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MMSD prevents nearly 50 overflows

By **DON BEHM**
dbehm@journalsentinel.com

Though there was a drought in the Milwaukee area much of last year, the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District's deep tunnels prevented nearly 50 combined sewer overflows to waterways in 2012, records show.

Milwaukee had measurable precipitation on 63 days last year, and the deep tunnels were needed 47 times to store storm water and sewage from combined sanitary and storm sewers in central Milwaukee and eastern Shorewood.

The tunnels did not fill to capacity in any of the storms, and no combined sewers overflowed to local rivers and Lake Michigan in 2012.

Last year joins 2003 as the only years with no combined sewer overflows to waterways since the tun-

Deep tunnels helped the district treat 99.99% of wastewater in 2012, keeping it out of lakes, rivers

nels' first full year of operation in 1994. There was one combined sewer overflow in 2011.

The district has reported a total of 46 combined sewer overflows in 19 years, or an average of 2.4 a year. Before the availability of the tunnels, combined sewers overflowed directly to local waterways 50 to 60 times a year.

When the tunnel storage system was designed in the early 1980s, engineers projected combined sewer overflows would be reduced to an average of 1.4 a year, MMSD Executive Director Kevin Shafer said.

The system is close to meeting

those early goals, he said Friday. One reason the tunnels are not eliminating more overflows is that engineers at the time underestimated the amount of storm water entering private and municipal sewers within the district's service area, Shafer said.

In heavy rainstorms, the clear water can quickly fill sewers, then fill the tunnels in turn and cause discharges to rivers and the lake.

If there is any doubt of the impact of storm water on the regional collection and treatment system, then flows treated by the district's Jones Island and South Shore sewage treat-

ment plant in the drought year of 2012 are evidence to be considered, according to Shafer.

The plants treated 56.5 billion gallons of wastewater last year, records show.

Treated volumes in most years since 1994 are in the range of 70 billion to 80 billion gallons. In 2011, the district treated 74.1 billion gallons of wastewater, or 17.6 billion gallons more than in 2012.

The difference last year was due to less than average storm water.

Milwaukee's total precipitation of 29.29 inches in 2012 was nearly 5½ inches below the city's average of

34.76 inches, according to the National Weather Service office in Sullivan.

Four heavy rains

Even so, there were heavy rains last year.

Milwaukee recorded more than 1 inch of precipitation on four days in 2012: April 15, May 6, Aug. 9 and Dec. 20, the weather service said.

The Dec. 20 storm poured 2.16 inches of rain with some snow on Milwaukee, making it the second wettest day of the year.

The tunnels filled to 73.5% of capacity Dec. 20 and Dec. 21, storing nearly 383 million gallons of wastewater from the storm.

The main deep tunnels have a capacity of 432 million gallons, and a northwest side tunnel that collects

Please see **SEWAGE, 10A**

OBITUARY



JOURNAL SENTINEL FILES

Ray Py and Carol Buchholz look over their 1954 Wauwatosa yearbook.

Journalist Py kept up his love of the past

Tosa alum strove to preserve history

By **JAN UEBELHERR**
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It's fair to say that Raymond Py never turned his back on something that interested him. It's fair to say, too, that so many things did. Journalist, small-town shopkeeper, big-city public relations man, antique buff, congressional aide — he was all that, and an actor, too.

"He was intellectually curious," said his daughter, Stacey Py Flynn of Germantown, Md. "Right up until the end — he sat down and learned how to use new technology. He was on Facebook daily. He tweeted. Nothing got in the way of his curiosity."

Py, whose last few years were focused on historical work at his alma mater, Wauwatosa High School — it later became Wauwatosa East — died Tuesday of complications of diabetes and liver disease at a Wauwatosa hospice. He was 76.

Shortly after graduating from Wauwatosa High School, Class of 1954, Py pursued a journalism career. He attended the University of Wisconsin in Madison for a few years and became editor of the Daily Cardinal. He left college and served in the Air Force as an information specialist, working as an editor of a magazine. Around that time he met his late wife, Lucille, a nurse. They married in 1959.

In the 1960s, he worked for several

Please see **PY, 10A**

Hmong community changing



GARY PORTER / GPORTER@JOURNALSENTINEL.COM

Nang Thao, 19, a senior, works on a science experiment at the Hmong American Peace Academy, the only Hmong charter school in Wisconsin.



K-4 students use their hands to illustrate a book reading at the Hmong American Peace Academy, a K-12 charter school that serves nearly 1,000 students.

Report says group has grown, made progress, but challenges remain

By **GEORGIA PABST**
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Wisconsin is home to the third-largest Hmong-American community in the country, behind California and Minnesota, and in the last 10 years the Hmong population here and around the country has grown, expanded and made gains in educational attainment, language acquisition and citizenship.

But Hmong communities also face high rates of poverty and disparities in health services.

That's according to a special issue of the Hmong Studies Journal, which reviewed and analyzed data from the 2010 U.S. census and elsewhere and asked various Hmong scholars to provide their expertise in areas such as education, economics, health and mental health. The study also looks at the commu-

nity by state and region.

"The articles in this special issue represent the most in-depth scholarly analysis of emerging issues and trends impacting Hmong American communities," Mark Pfeifer, the editor of the St. Paul-based Hmong Studies Journal, said in a telephone interview.

"If you go back 30 years, we see very substantial changes over time, and there's been considerable advancement educationally, socially and economically from 1990 to 2000 and 2010, although there are still challenges such as poverty," he said.

Some of the key findings in the study include:

■ For the first time since the late 1970s when Hmong refugees started

Please see **HMONG, 10A**

Group lowers its grade for Milwaukee River

Pollutants still an issue, testing shows

By **LEE BERGQUIST**
lbergquist@journalsentinel.com

The Milwaukee River continues to battle an array of environmental assaults — especially pollutants from fertilizer, road salt and human waste.

In its latest report card on the health of the river, Milwaukee Riverkeeper gave the Milwaukee a C for 2011.

That's down from a B-minus in

2010, the environmental group reported.

The drop doesn't so much reflect a big change in the river from one year to next, although dry conditions in 2011 hampered water quality to some extent, said Cheryl Nenn, who led the analysis for the group.

Rather, she said the lower grade was spurred by more testing of pollutants in 2011 — the second year of Milwaukee Riverkeeper's report card.

The additional testing included measures in areas where many believe the Milwaukee River needs to

improve.

They included phosphorus, which is used in fertilizer, and some detergents, and a measure known as conductivity, which tracks industrial contaminants and road salt from icy streets.

Milwaukee Riverkeeper's definition of a C grade: A river system has a mix of healthy and unhealthy water, with data showing that it meets a target of acceptable water quality 70% to 79% of the time.

To be sure, the Milwaukee River was far dirtier decades ago. But with pollution limits required by the Clean Water Act of 1972 and sub-

sequent regulations, the river is getting cleaner.

"I think that we are making progress in a lot of areas, but we still have a long way to go," Nenn said.

The state Department of Natural Resources, which supports the findings of the report, agrees with Nenn's assessment.

"There has been so much invested to improve water quality — that river is so much better than it was the '70s and '80s," said Sharon Gagan, a basin supervisor for the DNR. "It gives us a framework of what more needs to be done."

Milwaukee Riverkeeper used wa-

ter quality data from the DNR, Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District and its own army of citizen water-quality volunteers who take water samples under protocols the DNR finds acceptable.

The group's volunteers took samples from 99 sites in the Milwaukee River basin, which includes the Menomonee River and Kinnickinnic River watersheds.

MMSD tests at 57 sites and the DNR tests at 11 sites.

All of the data was plugged into a database to grade the river.

Please see **RIVER, 10A**

DEATH NOTICES

Gurtz, Vearyl J. Kane, Shirley
Hart, John Kincaid,
Michael Bessie

Mathes, Thomas J.

McLaughlin, Brian C. M.D.
Shlensky, Selma

SEARCH PAST & PRESENT NOTICES
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Via: www.jsonline.com/obits

Gurtz, Vearyl J.

Passed from this life on January 3, 2013, at age 90. Loving husband for 70 years of Lucille. Dear father of John (Colette) Gurtz, Barbara (Lorin) Williams and Linda (Jeff) Hildreth. Papa of 6 and great grandfather of 11. Vearyl was a proud member of American Legion Post #187, a Boy Scout Master who loved the outdoors and golf and an avid Badgers fan. He also enjoyed rose gardening. Memorial Services Thursday, January 10, at 10:30 AM, at Clement Manor Chapel, 3939 South 92nd Street. Memorial Gathering Thursday from 9:30 to 10:30 AM.

JOSEPH E. SASS
Funeral & Cremation Services
1019 W. OKLAHOMA AVE.
(414) 744-3636



Hart, John Michael

Died unexpectedly on January 4, 2013, at the age of 56. Cherished husband of Barbara (nee Gartzke) for 30 years. Proud father of Andrew (Stacey), Christopher, and Matthew. Funny grandfather of Caleb and Amelia. Son of Walter and Kathleen Hart. Brother of William, Joseph, Robert, Mary, Anne, James, Thomas, and Michael. Also loved by other relatives and friends.

John, you were the best husband ever. Your unconditional love made me all the things I could never be without you. You will be missed so deeply. I love you.

Dad, the most understanding and supportive father, you taught us to be three loving gentlemen.

Grandpa, you are the funniest.

Services are pending for Tuesday. Please see Tuesday's edition or contact the funeral home.

Condolences to:
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414-464-4640

Kane, Shirley

(Nee **Gottlieb**) January 4, 2013, age 85 years, of Glendale. Beloved wife of the late Lawrence Kane. Dear mother of Anita (Ric) Domnitz, the late Jeffrey (Cindy) Kane, and Barbara Jo (Jon Stokes) Kane. Loving grandmother of Ari (Angela) and Noah (Rebecca) Kane, Adam Kane and great-grandmother of Jakob and Lucy Domnitz. Further survived by many other relatives and friends. Shirley's family would like to express their gratitude to the staff of Seven Oaks for the loving care they provided.

Shirley was a unique and fun-loving soul. She always had a smile and a kind word for everyone with whom she had contact. She was dearly loved and will be deeply missed by all.

Funeral services 1 PM Monday, January 7, 2013, at Congregation Beth Israel Ner Tamid, 6880 N. Green Bay Ave., Glendale. Interment Second Home Cemetery, 3705 S. 43 St., Milwaukee. Memorials to Angel On My Shoulder, P.O. Box 747, St. Germain, WI 54558 or Milwaukee Jewish Day School, 6401 North Santa Monica Blvd., Milwaukee, WI 53217 preferred.

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www.blanegoodmanfunerals.com

Kincaid, Bessie

Born to Eternal Life on January 2, 2013. Age: 59. Funeral: Wed., Jan. 9, 2013, at 11AM, at Shiloh BC, 4801 W. Capitol Dr. In state: 10AM-11AM. Visitation: Tues., Jan. 8, 2013; 4-7PM held in Chapel of:

Serenity Funeral Home
4217 W. Fond du Lac Ave.
Milwaukee, WI 53216
414-445-3700
www.serenityinfo.com

Mathes, Thomas J.

Born Aug. 7, 1958, in Misawa, Japan to an Air Force family, passed peacefully from this life Dec. 11, 2012. Raised in Milwaukee, Thomas graduated from Bay View High School. Survivors include daughter Elizabeth, uncle Thomas Brogan and wife Annie, cousins Tim and John Brogan and numerous second cousins. A memorial service will be held Jan. 12, at 11AM at Unity Ev. Lutheran Church, 1025 E. Oklahoma Ave. In lieu of flowers, please donate to the Salvation Army.

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Shlensky, Selma



(Nee **Berman**) Passed away at home on January 4, 2013, age 83 years, of Mequon. Beloved wife of Jerry Shlensky. Dear mother of Louis (the late Ka-gren) Shlensky, Michael (Julie) Shlensky and Steven (Bonnie) Shlensky. Fond sister-in-law of Ruth Berman and Barbara (Paul) Stone. Loving grandmother of Heidi and Adam; Jason and David; Andy (Vickie), Alyssa and Jami Shlensky. Further survived by other relatives and friends.

Funeral services 1:00 PM Monday, January 7, 2013 at Congregation Shalom, 7630 N. Santa Monica Blvd., Fox Point. Interment Second Home Cemetery, 3705 S. 43 St., Milwaukee. Memorial gifts to Congregation Shalom are appreciated.

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McLaughlin, Brian C. M.D.



Entered Eternal Life on January 4, 2013, at the age of 91. Resident of Alexian Village of Milwaukee, former resident of Shorewood, Whitefish Bay and Thiensville.

Beloved husband for 63 years of Monica (nee McCormick). Loving father of Deirdra (Robert) Johnson, McLaughlin, Nancy (Patrick) Sullivan and Brian (Joni) McLaughlin. Proud grandfather of Brian Johnson, Alex Sullivan and Patrick Johnson. Dear brother of the late Jeanne Schroeder. Brian is further survived by other relatives and dear friends.

Brian was a graduate of Notre Dame and Saint Louis Medical School. He served a two year residency at the University of Chicago before beginning a private practice in Milwaukee. Brian had a true passion for wood-working and he built many boats. He was greatly devoted to his ophthalmology practice and was a loving and devoted husband, father and grandfather. Brian will be deeply missed by all those whose lives he touched.

Visitation will be held on Tuesday, January 8, from 10:00 AM until the time of Mass of Christian Burial celebrated at 11:00 AM, at Alexian Village of Milwaukee, 9301 N. 76th St., Milwaukee, WI 53223. Interment to be held at Holy Cross Cemetery. Memorials in Brian's name can be made to the Alexian Village Employee Appreciation Fund.

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LEGACY 134

From page 7

PY

Journalist loved history

newspapers in Wisconsin — including the Waukesha Freeman and Appleton Post-Crescent, where he was working the day President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. He was alone in the newsroom at the time and executed the classic stop-the-presses, said his fiancée, Carol Buchholz.



Py

"He dearly, dearly loved the newspaper business," she said.

"He just really valued the power of the press in our country," his daughter said. "He just always saw it as being part of freedom — and not just the big media. It was your hometown and what's happening right around you. He saw the importance of everyday things."

He was state editor of the Beloit Daily News when he took a job as press secretary

RAYMOND L. PY

A visitation was held Friday. A private family burial service will be in the spring in Milton, Pa. Memorials to the WPA Mural Preservation Program at Wauwatosa East High School are appreciated.

for U.S. Rep. Henry C. Schadeberg, a Republican from Burlington, in 1969.

The congressman wasn't re-elected, so Py turned to public relations, including work for the Selective Service. He lived and worked in Bethesda, Md., for the next decade. On the side, he and his wife dealt in antiques.

Throughout his life, the importance of everyday things, and preserving them, was a constant theme.

"He didn't want things to get lost — people's sense of place. I think that kind of carried through in his life," his daughter said.

"He collected, he curated, he archived," she said. He collected toys from the 1930s, advertising memorabilia, American primitive folk art pieces, sports equipment and memorabilia.

Py and his wife returned to the Milwaukee area in 1978. They ran the Old General Store in the historic Cedar Creek Settlement in Cedarburg in the early 1980s. They lived in Port Washington, and all three of their children pitched in running the store,

which dealt with items from a century ago.

Py also opened an advertising and public relations firm, Creative Approaches, serving small businesses.

They moved back to Mary-land in the mid-1990s, where Py worked at Phillips Publishing, doing newsletter work for various associations. He later worked as a reporter for UPI, retiring in 1997. A year later, his wife died.

A short time after that, he took a job as a living history curator at Rose Hill Manor Museum in Frederick, Md. He dressed as an 18th-century character and gave tours.

The experience ignited an acting bug — at least that's how his daughter sees it. It was around the same time that he came back to Wauwatosa for his 45-year high school reunion and reconnected with Buchholz, a classmate. In 2000, Py decided to move back to Wauwatosa to be with her and he tried out for community theater roles. He had parts in "To Kill a Mockingbird" and "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest."

The latter role called for him to swear — something he never did. "My father hated profanity," his daughter said. "All five of his speaking lines had the F-word. My brother flew back to Milwaukee just to hear it, because we'd never heard him say that word."

When a casting call went out for the 2004 movie "Mr. 3000," which shot scenes at Miller Park, he tried out.

"He was like, 'Why not? Let me try out, see what happens,'" his daughter said. He got a bit part, sitting in a press box, playing a reporter. "I said, 'That's not really acting, Dad.'"

Around the same time, he self-published "Around the Tower" — a reference to the old tower at the Wauwatosa school. It was about life at his old high school when he was there. He and Buchholz would become co-chairmen of the 50-year class reunion. They searched yard sales and resale shops for memorabilia — team sweaters, pennants, yearbooks — from their old high school.

"It disturbed me that I came back after 30 years and can't find a trace of where I had been," he said in a 2001 Journal Sentinel interview.

And he worked to have a long-ago covered-up WPA mural at the high school restored.

"He said those murals should be exposed because it's history," Buchholz said. "It's part of the school. Just like the bubblers."

Besides his daughter and fiancée, he is survived by a brother, Arthur B. Py Jr.; a sister, Judy Henley; another daughter Elizabeth Py-Lieberman; a son, Raymond (Chip) Py; and three grandchildren.

From page 7

HMONG

Poverty, language still issues

settling in the United States, people of Hmong ethnicity live in every state, including the District of Columbia.

■ In 2010 there were 260,073 people of Hmong origin in the country, a 40% increase from 2000 census figures, although researchers believe there's an undercount of Hmong — 49% — live in the Midwest.

■ More than 50% of the Hmong population in the U.S. is now American-born, instead of foreign-born.

■ The median age is young — just over 20 — and the family size now averages 5.6 people per household, down one person from 10 years ago.

■ The poverty rate among the Hmong in 2010 was 25%, compared with 11% for the general population.

State population rises

In Wisconsin the Hmong population numbers 49,240, a 46% increase from 2000, with the greatest numbers living in the Milwaukee area, Wausau, Madison, Sheboygan, Green Bay, Appleton, La Crosse and Eau Claire.



GARY PORTER / GPORTER@JOURNALSENTINEL.COM

Kalia Vang, 7, works on a computer in her first-grade class at the Hmong American Peace Academy, 4601 N. 84th St.

Although in Milwaukee the Hmong lived on the north and south sides of the city, there's been a movement to the northwest side of the city in recent years, Pfeifer said.

Charles Vang, who owns an insurance company and is the executive director of the Hmong Wisconsin Chamber of Commerce, said he believes the move to the northwest side has been driven by the affordability of housing in the area.

But economic hard times and the foreclosure crisis have made "a bad situation worse" and created more challenges for many Hmong families who were living on the edge before the recession hit, he said. "Many are unable to start a business or keep a business going."

While there's assistance with home-buying counseling, there's no bilingual assistance for helping Hmong deal with foreclosures, he said.

Although the study found that "English is no longer a barrier for the majority," Vang disagrees.

He came to the U.S. in the mid-1970s and eventually settled in Milwaukee, where family members lived. Although many children are born here, their parents often speak Hmong to their children at home, which often hinders them in school.

But he also believes, as the study suggests, that Hmong children may also be tracked or labeled and put in English as a second language classes, even though they may not need it. Vang, a father of five,

said his children attended school in Brookfield and some were placed in ESL classes that may not have been necessary.

Charter schools

Although the educational attainment among the Hmong has improved nationally, some Hmong have started their own charter schools. There are seven Hmong-centered charter schools in the Twin Cities.

The Hmong American Peace Academy was founded in Milwaukee in 2004 by Chris Her-Xiong, and it's the only one in the state.

Today it's a K-12 college prep school serving nearly 1,000 students. To help students succeed, the school has an extended day, after-school tutoring and a Saturday academy where students can get extra academic support and enrichment.

"We teach Hmong and English, including academic instruction in English and heritage courses in Hmong," Her-Xiong said. Some 87% of the students at the school qualify for free or reduced lunch, and that means families struggle to meet the basic needs, she said. The school works to meet the needs of the students and to focus on preparing them for successful futures, she said.

"Like the immigrant and refugee groups that came before us, we know that education is the key to obtaining self-sufficiency and economic success," she said.

From page 7

RIVER

Still long way to go

The Menomonee and Kinnickinnic rivers also earned their own scores — a D and D-minus, respectively.

Both rivers are highly urbanized, and among a host of ills, they are harmed by large volumes of polluted storm water.

The 2011 report was the

first time the two rivers were included, but the problems of both have long been known.

In 2007, for example, American Rivers designated the Kinnickinnic, which is almost entirely bordered by impervious surfaces, as the seventh most endangered river in the United States.

Will Wawrzyn, a fisheries biologist with the DNR since the mid-1970s who has seen both improvements and deterioration in the entire watershed, called the Kinnickinnic "a poster child for everything that goes wrong with a river."

As for the Milwaukee River, the Riverkeeper analysis

divides the system into sections, with northern stretches extending into Fond du Lac and Sheboygan counties earning a B and C-plus, respectively.

The Cedar Creek watershed of the river also earns a B, but the southern sections of the river that are more urbanized earned a C-minus.

Phosphorus spurs algae blooms in the river. "It slows down the river, and from there problems began to compound," Wawrzyn observed.

The measures that traced pollutants such as road salt and industrial sources such as copper and mercury revealed high levels — some-

times even in the summer.

MMSD measured bacteria data at 26 locations in southern sections of the Milwaukee River in 2011. It found that the sites failed to meet the fecal coliform standard for recreational use 51% of the time. The waste could have come from animal or human sources, such as leaking sanitary sewers improperly connected to storm sewers.

The report said that the presence of bacteria indicates the likelihood of viruses or pathogens, which isn't conducive to the goal of making the river swimmable — a principle goal of the Clean Water Act.

From page 7

SEWAGE

Overflows prevented

overflows only from separate sanitary sewers has a capacity of 89 million gallons. Total: 521 million gallons of storage.

Last year's top spot for days with precipitation goes to May 6, when 2.45 inches of rain fell on Milwaukee, according to the weather service.

It was an intense, quick

storm, with most of the rain falling in less than two hours. Nearly 90 million gallons of wastewater collected in the tunnels, far less than capacity, and no combined sewer overflows occurred that day.

Computer glitch

As they do after every major rainstorm, MMSD crews went into the field the next day. They inspected overflow pipes within regional separate sanitary sewers to determine whether there were any isolated problems outside the combined sewer area. They found one on Milwaukee's south side.

Wastewater flows in a regional sanitary sewer rose high enough to trigger a relief

pump for three minutes beginning at 8:44 p.m. on May 6. An estimated 16,250 gallons of untreated sewage was pumped into the Kinnickinnic River at S. 35th and W. Manitoba streets.

An investigation determined the overflow was caused by a programming error in a computer-based operating system at the site.

This brief separate sanitary sewer overflow was the only one reported by MMSD in 2012.

As a consequence, the district cannot claim a 100% success rate last year, but it came ever so close.

MMSD's regional sewers, deep tunnels and two sewage treatment plants successfully

collected and treated 99.99997% of all wastewater that came its way last year, Shafer said. The 16,250 gallons of sewage that poured into the Kinnickinnic River on May 6 accounts for 0.00003% of total flows.

The district's 2011 success rate was 99.7%.

For comparison, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has set a goal of collecting and treating 85% of wastewater by municipalities or regional wastewater utilities with combined sanitary and storm sewers.

"We've exceeded the EPA's goal every year since the tunnels came on line," Shafer said. The district's lowest performance was 94.8% in 1999.