

Ward 11 – *Danny Kelly*

Ward 3 – *Kerry McCormack*

Ward 12 – *Rebecca Maurer*

Ward 4 – *Deborah A. Gray*

Ward 13 – *Kris Harsh*

Ward 5 – *Richard A. Starr*

Ward 14 – *Jasmin Santana*

Ward 6 – *Blaine A. Griffin*

Ward 15 – *Jenny Spencer*

Ward 7 – *Stephanie D. Howse-Jones*

Ward 16 – *Brian Kazy*

Ward 8 – *Michael D. Polensek*

Ward 17 – *Charles J. Slife*

Ward 9 – *Kevin Conwell*

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