"When I first started doing the street art I did a few different characters including flowers and ladybugs. Once I got into gallery exhibitions, I realized people liked the art. Some of my characters weren’t selling as well as others. I stumbled onto the bird motif...."

...story on page 7
The Lit Opens for Lunch

A special report by The Tremonster

Five years ago, the legendary Literary Café (Linda Baldizzi and Andy Timithy’s 30-year outpost for Tremont OGs and artists of the 1980s and 90s) closed its doors.

After three years of renovations to one of Tremont’s oldest, pre-Civil War buildings, a new bar and restaurant, The Literary Tavern (1031 Literary Rd), opened in July 2019. Since then, the new tavern has been navigating the COVID-19 pandemic by trusting in a vision of innovative, high-quality, frequently changing menu items and libations you can’t find elsewhere in an atmosphere that feels like home.

“You know, we’re open for lunch now, too!” The Literary Tavern’s Head Chef, Rob Broka, who earned a reputation in the Cleveland food scene as executive chef for D’Vine Wine Bar, has been putting his heart and soul into lunch since The Lit started opening for lunch last month at 11:00 a.m., Monday through Saturday.

The Lit added lunch as their most recent offering to join a noteworthy happy hour, dinner, and cocktails.

Rob mapped out the schedule: “We open at 11:00 a.m., and the kitchen is open until 11:00 p.m. weekdays, with happy hour from 3:00 to 6:00 p.m. (until 7:00 p.m. for Tremonsters!). On Fridays and Saturdays, the kitchen is open until 12:00 a.m., and the bar is open until 1:00 a.m. every day.”

Billy Stepan, The Literary Tavern’s owner-operator, described their approach to lunch: “We’ve been keeping it fairly simple: we’re doing a soup and a sandwich. The first week we did a fried grouper, the second week we did a pancetta, lettuce, tomatoes, with a fried green tomato on it.”

“We call it the PLIT... like BLT with a PLT... with a little ‘i’ in-between because of Literary,” Rob chimed in.

“This week, we have the patty melt... just really substantial sandwiches, well-presented, nice and filling.

Connie and Dorothea talking on the phone.
Something that we can get you in and out with,” Billy explained. “Every one of them has just been really well-made, well- designed, something that’s interesting. Maybe something that you can’t find in the neighborhood, and it’s comfortable and delicious and affordable.” Then, we do a soup as well. They’ve been doing a nice job on that—a big enough bowl of soup to be filling. There’s not a lot of starch in it; we’ll throw a piece of bread on the side… this week it’s chicken noodle, so there’s a big portion of noodles in there.”

Rob added, “Yeah, a guy yesterday, he’s like, ‘Whoa—it’s like an entrée!’ Billy gestured to Rob, “He lives in the neighborhood; I live in the neighborhood.”

Billy explained, “We enjoy the people, but people who choose to be in Tremont and be a part of this community tend to be adventurous and willing to embrace what’s in their neighborhood and let us lead them through a curated dining experience.”

This struck a chord with Rob: “The people that are part of Tremont are more willing to let you lead them through a curated dining experience, which makes it more fun for us, as hosts, to take care of the people because they’re willing to accept what we’re doing and try new things they might not normally try. We’ve had some success with cocktails that I wouldn’t imagine putting on a cocktail list anywhere else. We did one with gin, aloe soda, and maccha powder… I don’t know that I could put that in a bar in Berea and have anybody order it. But they trust us here; they like what we’re doing. So, we are really enjoying being able to bring them the things that they’re looking for. Listening to them, elevating it, and making it fun so it’s playful… they look forward to coming to us over and over again because we’re going to offer fun, interesting, unusual things to keep them interested, to keep them coming, to keep them excited about being here. Joyful people coming into your establishment makes for a joyful workspace. It brings us all together; it makes us all better, more positive, happier.”

Monica Zelemy, a newly hired staff member since The Lit opened for lunch, offered this in closing on our way out the door: “Can I just say that the team here put their heart and soul into everything that they do here, too. They really do. From somebody who doesn’t work in the kitchen, it shows through all the specials, through all the menu changes. It shows through everything: how much they care and love what they do and love this place for real. It shows.”
News from the Tremont Street:

The Latest Word on Fat Cats, Lava Lounge, and Tremont Public Works from Ricardo Sandoval

Fat Cats Update
At Fat Cats, we’re getting ready for Thanksgiving pre-order and pick-up dinners. You make a reservation and then pick up your Thanksgiving dinner between 11:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. We have a vegan selection, a vegetarian selection, or you can do the turkey thing! Basically soup to nuts: from soup to dessert with turkey, stuffing, sweet potato, and the whole nine yards.

Lava Lounge Update
Lava Lounge is reopening on November 12th, and it’s going to be a little change. Not a huge change, but we’ll have a smaller menu and different hours. The hours—because we’ve aged over the last two years (we’ve been closed since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic)—we’re projecting our hours are going to be 2:00 p.m. until 10:00 p.m. A little earlier crowd, a little different dynamic with the Lava. We probably won’t have DJs like we used to—only on special occasions will we have DJs there. We’re doing little uplifts here and there: we fixed up the restrooms, new paint in the dining room, a little lighter in color. Believe it or not, with Lava Lounge in its name, it’ll be more accessible to the current trends that are happening today. I see a lot more families in the neighborhood, so it’s going to be child friendly. We’re not going to go after that late-night crowd. We’re not going to be that late-night spot that’s the last destination to be hit by any service people; we won’t be that place. It will be more kid-friendly; the restrooms will have changing stations.

It will be scratch-cooked type foods. We’re working on the menu now, but we’ll probably have a crispy chicken sandwich—probably eight to 10 items at the most—but it will concentrate on making sure that we do everything correctly within there. That’s what we’re going to start with. What will be mixed in there is our farm ingredients, obviously, from Red Basket Farms and Tyler Farms that we work with a lot—we buy a lot of stuff from them. We will definitely use a lot of the farm-to-table ideas that we use at Fat Cats. Price points will be—it’s a different time right now; goods are more expensive.

We will still have DJ nights. It’s not going to be like inexpensive dining or anything. That’s one of the things we had to sacrifice. Our beers are going to be 90 percent artisan. Everything in the State of Ohio we’re going to support. Generally, we’ll just have two beers outside of Ohio. One is Rolling Rock because I drink it. But, besides that, it’s all local. Everything else is going to be local—all the tap will be within the City of Cleveland, and then Ohio will carry the bulk, or at least 90 percent, of the remaining balance of the beer list. It’s like trying to keep that whole farm-to-table concept...maybe just from artisan beer brewer to tap at our place! That’s basically what we’re doing. We just want to try and support. Of course, we’ll do the dog-friendly patio, and hopefully we can liven up the corner there, right around the corner from Tremont Public Works.

Tremont Public Works Update
Tremont Public Works—about two years ago, we started that concept. It’s based on more of an event space. But the events that we’re doing—we’re going to try to commit to at least twice a month: one during Walkabout. We’re going to support the artists—they can display their work there or sell their artisan goods there—I don’t charge anything at any of my places. That’s how I support them. Then, I’m trying to do a comedy thing later at night. We’ll have food, like a five-item menu there and beverages as well. Lastly, we’re going to have a supper club there once a month. We’re going to sell about 26 seats for a monthly meal. The first one’s going to be in December—it’s going to be the Feast of the Seven Fishes on December 15th, which is a Wednesday—it will start at 6:30 p.m., and we’ll have wine matched up with the idea of our seven-fish menu. It will be a lot of fun. We’re only reserving 26 spaces, and that’s it. Every month moving forward, that’s the idea: we’ll just have 26 spaces for our Tremont Public Works monthly supper club.
Erich Hooper’s RV Life on the Road

Back in 1966, Erich Hooper remembers the neighborhood participating in a culture of growing and sharing food as a community. In 1994, Erich opened Hooper Farm on his residential land adjacent Clark Field (Clark Field is now incorporated into The Ohio and Erie Canal Towpath Trail) with a mission to build community in Tremont specifically, and in the City of Cleveland in general. Now an award-winning urban farmer and trainer, our own celebrated urban farmer is traveling the country by RV, full-time, and sending back article submissions titled “Erich Hooper’s RV Life on the Road” for publication in The Tremonster.

by Erich Hooper

Welcome to my road trip!

It’s been two years since I left Cleveland…

and might I add, just before the pandemic struck. What started out as a dream vacation ended up being four months of lockdown at a campground in Southern Ohio (Rocky Fork) due to the pandemic. Governor DeWine closed all the parks in the state of Ohio, which was a good move except for people who are full-timers like us. At first, those of us who have no home to go to were stranded on the sides of the road. After dozens of calls to his office, the State of Ohio opened a few parks so that full-time RVers could have some place to stay. So, for four months, only 4 RVs occupied a campground that holds 300. The parks turned off their water as they usually do for the winter months, so filling a 90-gallon tank became a weekly chore. This was a small price to pay if we wanted to shower. We stocked up on canned goods, toilet paper, and water—not knowing when things will return to normal. Like everybody during lockdown, walking and exercise became very important. I spent a lot of my time walking the hills around our Ohio park, reflecting on how lucky I was to be in Cleveland (at the time a hot spot for COVID-19). I now know four friends who have passed away from COVID-19.

Living on the road has taught me

that without each other, people, the beauty of this country is lost. We’ve made it to 24 states so far after starting off in the Midwest. The East Coast has a lot to offer...the sites, the food, the history all come together to paint a picture of America from its beginning: from Maine to Key West, from Iowa to South Carolina, this land was made for you and me. Being a full-time RVer, I have made friends with other full-timers. Most of them have a dog. We exchange stories about campgrounds, food ideas, and crazy things that can happen only to an RV. You see, the RV industry is not regulated like the automobile industry. Stories about being ripped off, buying defective motorhomes, bad service technicians, three-week waits on parts or repairs would make your head spin...and definitely empty out your wallet. I’ve spent days and weeks at parking lots of Walmarts and Cracker Barrels, waiting for service. By far, West Virginia and Pennsylvania are the most remote places to try to get help of any kind. A typical tow can run you $400, so remember: relax, take your time, enjoy the ride...as others race by you in the rat race of the working world. That’s what I do, full time.

As regularly as I can, I will describe for The Tremonster the experience of seeing our country from the drivers seat of a 41-foot RV. Let’s start with Gettysburg, PA. Gettysburg, PA.

Since Tremont Elementary School, I have heard of Gettysburg and the Civil War—the war that divided the country even until today. Of course, when we found out there was a campground space just a couple of miles away, we took it. We spent three weeks living three miles from the battlefield sites. I took it upon myself to walk the 12 miles into town to the university’s hospital. The history of the hospital in Gettysburg is something only Stephen King could write. Healthcare during this time was medieval, to say the least. Stories about the ghosts of dead soldiers walking the hospital hallways may or may not be true, but we decided against going inside to find out for ourselves.

On our way out of town, we stumbled upon a “colored troops” cemetery (A permanent tribute at Arlington National Cemetery to African American soldiers who fought in the Union Army during the Civil War). It broke my heart to find out that these 30 men—who died fighting for freedom—were not even still today allowed to be buried with other soldiers at the national cemetery because of their color. We spoke with the curator, a woman who is 86 years old and has written two books about the US colored troops and their final resting place. We bought two books, she autographed them, and we made a donation. The nonprofit cemetery has been vandalized many times. A horseback ride along the battlefield brought us to a small farm owned by an African American family who had lived along with the people of Gettysburg in Civil War times. Upon hearing that the Confederate Army was just over the hill from his farm, the family left everything and headed north. The house still stands today, as does the fight for freedom.
by Ken Scigulinski

In the 1940s, there were 8 churches and 7 bars within a half-mile radius of our house on Tremont Ave. On Sunday mornings, the toiling of church bells was a pleasant invitation to attend worship. There was no such beckoning from the bars, but it was not required. By the time I was 10 years old, I was familiar with the interiors of 5 of the 7 bars. I think that was my dad’s version of babysitting while my mom worked, cleaning downtown office buildings at night. I only knew the interiors of 2 churches, however: Holy Ghost on W. 14th & Kenilworth and St. John Cantius on W. 25th where I visited with my dad and I was Duly’s on W. 11th & Starkweather—probably because it was also a restaurant and the owner was a friend from the Shamrock Club. It was unique because along the right side from the entrance there were booths, each with a curtain that could be slid to conceal the occupants for privacy. Mom drank the only mixed drink I ever heard of—a highball. These days I rarely do whisky shots, but whenever I have a cold the mix of whisky, honey, and lemon juice is my memorable at-home remedy.

Tremont Brainer
Social Security Disability 101
Workshop with Andrew November

by Michael Jankus

Disability attorney Andrew November has been speaking at high schools, colleges, senior centers and medical practices with the crucial message not to wait until it’s too late. “In my mind, it’s a matter of saving to the crux of your life’s work, or a progression of a condition they might have lived with and worked with for 20 years, or a new one that’s hit,” he said. “So they don’t get educated about an extremely complex system until they are forced to apply. They got a denial and can’t believe they’re denied because they think they’re disabled.”

“So I put myself out there for 11 years being a face in the community just to educate people, and do as simple as a Disability 101, just to plant the seed in peoples’ heads.” Social Security’s field offices have remained closed since due to the pandemic. Those same field offices saw 19 million visitors in 2019, and those include many who can’t easily access those services online. November says he will speak anywhere he is asked, tailoring the presentation to the audience. November says he will speak anywhere he is invited anyone with any questions to reach him at anovember@linerlegal.com or call 216-262-1773.
The Sign Guy Makes a Canvas of a Quigley Road Train Car

by Bruce Checefsky

Dave Witzke, a local artist and former Tremont resident, talks to the Tremonster about his new mural project for the Railroad Historical Society on Quigley Road, as well as his trademark birds motif.

Bruce Checefsky: Where did you get the name “The Sign Guy”?

Dave Witzke: The Sign Guy name was given to me. I didn’t choose it. There used to be a Tremont website where people would post things going on in the neighborhood. A friend sent me a link with pictures of my street art asking ‘Who is The Sign Guy?’ Someone claimed to be me. That’s when I talked to Becca at The Mutt Hut about having an exhibition of my work. I did my first art show in 2006.

BC: Are you a professional sign painter?

DW: No. But I can paint signs. I have a lot of friends that are sign painters.

BC: Your new project is a mural on an old train car for the Railroad Historical Society parked on Quigley Road. How did that come about?

DW: I did it for the experience. No money was exchanged. The Historical Society is non-profit. Whatever money that they generate goes into projects like rebuilding train engines and stuff like that.

BC: I’ve seen your paintings around Tremont. Do you get permission or is it more about graffiti?

DW: People ask me to paint their garage door and places like that. I want to get paid for commission work. It’s my artwork on their property. A lot of the times my work ends up behind closed doors or fenced in. The general public doesn’t see it.

BC: What’s with the bird motif? Is that your signature style?

DW: When I first started doing the street art I did a few different characters including flowers and ladybugs. Once I got into gallery exhibitions, I realized people liked the art. Some of my characters weren’t selling as well as others. I stumbled onto the bird motif. It’s been reworked to a simpler state with triangles and circles. People of all ages enjoy them.

BC: Do you use spray paint?

DW: I use spray paint for the figures and shapes then use a brush for an outline. It doesn’t matter how big it is or how small, I use the same technique unless it’s an abandoned building. I’ll use just spray paint then.

BC: Do you work up sketches beforehand or is it spontaneous?

DW: I work up sketches sometimes but not always. More recently, I use the mirror image to create a symmetrical form from the center moving to left or right.

BC: I noticed all the letters in the word CLEVELAND are black except for the ‘A’. Why is that?

DW: The ‘A’ in Cleveland is the anarchy sign. I add symbolism to my paintings but I wasn’t sure about the anarchy sign. Some people can take it the wrong way. I’m not suggesting an up rise and overthrow Cleveland. Maybe I am. Depends on the day I guess.

BC: Do people say hello when you’re painting in public?

DW: The overlook is behind us on the Towpath at this location. People yell things like ‘good job’, or ‘looks good’. A guy rode by on a bicycle and photographed me in front of the mural. He was telling me about the history of Tremont. He said that he’d been taking pictures of my public art in Tremont.

BC: Are you planning to paint more than one train passenger car?

DW: That was my first choice. I wanted to do the train because it’s smaller. I’m using my own paint supply with no funding of any kind but then I thought about it and decided to do the biggest car. Why not?

BC: Do you have any exhibitions coming up?

DW: I have a show at Baldwin Wallace this month. I’ll have three metal sculptures, that’s it. Whenever I have a show, I like to do different work, things that haven’t been seen before. No one has seen these new pieces, yet.

Editor’s note: Michael Janus contributed significantly to this report.

Midwest Railway Preservation Society Seeks Quigley Train Car Mural Artists

by The Tremonster Staff

We reached out to Steven Korpos, Jr., MRPS Executive Director, and he told The Tremonster his organization is seeking mural artists for the remaining train cars along Quigley Rd. He said, “They’re getting rusty. I said, ‘Hey, guys, if you want to do graffiti artwork on them, they’ll be like that for three, four, five years, maybe longer. In the meantime, you’re doing me a favor by giving it another coat of paint’ (he laughed). You know, to slow down the rusting process. Eventually, they’ll come in [to the Roundhouse] for restoration.” The MRPS will provide train car mural artists with a letter for the State to say, “Please don’t interrupt ‘em.”

Steven said he will entrain train car murals of any subject matter within reason for public display. “I don’t like the graffiti where people just blurt stuff on—I want something to look decent, you know. Like artwork. That’s why I offered the two train cars so far to the two artists that already came up to. So far, two of the train cars are painted, but the remaining cars are all available to do.”

If you are a mural artist interested in painting a MRPS train car along Quigley Rd, please contact Steven Korpos, Jr. by calling the MRPS (330-397-9994) for more information on the mural submission process.
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