THE SUNDAY STAR
SEPTEMBER 22, 2013

THE DANGERS OF INDY THROUGH A COP’S EYES

For IMPD officers, the calls come in a steady stream, and the potential for a fatal encounter is always there.

L it’s 90 degrees out and the early afternoon sun is blazing as a dozen mid-late-shift police officers walk out of roll call on the last Friday in August. Chilled with patrolling the Eastside of Indianapolis, the officers scatter to their cars and hit the streets in what is considered the state’s busiest police district.

Fourth-year officer Molly Mason is one of the first to exit the building. She hardly has a chance to put her car in drive before the shift’s first call comes in, about a man screaming at people a couple of blocks from Tech High School. Her job is to spot, Mason says. He’s dressed only in a pair of red underwear.

“For a strange day,” she says.

Pulling out of the district headquarters, the 25-year-old police officer heads into a police zone that is rarely quiet. But few of them are in Indianapolis.

Molly Mason frequently must enter buildings where danger could lurk. Sometimes, there’s an arrest. On a good day, no one gets hurt.

EDITOR’S NOTE: Columnist Matthew Tully spent three months this summer riding with Indianapolis police officers to gain an understanding of the challenges they face every day on the city’s streets. Domestic violence calls, the kind during which officer Rod Bradway was shot and killed Friday, are a frequent hazard.

MATTHEW TULLY COMMENTARY

During vigil, slain IMPD officer is remembered as a peacekeeper, hero

Indianapolis police officer Rod Bradway always wanted to be the first in.” That’s how a former Wayne Township Fire Department employee remembered him during a vigil last Friday afternoon outside the Eagles Pointe Apartments on the Northside.

“He never had a bad heart for anybody. When I heard he was the first in, I was surprised.” Melissa Warkens, Avon, said as she spoke through tears. “I’ve been in emergency response for 20 years. We are all family. He would be here for me, and I had to be here for him.”

Dressed in black T-shirts, a dozen young men marched in cadence to a spot outside the apartments where flowers, flags, stuffed animals, angels and crosses created a memorial for Bradway, a five-year veteran with the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department.

Warkens was one of about 50 mourners who gathered to honor the slain officer. Bradway, 41, was fatally shot early Friday.

“The Eiteljorg’s unexpected West

Guitars, motorcycles and gay cowboys lead museum in new direction

It still looks like the Old West, a stylish, saloon-like structure that fit in on a John Ford/John Wayne set, but the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art’s latest exhibit is all about the American West, museum officials say.

The exhibits are part of the Legacy Series, which gives different elements of American history a closer look.

These exhibits and others have packed the house and changed the museum’s culture. After two decades of being stuck at 100,000 visitors a year, in 2008 the Eiteljorg jumped to 140,000, and has stayed there. It’s on track to clear $500,000 in ticket sales this year. Three times what it brought in a little more than a year ago.

> See EITELJORG, Page A6
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Fourth-year officer Molly Mason is one of the first to exit the building. She hardly has a chance to put her car in drive before the shift’s first call comes in, about a man screaming at people a couple of blocks from Tech High School. He’ll be easy to spot, Mason says. He’s dressed only in a pair of red underwear.

“Could be a strange day,” she says.

Pulling out of the district headquarters, the 31-year-old patrol officer heads into a police zone that is rarely quiet. Few of them are in Indianapolis. The state’s biggest city is home to the state’s most sweeping crime problems and social challenges. From the petty to the headline-making, from the horrific and dangerous to the almost comic, patrol officers in Indianapolis see just about anything imaginable.

“It’s been a strange summer,” Mason tells me that Friday afternoon, three days before Labor Day and three weeks before fellow patrol officer Rod Bradway would be shot dead in the line of duty. “After all the shootings in the spring, I actually thought the summer would be worse.”

But, she adds as she navigates her aging squad car through traffic, “it still feels like there’s this underlying tension on the streets, like things are on the edge.”

Turning west onto 10th Street, Mason talks about a shooting scene just a few nights earlier that included several residents who had yelled at and tossed things at the police who had responded. It was a sign of that tension on the streets she spoke about, of the strained relationship between police and many residents in some of the city’s neighborhoods, and of the dangers that are an accepted and routine part of a patrol officer’s job.

I rode numerous shifts with Mason this summer in hopes of getting a better sense of the challenges and issues facing Indianapolis’ police officers and neighborhoods, and those hoping to push the city forward. What I saw, day after day, was a nonstop barrage of difficult demands on police officers and a mind-boggling catalog of the city’s epic challenges.

“There really is a window into what is happening socially in our cities,” Public Safety Director Troy Riggs told me recently as we talked about the job of a patrol officer. “It’s stunning when you look at the myriad issues an officer has to deal with in just one shift — family issues, psychological problems, drug and alcohol abuse, violence and so
much else.”

The violence hit home tragically on Friday when Bradway, a 41-year-old father of two, was shot and killed while responding to a domestic violence call on the Northwestside. Throughout the summer I saw examples of the dangers officers face as Mason chased a suspect with a violent criminal history through a neighborhood, and, on several occasions, as she searched dark and dirty abandoned homes that had been taken over by squatters, her handgun sometimes out, not sure what was around the next corner.

The city’s vast social challenges were exemplified during Mason’s shifts by people such as the 58-year-old diabetic, alcoholic veteran in a wheelchair who was evicted from a filthy rental because he had no money; the 17-year-old boy arrested for violating house arrest and already facing a felony armed robbery charge; the young prostitute who robbed a business owner after performing oral sex on him in his store; the senior citizen who said selling her home had become impossible because of all the crime; the many residents who suffered the trauma of a break-in; and the many children living in squalor.

**Confronting domestic violence**

On Aug. 30, arriving at the day’s first call, Mason finds two women sitting outside a once-beautiful brick building that now houses a laundromat and several dingy upstairs apartments. One of the women, sitting on a chair against the brick wall, points up a set of stairs. “He’s drunk as hell,” she says quietly. “You have to take him to jail tonight. Can you just take him to jail? Can you just get him out of here?”

The woman has been dating the man for several months and domestic violence is already a part of their story. His fists sent her to the hospital earlier in the year, a friend says, and on this day he has filled himself with beer. At one point he had wandered out of his apartment in his red underwear, screaming obscenities at anyone within sight.

Mason heads past the women and up the creaky stairs, into a building that lacks air conditioning and feels suffocating on one of the hottest days of the year. She arrives in front of a door at the far west end of the second-floor hallway, knocks and identifies herself.

“What you want with me?” the man inside yells, muttering a stream of obscenities.

“I just want to talk,” Mason says calmly.

Slurring his words, the man opens the door with a hard yank, still wearing only his underwear. The small apartment is filled with trash and beer bottles; a porn DVD sits in front of an old TV.

“Don’t come in my house,” he orders. “Unless you have a warrant, don’t come in my house.”

This first call of the day is one of many made more complex and intense by alcohol or drugs, by anger and dysfunction, by unhealthy relationships and lost souls. After Mason leaves, encouraging the man to stay inside his apartment and telling him she just wanted to make sure he was OK, she predicts she’ll be called back before long. She’s right. Within 20 minutes she’s racing back up those creaky stairs after hearing the girlfriend’s screams for help. Barging into the apartment she finds the man holding the woman against a bedroom wall, a wooden stick in his right hand just above her head, apparently ready to strike.
seconds Mason has the man’s hands behind his back.

“OK, OK,” he says, surrendering as the handcuffs come out.

The arrest is just one more for the 54-year-old man. Mason learns that he had beaten his girlfriend before, and that she has two young kids that she’s lost custody of because of her own mistakes. Despite it all, the couple will likely reunite after he gets out of jail.

“I love her,” the man tells Mason as he sits on the curb with his hands cuffed behind his back, Tech students passing by on the sidewalk.

“You may love him,” Mason tells the girlfriend a few minutes later. “But you two need to realize that you don’t mix well.”

Driven by substance abuse

Before long, the man is in a wagon, on his way to jail, and Mason responds to the call of another disturbance near a gas station. She moves from there to the scene of a messy domestic situation that results in a 56-year-old woman, in tears, being arrested.

Then, as other officers respond to reports of shots fired, Mason spots a man passed out in the parking lot of an abandoned building on Washington Street. Who knows how long he’s been there; when Mason tries to nudge him awake, I notice that his forehead has gotten crispy in the afternoon’s intense sun. A long day of drinking — and it’s barely 3 p.m. — has left the 46-year-old unemployed man, already wanted for a probation violation, able to sleep comfortably on the sun-baked concrete.

All you have to do to get a sense of the substance abuse problems in the city is to ride a shift or two with a police officer. No matter how early, police encounter drunkenness. Signs of drug use and abuse are common — in homes and on street corners. Many of the city’s worst crimes — murders and brutal assaults — are tied directly to the drug trade. Many other crimes are committed by those seeking money for drugs. Family and neighborhood disputes, often petty, consume a tremendous amount of officers’ time and are often complicated by intoxication.

“In almost every run,” Mason says, “narcotics or alcohol are somehow related. Someone is drunk or on drugs, or drugs are somehow tied to the problem. It’s so common.”

During one of the shift’s few lulls, Mason drives her squad car through several Near-Eastside neighborhoods, slowing down at the sight of a woman who may be working as a prostitute and again, a few minutes later, when she sees a woman walking with a man. Earlier this year, Mason had arrested the man for violently assaulting the same woman, but the charges were dropped when the woman failed to show up for a court hearing. As we drive by, the man stares and glowers.

Fighting for their neighborhood

A shift in a squad car exposes the district’s worst problems. But that same shift can serve as a reminder of the city’s greatness and of its opportunities. The Eastside is filled with families who refuse to give up, schools that are trying to overcome monumental challenges, and nonprofits desperate to strengthen the area. Many residents are uniquely passionate, defensive about the stereotypes assigned to their section of the city, convinced things are on the upswing.

One afternoon, for instance, City-
County Councilman Zach Adamson told me about the changes he’s seen since moving to the Near Eastside 11 years ago. Crime is still a problem, and the transient nature of so many blocks makes it hard to engage people in the community. But he said the drug dealers, gangs and streetwalkers who were once dominant members of the community are not as common or openly visible these days. Community gardens, new businesses and the Boner Community Center have changed life there, he insisted.

“It’s not Disneyland,” he said. “But it’s also not ‘Escape from New York.’ Sometimes it’s two steps forward and one step back over here, but there are really powerful people and forces that are so positive about the opportunities here that it’s infectious.”

Underscoring that point, Mason one afternoon stopped by Outreach Inc., a small organization that helps homeless teens. She stood on the steps for 20 minutes, talking with a group of kids about their lives and their tattoos as she tried to convince them to join a workout program the nonprofit has formed with a group of Eastside cops.

“It’s hard but you’ll like it,” Mason, a dedicated weight lifter and CrossFit advocate, tells one of the teens. Her goal is to get the young people involved in something positive, knowing that they’ve had a lot of negative circumstances hurled their way.

A graduate of Plainfield High School, Mason took a long path to policing. Growing up in a family “where you went to college and worked in an office,” she received a degree in psychology from Taylor University before working for an organization that assists adults with developmental disabilities. She struggled to find the right career, working later as a nanny and then at an advertising agency.

“I was miserable,” she said of the agency job. “I was frustrated and antsy. I hated everything about it.”

So she started to explore an idea she’d had since childhood, at least in the back of her mind: to be a cop. It fit in with the things she cared about — helping others, particularly kids, and keeping active and being involved. She applied to IMPD and was accepted, heading to the police academy in 2009. After years of trying to find the right job, she knew she’d found it when she arrived at the academy. She liked the training, the camaraderie and the focus on serving her community. And then she hit the streets; a wave of emotion struck on her very first shift.

“I just remember thinking, ‘This is my thing. This is it. I found my thing, I found what I was meant to do,’” she said with a smile one afternoon. “It just fit from that first day.”

Nearly four years later, it still fits. “It’s a hands-on way to help people, to get involved and maybe make things a little better,” she says. “I get it, I know we’re not going to solve the world’s problems. But on any one day in someone’s life you can make a difference.”

Mason acknowledges the toll that dealing with the city’s most depressing and difficult problems can take on a person. She’s an optimist by nature, she says, and the job can challenge that trait, though she adds quickly that she’s committed to holding onto it. Like many of her colleagues, she downplays questions about the dangers of the job. But an email her mom sent me one day sums up things pretty well. Sarah Mason recalled her surprise after being told that her daughter, a once-shy high
school valedictorian who always wanted to help people, would be joining the force.

“The last few years have been stressful accepting (our daughter) in this new, dangerous and somewhat depressing vocation,” the elder Mason wrote. “But she loves it and treats it like her own personal coaching and mission work. I am so proud and grateful that she has found her calling in life.”

Abandoned, but not empty

About 5 p.m. that Friday, Mason’s calling has her and a colleague responding to one of the area’s most persistent problems: abandoned homes. They’re an eyesore, a nuisance, a discouragement to investors and a public-safety problem. And in this case, in the 600 block of Tacoma Street, they’re just about everywhere.

Mason and her colleague find a young couple sitting on their porch, soaking up the hot afternoon, a few months away from being first-time parents. Abandoned homes sit on both sides of the house they are renting and, the couple tells the officers, one of the homes has attracted squatters who have ripped off a window in the back of the house and kicked in the front door.

“We get nervous,” Brittany Templeton says. “There are so many abandoned homes over here, and something’s going on in some of them.”

Walking through high weeds and over glass and trash, the officers check the back of the house. Then, after several knocks, they push open the front door, which releases a deep, foul smell. The room is covered with trash and bugs. Pulling out their guns, they search the main floor and then ascend a dangerously dilapidated flight of stairs. The house is empty. But, Templeton says later, it probably wouldn’t be for long.

It’s a problem that isn’t going away, not in a city with an estimated 10,000 abandoned homes and a history of failed attempts to address the issue. The legislature has stalled efforts by the city to more aggressively tackle the problem, and the nonprofits that have produced inspiring results operate only on a small scale.

“I wish they could just tear them all down,” Templeton tells me.

As early evening arrives, Mason and her colleagues handle a series of relatively minor calls, including one that centers on a simmering neighborhood battle over a young man’s loud dog. The officers knock on the door of a neighbor who’d called in the complaint and are met by a friendly man who apologizes for not being able to step onto the porch.

“I’m on house arrest,” he says, pointing to his ankle monitor.

A few minutes later, they arrive at a sad scene. A woman sits outside her home, begging police not to arrest her drunk boyfriend, who is in the house and angrily refusing to leave. The woman has a fresh scratch on her neck but declines to talk about it. She has a job, she tells the officers, and he has little kids. An arrest or a police report would only complicate things and put what little they do have in jeopardy.

“I just need him to leave,” the woman tells Mason. “Every time he gets to drinking we have a problem. When he’s drunk we can’t communicate.”

Mason asks the woman if she wants help, perhaps a medic to look at her scratches or a social services program that can help get her out of an unhealthy relationship.

Tears fall down the woman’s cheeks,
but she looks calm and determined. “You can’t get out of a relationship like this,” she says. “It’s like being a hostage.”

As another officer convinces the man to grab what belongings he needs for the night and leave, his girlfriend sits on the porch, tears still falling as she talks. “It’s like this with everyone,” she tells me. “Once they get to drinking, everything goes sour.”

**A long shift**

Although a police shift lasts only eight hours, it feels longer. Much longer. The day’s first call, involving the man in his underwear, feels like it happened three days ago. Mason laughs when I say that and says she’s used to it. She likes the action and actually dreads days filled with quiet. She likes to interact with the people she serves. There is plenty of opportunity for that; from June 1 to Sept. 1, the city’s police officers took more than 41,000 crime and incident reports.

The psychology major in Mason comes out frequently. I saw it all summer in the calm way she talked to people even in the most tense situations, and in her refusal to offer a word of sarcasm or a sign of disrespect to someone even as she was sending them to jail. And I saw it in the way she listened patiently to people who had both committed crimes and been victims of them, and to those who were simply caught up in dysfunctional relationships and depressing situations. It’s what she loves about being a police officer: that chance to have an impact in the moment.

“You’re helping them with the problem they are having right now,” she said. “You can maybe take a tough situation and make it a little better.” That’s Mason’s hope late that Friday when she arrives at a scene involving a 14-year-old boy who was on the roof of his home when police arrived, after a fight with his mother and little sister. He initially refused to come down, even telling police that they’d have to shoot him. As we step toward the house, he finally descends and laughs dismissively at another police officer’s questions and advice. As his 7-year-old brother looks on with concern, he calls the little boy a “faggot.”

Mason steps in and begins to talk to the 14-year-old but has to cut the conversation short. It’s dark out now and things are picking up in the East District. Several other officers have been called to the scene of a shooting, the latest in a bloody year in Indianapolis, and Mason is called to help with a young runaway — a deeply troubled girl who is 15, homeless and pregnant.

By 9 p.m. the girl is in the county’s juvenile detention center and the day’s heat has subsided. Another group of East District officers is preparing to begin the overnight shift. Mason and her day-shift colleagues are wrapping things up. The streets are noisier now, with music, loud engines and loud conversation filling the air.

The shift ends with a few more calls over the radio: a drunken argument near an apartment building, a disturbance at a convenience store, and, finally, a stolen car. As we head to that last call, Mason gets an update on her radio about the shooting victim.

“He’s dead,” she says. Another homicide. No. 94 in the city through the first eight months of 2013. This time, the victim is a 20-year-old man. I later learn his name is Michael Henderson and, according to a police
report, narcotics were found at the scene. Nearly a month after his death, his killer is still at large.

As 10 p.m. approaches, Mason heads to the East District headquarters, her day’s work complete. It was both a busy shift and a routine one. She took no reports that produced big news or shocking scenes. But that’s the point: The shift offered a glimpse into the deep sea of challenges, dysfunction and struggles facing the city. By my count, Mason talked with more than 25 residents that day, many of them in moments of crisis. She arrested four others. Her shift wasn’t the full picture of Indianapolis on that Friday, but it provided a crucial piece of the overall portrait.

Later, I asked Mason how she feels at the end of a workday.

“Mentally exhausted,” she says. “Definitely mentally exhausted. There are days when it wears you out, but in a good way.”

Exhausted, she ends her shift. Less that 16 hours later, she’ll start another one.
THE SUNDAY STAR

"WHERE THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS, THERE IS LIBERTY" 8 COR. 3:17

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2013  |  STATE EDITION

THE INDIANAPOLIS STAR

TODAY'S WEATHER
LOW: 58  HIGH: 72

Plenty of sunshine today. Details, A28

BLENDED LEARNING

SHOULD MORE SCHOOLS MIX TEACHERS, ONLINE EDUCATION?

When visitors to the Carpe Diem charter school see 175 students wearing headphones and starting into computer screens from small cubicles, Principal Mark Forner is ready for a skeptical reaction.

“Our critics say it looks like a telemarketing call center,” he said, preemptively.

“I tell people it reminds me of a university library.”

The tightly arranged cubed seating in a large, open room isn’t the only way Carpe Diem doesn’t look like a traditional school. There’s also this fact — there are only five teachers for 175 students.

That’s a 35:1 student-to-teacher ratio, a little out of line for what many middle and high schools offer. Eventually, the five teachers — with the assistance of aides — will be expected to educate 300 students as the school grows, creating a 66:1 ratio more common in Third World countries.

That’s because Carpe Diem offers a “blended learning” curriculum. It’s a cutting-edge and controversial concept that delivers a big chunk of instruction to students via computer and occasionally at home and mixes it with periodic small group discussions and one-on-one instruction.

Carpe Diem, which serves grades 6 to 12 with a 12-member staff, brought blended learning to Indianapolis for the first time last year.

Three more blended learning charter schools opened in the city this month — Phalen Learning, Nexus and Enlace academies — but the concept is starting to ramp up. More than a dozen blended learning schools are planned to open here over the next five years.

By Scott Elliott | Star reporter

BLENDING LEARNING

Sydney Pedigo (right) does classwork at Carpe Diem. “Our critics say it looks like a telemarketing call center,” says Mark Forner, principal of the charter school. KELSEY WOLFE | PHOTOGRAPHER

Indy is losing another generation

The streets chant kids at a young age

When police came to arrest her mother, the 9-year-old was sitting on a sofa, eating a lollipop. Her 12-year-old sister, in a chair on the other side of the room, was brushing her blond hair. Their 6-year-old brother played nearby.

“Can you give me a few minutes?” the children’s 31-year-old mother asked the police officer who knocked at the front door of her Near Eastside home one day this summer.

She made the request calmly, matter-of-factly. This wasn’t her first arrest; her police record includes several run-ins with the law for things such as theft, prescription fraud, public intoxication and driving violations. On this afternoon she was picked up on an outstanding narcotics warrant.

“I’ll be OK,” she said quietly, to nobody in particular, as she gathered a few belongings.

She understood the process. And although the arrest didn’t seem to be a big deal for her, it was for her children. As the woman talked with her mom about arranging bail and watching after the kids that evening, the children sobbed.

The girl begged repeatedly for hugs and kisses. The little boy stuck close to his mom’s legs as she prepared to head to the county jail with Patrol Officer Molly Mason.

“Mommy, Mommy, don’t go,” the boy said.

The scene was one of the first I experienced during a summer spent riding with police on Indy’s troubled Eastside.

Although a heart-breaking scene, it was a routine one and a common example of the harsh reality many young people in this city face. In so many situations, their worlds are filled with dysfunction, drugs...
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The scene was one of the first I experienced during a summer spent riding with police on Indy’s troubled Eastside.

Although a heartbreaking scene, it was a routine arrest and a common example of the harsh reality many young people in this city face. In so many cases, their worlds are filled with dysfunction, drugs and trauma. They are shaped by traumatic experiences that eventually play out in their own lives in classrooms, courtrooms and neighborhoods across the city.

Children were everywhere I went with the police this summer. No matter how dire the situation, no matter how troubling the circumstance, children were a prominent part of the picture. They were witnesses to the city’s troubles, victims of it and, on many occasions, the cause of it. The bottom line is this: From toddlers in diapers to teenagers on the verge of adulthood, many of our city’s youngest are at deep risk of having their lives wrecked at an early age.

“We see it every day out there,” the Rev. Charles Harrison said. “It’s troubling because it makes you wonder what this says about their futures when they are living through these experiences at such a young age, and when they too often don’t have positive role models. They’re kids, so they emulate what they see, and too often what they see is dysfunction and people involved in criminal activity.”

No positive direction

Harrison, pastor of Barnes United Methodist Church, leads the Ten Point Coalition, a crime-prevention group that has spent dozens of nights this year...
patrolling and mediating in the city’s most crime-ridden neighborhoods. He’s worried about the youngest of the kids he sees night after night, as well as their older brothers and sisters who have already veered the wrong way.

“We have to rebuild the family and the sense of community,” he said.

“These kids are not getting the positive direction from home that they need.”

What they get instead is a flood of experiences no child should have to endure.

On another afternoon this summer, several people were sitting on the porch of a dilapidated home near 10th and Oxford streets when police arrived. The officers had been called to mediate a dispute between the home’s landlord and its renters, a family that had fallen behind on the $440-per-month payments. As a woman argued loudly with the landlord, her 2-year-old son, wearing a diaper and a blue Thomas the Train T-shirt, cuddled in the arms of another woman on the porch.

“We don’t have anywhere else to go,” the first woman told police.

The house was filthy, inside and out. Weeds and broken glass choked the yard, and at least a dozen bags of trash had been tossed in a pile out back. Bugs filled the air; empty beer bottles littered the grass.

“I’m sorry,” the woman told police a few minutes later as she invited them into the home. Inside, boards had been nailed over several windows and some of the screens were ripped. Ceiling tiles were missing and the home was filled with exposed electrical outlets. Trash was scattered everywhere. Apologizing again, the woman said she worked at a local discount store and hadn’t had time to clean.

Back outside, a few feet from the toddler, the landlord made clear he wasn’t moved by pleas for additional time.

“I’m kicking them out,” he said. “They haven’t paid me a dime in two months.”

On that afternoon, and many others, I thought about the impact of such experiences on young children. What does it do to a child when they don’t feel safe or secure, when their lives are filled with turmoil and trouble? What does it mean when their parents are absent or lost in a haze of drugs and alcohol? Toddlers are sponges, soaking in experiences and words and echoing them back. Their actions tomorrow are driven so much by what they see, hear and feel today.

The ramifications for children, and for our community, can be searing. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released a study in 2010 backing up what many researchers had previously found: “Adverse childhood experiences ... have been linked to a range of adverse health outcomes in adulthood,” from substance abuse and depression to diabetes and cancer.

Another federal report, in 2012 by the National Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence, laid bare the threat: “The trauma children experience when they are exposed to physical, sexual and emotional violence harms their ability to mature cognitively and emotionally, and it scars them physically and emotionally well into their adult lives.”

The statistics highlight the scope of the problem. In Marion County, more than 3,000 children are under the court-ordered supervision of Child Protective Services, a sign of significant problems in the home. A recent national report estimated 80,000 children in the metro area go to bed hungry or face
food insecurity. A local study found more than 350 minors were homeless on a typical night in January. And the city’s most crime-ridden neighborhoods and apartment complexes are filled with thousands of children.

**A heavy cost**

Although many children overcome painful experiences while growing up, there’s still a cost exacted on them and on our community. Examples of those costs aren’t hard to find.

One afternoon in June, for instance, police were called to a home by the mother of a 17-year-old who had violated his home detention order. The woman had called 911 after getting into a loud argument with the boy about his girlfriend. When police arrived, her anger had not subsided.

“I don’t care what the f--- you all do with him,” she said. “If you see him, f--- him up. F--- him up bad, that’s what I want you to do.”

As she spoke, three toddlers stood within several feet of her, watching everything, hearing everything. One of the toddlers sat on a tricycle, moving it back and forth in the grass as he took in the scene.

A few minutes later and a few blocks away, Officer Mason spotted the young man as he walked through a community center parking lot. When she put her squad car into reverse, the teenager ducked behind a pickup truck, then sprinted away. He ran through the parking lot and into a Burger King, swerving around customers before heading into a nearby neighborhood.

“Stop! Police!” Mason shouted as she chased the suspect, crossing 10th Street in a full sprint amid afternoon traffic.

Police eventually caught the teenager, handcuffed him and brought him back to the Burger King parking lot. Despite the tense situation, the young man was friendly and talkative, smiling and joking and displaying a personality and intelligence that made me think he should be preparing to go to college and not to jail. He was another example of the untapped potential that exists in so many young people in the city, young people who have too often been robbed of fathers, opportunities, safety and security, and the positive experiences that fill the lives of other children.

The young man’s story is typical; it is filled with years of trouble that started at a young age. At 13, he was suspended from school for making sexual comments to a 12-year-old girl, then threatening her after she reported his behavior. At 16, he was kicked out of a skating rink for flashing gang signs, then arrested when he defiantly ignored police orders to leave the premises. Months after that, he was arrested with another teenager for the armed robbery of a 21-year-old man. His mom has filed numerous runaway reports over the years.

As he sat cuffed in the parking lot that afternoon this summer, the teenager told police that he attended Tech High School — offering a glimpse into the immense challenges faced by teachers and administrators in many schools, and of the troubled lives of students who collectively make up a school’s test scores and graduation rate.

Behind that data are tales of heartbreak that most of us can’t fully grasp. It’s a heartbreak that underscores the difficulty of turning around the city’s schools but also makes clear the desperate need to build school systems prepared to handle such challenges and to invest in programs that prepare young people for parenthood and
school, and that combat ills such as substance abuse and family dysfunction.

Eric Howard sees the problems daily as CEO of Outreach Inc., an Eastside nonprofit he founded in 1996 to address the devastating plight of homeless young people in the city. By the time teens and young adults arrive at his door, they have endured years of painful experiences. They’ve been in and out of foster care and most have been victims of emotional, verbal and physical abuse. They’ve suffered insecurity over food, family support and housing. Some are already parents themselves.

“The trauma they have experienced isn’t about one incident,” Howard said. “It’s about years of experiences.”

The result is that many children across the city are lost to the streets.

On the last day of August, several police officers responded to a complicated case involving a teenage runaway, a girl with a lifetime of troubles who on this occasion had fled from a residential treatment center for young people who have experienced abuse and neglect and who, in some cases, suffer from mental health problems.

The girl was spilling out of the sports bra she wore above a pair of short-shorts and go-go boots. She has been picked up by police at least 10 times in the past three years. On this evening, days after again being reported as a runaway, police found her when an acquaintance called them about a fight she’d just had at the apartment of a 40-year-old man.

The man, wanted on an unrelated strangulation charge, was drinking beers in back of a house with a few friends when police located him. He called the girl a “bitch” and said she was friends with his girlfriend. He showed the officers a cut on his right thumb that he blamed on the runaway, saying she had “freaked out” when he told her to leave the house. His friends, in various stages of drunkenness, backed up the story.

The girl attempted to flee as police talked to the man, but she was quickly apprehended and told to sit on the curb next to a squad car with its lights flashing. She became annoyed and dismissive of the questions the officers posed, asking that they simply take her to the juvenile lockup, a place she’d been many times before.

“How tall are you?” an officer who was preparing his report asked.

“I don’t know,” the girl said.

“What’s your birthday?”

“I don’t remember,” she responded.

“I don’t know my stuff anymore. You have all that information. It’s in your computer.”

15 and pregnant ...

for the third time

The girl was only 15 on that August night but she already had a long history in the public safety and child-protection systems. Arrested several times, she also had been through a series of foster homes, including three in the past year. She was taken away from her mother at age 5 because officials believed the violence between her mom and her mom’s boyfriend put the child in danger. According to police reports, her parents have been in and out of prison.

Now she’s pregnant, seven months from bringing a child into her world. It’s her third pregnancy, she told me that night, saying the other two ended in miscarriages.

As the lights of police cars filled the darkness, the officer asked a few more questions.
“Do you have a phone number for your dad?”
“No.”
“For your mom?”
“No.”
“What school do you go to?”
“I don’t go to school.”
She was taken to juvenile jail that night. It was one more bad night in a young life filled with bad nights. She’s one more troubled child in a city filled with troubled children.
They are the reason we must work harder to repair schools, families and neighborhoods, and the reason we should invest in programs that work. This city is home to thousands of children whose great potential is largely untapped. Helping them fulfill their potential, and, thus, have the opportunities they deserve, must be our city’s cause.
BUTLER BLUES

Butler’s season ends with 74-72 loss to Marquette. Butler’s Andrew Smith (right) walks off in tears after he missed the last shot that would have tied the game, C1. Kravitz: Call off the NCAA tournament since Butler is going home, C1

INDIANA: The Victor Oladipo-Kahlil Wyatt matchup could be key to this afternoon’s game against Temple, C1

THE SUNDAY STAR

“Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” II COR. 3:17

MORE ONLINE AT SSUPPEERRDDAAAALLLEEEE!!!

NOW through Sunday, March 24th

MEETING THE SPIRIT

BEHIND THE FUN, A FAMILY FEUD

After death of park president, his widow and brother battle to run Holiday World

SANTACAUST, Ind. — In the southeastern Indiana hamlet of Santa Claus nearly 70 years ago, an Evansville industrialist had an inspiration. With little here for children but a post office that handled Santa letters, why not offer something more? Much more. So Louis J. Koch opened a theme park, with a Mother Goose ride and a toy shop of elves. Years later his son Bill and later his grandson Will took the vision further. Much further.

Monster roller coasters. Giant water slides.

Today, Holiday World & Splashy Safari draws more than a million visitors each year. But the park built by generations of a family to entertain families is now splitting a family apart. Bill’s widow, Lori Koch, and brother Dan Koch, who heads the legal arm of the Koch family legacy, locked horns this weekend over the park and his three children. Dan, a lawyer from Florida who once ran the park, says he now pines for a return. Perhaps because of expectations of closeness, family legal battles tend to be wrenching things. The Koch feud is that and more.

Dan and Lori have quite differing views on each other. She fired him as in- house counsel of the company board. He said her demands could destroy the park.

It’s hard, it’s difficult, I’m torn. Who wants to be at odds with your family?* LORE KOCH, with widow

MORE ONLINE AT INDYSTAR.COM

VIDEO: Lori Koch and company President Matt Eckert discuss the battle for control and how the importance of family guides their decisions. Also, a sneak peak at the new ride for the year.

Photo galleries: A look back at Holiday World over the years. Plus, other notable Hoosier family feuds.

CULTURE OF COZINESS

FIRST IN A SERIES

Conflicts of interest abound at Statehouse

Coziness between lobbyists, lawmakers is widely accepted

O ne by one on a Tuesday in mid-February, Indiana state legisla
tors streamed into the Down- town Hyatt Regency to an

invitation-only party hosted by the state’s banking industry. One of the first law-
makers to arrive was among the most important: Sen. Travis Holcomb, chair-
man of the Senate Committee on Financial Institutions.

Few people in the state have more power than Holcomb over the shape and

scope of the banking industry, and as a result, he has as a result, he has

received an unusual amount of related legis-
lations — legisla-
tion that fills

hours of commit-
tee work during

the session. But

this on this evening, the Weld County Republican wasn’t
toiling in his com-

mittee but rather mingling with leaders of

the state’s banking industry in a sim-
dy lit banquet hall, as those at the party

sipped brandied cherries and grabbed drinks and

toasted the

New Year.

Holcomb’s appearance wasn’t a sur-
prise. In the session, the banking indus-
try enjoys both a close friend and a col-
league. Away from the Statehouse, the

*See CONFLICTS, Page A18

HEAR AND SEE MORE AT INDYSTAR.COM: A live video, listen to Matthew Tully explain how a lobbyist became law in Indiana. A view a photo gallery to see lobbyists at work.

STORIES YOU WON’T WANT TO MISS IN YOUR SUNDAY STAR

Are you upsetting your...?

The folks who brew your coffee, style your hair, coach your kids and more tell The Star what’s on their minds.

What kids think off Indy Living, Q1

Showrooming booms; businesses fight back

Brick and mortar retailers are using a number of tools — including price comparison — to combat “showrooming,” where shoppers check out a product in a store, then buy it for less online. Business, E1

Rethinking school for special needs kids

Schools add staff and refine their rules to serve students with special education needs. Metro, State, B1

INDEX » Business B1-B3 » Editorials B5 » Lottery A2 » Obituaries B5-B6 » Money B5-B6 » Puzzles G9 » Scoreboard C77
Conflicts of interest abound at Statehouse

BY MATTHEW TULLY

One by one on a Tuesday in mid-February, Indiana state legislators streamed into the Downtown Hyatt Regency to an invitation-only party hosted by the state’s banking industry. One of the first lawmakers to arrive also was among the most important: Sen. Travis Holdman, chairman of the Senate Committee on Financial Institutions.

Few people in the state have more power than Holdman over the shape and content of banking-related legislation — legislation that fills hours of committee work during the session. But on this evening, the Wells County Republican wasn’t toiling in his committee but rather mingling with leaders of the state’s banking industry in a dimly lit banquet hall, as those at the party nibbled bruschetta and grabbed drinks at the bar.

Holdman’s appearance wasn’t a surprise. In the senator, the banking industry enjoys both a close friend and a colleague. Away from the Statehouse, the former bank CEO operates Holdman Consult, which solicits consulting business from the same banking industry he oversees. Through that consulting firm, Holdman serves as the national sales executive for The KeyState Companies, a Las Vegas-based financial services firm that does big business with community banks.

Explaining the relationship, KeyState’s president told a trade magazine in 2011 that Holdman “helps keep us connected with bankers” because “he has such deep ties to the Indiana banking community.”

In addition to working for the banking industry outside of the Statehouse, Holdman helps it within the General Assembly. A few weeks ago, he signed on as chief Senate sponsor of legislation that would lower taxes on banks in Indiana by $18.8 million a year when fully implemented — money that would either be lost to the state, or replaced by other taxpayers.

Holdman’s deep connection to an industry he helps oversee is far from unusual in the Indiana Statehouse. Conflicts of interest are as routine in the General Assembly as partisan spats, and the atmosphere of coziness between lawmakers and special interests is both deeply entrenched and widely accepted. Some call conflicts of interest business as usual, but this much is clear: The heavy influence exerted by well-connected lobbyists and industries makes it nearly impossible for average citizens, or those with fewer connections and less clout, to compete for attention when the laws that shape Indiana are written.

Julia Vaughn, longtime leader of the watchdog group Common Cause Indiana, said Holdman’s case is just one example of “an arrogant attitude that exists at the Statehouse.” The conflicts of interest and the outsized power of
special interests, Vaughn said, “seem to be endemic to the legislature.” She’s right.

**Tolerated and applauded**

Walk the Statehouse corridors when the General Assembly is in session and among the most common sights is the presence of former lawmakers and legislative staffers, now working as paid lobbyists. They fill the halls outside the House and Senate chambers, looking for help from lawmakers with whom they once served. The lobbying industry spends millions to shape public policy; the state’s casino industry alone spent at least $5.8 million to lobby 150 lawmakers over the past five years at the same time it repeatedly sought legislative changes that would save the industry far more money. High-ranking operatives in both major political parties also work as Statehouse lobbyists, seeking to influence the same members they help get elected. And many lawmakers, like Holdman, don’t shy from participating in debates over bills despite having close ties to the businesses or industries affected by the legislation.

Perhaps the most perplexing aspect of the culture of coziness is that it is often not a secret — it’s tolerated and even applauded. Just a few examples:

Rep. Matt Lehman is chairman of the House Insurance Committee. His campaign reports make that clear, as he received nearly $40,000 in the past two years from insurance-related companies, industries and lobbyists. But the relationship goes deeper: Lehman is a partner at an Allen County insurance company. He’s not alone. His committee, which shapes insurance-related legislation, includes three other members who either work at or operate insurance agencies. The bills they write affect the businesses they run.

Rep. Kevin Mahan, Hartford City, is a member of Lehman’s Insurance Committee and works at State Farm Insurance. This session, he wrote HB 1190, which would limit instances in which insurance companies must offer coverage against uninsured and underinsured motorists. He has also sought to limit the amount of such coverage. The legislation might be cheered by the insurance industry, but could mean fewer protections for drivers.

The first bill to pass the General Assembly this year would postpone new tax assessments affecting Indiana farmers. Indiana Farm Bureau ranked the bill as one of its top legislative goals and lobbied heavily for it. It’s easy to see why. The proposal would save corporate and family farmers a collective $57 million this year — savings that could shift costs to other property owners.

In a celebratory news release, Farm Bureau thanked Rep. Robert Cherry of Greenfield for guiding the legislation through the House. They could have just thanked him at the office: Cherry is a Farm Bureau employee. Meanwhile, the Senate sponsor of the bill, Sen. Jean Leising, owns a 300-acre farm in Franklin County that would have faced a significant tax increase this year if not for her legislation.

Rep. Mike Speedy is pushing a bill to prevent local governments from addressing problem rental properties through the creation of landlord licensing programs and apartment inspection fees. Mayors throughout the state say the bill could harm public safety initiatives. In Evansville, leaders fear it could block efforts to address slumlords, drug houses and abandoned structures. Speedy, though,
says the legislation would protect the apartment industry from unjust fees and regulations. The Indianapolis Republican understands the apartment industry quite well; away from the Statehouse, he is an apartment developer.

“This is all nothing new, and that is what’s really sad,” John Dunbar, managing editor of politics at the Center for Public Integrity, said of such conflicts. “And, unfortunately, it doesn’t seem to be something that is reformable.”

Good public policy?

Lawmakers, for their part, fiercely defend the conflicts of interest, noting that a part-time legislature is certain to have conflicts because members typically have other full-time careers. Moreover, they say, the conflicts actually inspire good public policy by infusing the legislature with experts in various fields — from farming to insurance to banking. The lawmakers I interviewed insisted that their votes and actions at the Statehouse were not influenced by the effect that bills and laws would have on their non-legislative careers or financial interests. As Cherry said: “I go above and beyond to make sure I’m as clean as a whistle.” Holdman’s office sent me a statement saying: “If no lawmaker could participate in any legislation regarding their fields of expertise, the legislature would be paralyzed. We depend on those with unique knowledge to offer their input, leadership and expertise in those fields.”

Yet such conflicts — lawmakers writing and presiding over legislation that directly benefits them and their industry colleagues — are clearly troublesome.

Dunbar, who has written extensively about conflicts of interest in state legislatures, chuckled as he accurately predicted the defense that many legislators had given me: that it only makes sense for those with industry expertise to guide committees and legislation affecting those industries. That argument fails to take into account that such conflicts often result in only one side of a debate or an issue getting heard, as it’s easier for big-dollar industries to flood campaigns with donations than it is for, say, consumer advocacy organizations.

“The people who make that argument just completely blow my mind,” Dunbar said. “Unless the people of your district are, say, all bankers or all insurance agents, it’s unlikely that’s why they elected you. And there is such an obvious potential for a conflict of interest. It’s just not realistic to think someone is going to vote against their own self interest, even if it’s in the public interest.”

The culture of insider coziness inside the General Assembly goes well beyond lawmakers’ business interests. The deep ties to special interests are on display night after night in Downtown Indianapolis when the legislature is in session. Lobbyists routinely treat lawmakers to expensive meals and high-end entertainment. That was the case one January evening when several utility lobbyists hosted members of the House Utility Committee in a suite during an Indiana Pacers game at Bankers Life Fieldhouse. It also was the case last year when, not long before coming to the legislature in search of a tax subsidy, the Indianapolis Motor Speedway spent nearly $10,000 on race tickets, food and drinks for 23 lawmakers and their guests. And it was the case when banking lobbyists took Holdman and other
members of his committee to dinner at the Capital Grille Downtown one night in the opening days of the current legislative session.

It's no secret
Insider clout is evident daily in Statehouse hallways. On a recent afternoon two former state political party chairmen — Democrat Kip Tew and Republican Mike McDaniel — were among dozens of lobbyists waiting to talk to lawmakers. Tew, McDaniel and others who work or have worked as both lobbyists and party leaders trade on close relationships with legislators built up over years of political campaigns.

John Hammond and Tom John are two other political insiders frequently seen at the Statehouse. The two work closely with legislative candidates as top officials in the Indiana Republican Party. They also are top lobbyists, influencing legislators they have helped get elected on behalf of lobbying giant Ice Miller’s clients. They are joined at their firm by Lacy Johnson, an influential Indianapolis Democrat. Frank Short, meanwhile, is a key player in the Marion County Democratic Party, serving as the Washington Township Trustee. He also lobbies fellow Democrats on behalf of clients such as 21st Amendment liquor stores and Cash America check-cashing outlets.

Sometimes the person waiting in the hallway is a former high-ranking legislator. Two of the more prominent lobbyists in the Statehouse are former House Speakers Paul Mannweiler and Michael Phillips.

Political, financial, personal ties
The conflicts arise on many fronts. And while they indeed in some ways may be unavoidable in a part-time citizen legislature, the current culture in the Statehouse is one in which the special interests who want to shape legislation and the lawmakers who write it are tied closely together — politically, financially and personally.

In the months leading up to the 2012 elections, lobbyists and special-interest representatives were a constant presence at fundraisers for lawmakers they would later turn to for help. Monarch Beverage, an alcohol-distribution firm that lobbies heavily at the Statehouse, provided the alcohol for a fundraiser supporting Rep. Tim Neese’s campaign last summer. Groups including U.S. Steel and Indiana’s Electric Cooperatives sponsored a fundraiser for Environmental Affairs Chairman Dave Wolkins in September, and golf outings to raise money for legislators’ campaigns, filled with lobbyists, were a near-daily occurrence last summer.

The fundraising invitations are often blunt. One sent to lobbyists and others for Rep. Kathy Heuer prominently noted that she was a member of the influential House Committee on Commerce, Small Business and Economic Development. An invitation to a fundraiser for Rep. Jack Lutz highlighted his position on the House Utilities Committee.

The same people attending the fundraisers and funding the campaigns can be found seeking legislative action daily at the Statehouse when the legislature is in session.

On a recent Monday morning, House Speaker Brian Bosma and Senate President David Long met privately with leaders of the school choice movement, which advocates for school
vouchers and has seen tremendous legislative success in recent years. The two Republican leaders were huddled in a Republican caucus room, typically home to closed-door party meetings, with a group that included Fred Klipsch, a local businessman who has made the contentious issue of school choice his cause.

Republican leaders have relied on Klipsch to help fund recent campaigns that enabled the GOP to build super majorities in both the House and Senate. In the most recent two-year campaign cycle alone, a school-choice group that Klipsch chairs, Hoosiers for Economic Growth, pumped nearly $1 million into the coffers of state Republican candidates and caucuses. Another $156,000 has come from Klipsch’s personal accounts in the past five years. And on that morning earlier this month, as another school voucher debate approached, Klipsch had a private audience with the most important legislative leaders in Indiana.

It’s not a partisan thing. When Democrats controlled the House, leaders often took their cues from the teachers union forces that infused their campaigns with money and support.

Both in the chambers and in the hallways, conflicts of interest rule at the Statehouse. Lawmakers rely on special interests to fund campaigns, and special interests rely on lawmakers to craft legislation in their favor — or to kill bills they oppose.

The conflicts become evident in combing campaign finance reports, as I have in recent months. In one typical example, Sen. Pat Miller, R-Indianapolis, received 30 campaign contributions just two weeks before the 2012 elections. All of the donations, worth between $200 and $1,000 each and totaling $7,950, arrived on the same day. All of the money came from partners at Krieg Devault, a powerful Indianapolis-based lobbying firm. A few weeks after Miller won re-election, Krieg Devault’s lobbyists were at the Statehouse, representing clients whose fortunes rise and fall depending on the legislation coming out of Miller’s Health Benefits Committee.

Some industries, though, hardly need an outside lobbyist. Take the case of health food stores.

One morning earlier this year State Rep. Bob Morris appeared at a meeting of the House Public Health Committee, although not a member of it, and asked to speak in opposition to a bill advocates said would protect consumers by more tightly regulating dietitians. The bill has faced strong resistance from the owners of health-food stores, who fear it could hurt their businesses.

The industry has both an ally, and a brother, in Morris. On that morning, he told the committee that the bill, “is very problematic to me.” It’s easy to see why; he owns a chain of health-food stores.

In the end, the committee amended the bill to address the concerns of health-food stores and 90 members of the House, including Morris, later voted to pass it. The residents of House District 84 probably didn’t know it, but when they re-elected Morris last fall they were also electing a powerful lobbyist for the health-food store industry.

Comfy with being cozy

At the Statehouse, few complained. Few rarely do.

The cozy, conflict-ridden culture is routinely on display, as it was on a recent Tuesday evening at the Ice
House. The out-of-the-way Southside bar was packed tight with dozens of state lawmakers who enjoyed tenderloin sandwiches, beers and hamburgers. The room was loud with conversation and laughter, and several members said it was an important bipartisan event — one that allowed rival Democrats and Republicans to bond in hopes of reducing the toxic partisanship that has clouded recent legislative sessions.

The goal may have been sound. But something else dominated the room that evening: insider clout. About a dozen lobbyists from the biggest firms in town were asked to join the party, and, in typical Statehouse fashion, they picked up the tab.

It was just another night in Indianapolis when the General Assembly is in session. As lawmakers gathered on that chilly evening, special interests were well-represented, as they so often are. The same lobbyists who would be back at the Statehouse pushing their clients’ causes the next morning were schmoozing with lawmakers that night. Rank-and-file Hoosiers were nowhere to be found.
A once-failing IPS school makes a remarkable turnaround through a relentless push for excellence from students and staff

THE HARSHMAN WAY

A young man on the edge of serious trouble sat with his head slumped one recent morning in a conference room at Harshman Middle, an IPS magnet school that sits along 106th Street on the Near Eastside. Several adults — teachers, administrators and the boy’s mom — surrounded him at a long wooden table.

Teachers insist that the 14-year-old student is bright, capable and, at times, thoughtful. He’s a standout on the school’s wrestling team; his coach called him “amazing” as the morning got started. But he’s also been the source of a long stream of headaches for the school’s staff. He disrespects teachers, sometimes angrily, and has lobbed gay slurs at some students and disturbing sexual comments at others. The school recently suspended him for a few days after a fight. Then there’s his most recent report card.

“Three Ds and four Fs”

Principal Robert Guffin said.

“From one of the kids who might be one of the smartest in the school? I don’t get it.”

This was an intervention.

The staff talked about the student’s grades and the potential for a positive path forward. They talked about his self-professed desire to go to

ONE SCHOOL’S TURNDOWN

Dec. 15: Once one of the state’s worst performing schools, IPS’ Harshman Middle School is now a model of urban education.

Dec. 18: For Madeline Hutchins, teaching at Harshman is more than a job. It’s a mission.

Dec. 22: Harshman faces one cold reality: A three-year federal grant that has pumped $5.5 million into the school is going away. The grant has funded 15 positions aimed at improving both student and teacher performance and filled in many gaps. But the school’s leaders insist its high performance will continue without the money.

» See HARSHMAN, Page A18

MOLD RUINS DREAM HOME

Inspection didn’t find toxic fungus, and couple can’t afford $80K to fix it

By Chris Sikich
chris.sikich@indystar.com

Dan and Erica Walter were confident they were buying their dream home along a tree-lined street in Carmel — a big house in a nice neighborhood with a sprawling backyard where they could build a life and raise a family.

But just one day after closing on the purchase of the $245,000 property, the couple realized something was terribly wrong. The home smelt musty. Erica felt sick.

The Walters knocked a few holes in the walls and ripped up some carpeting. They found multiple signs of water damage: stains inside walls and on subfloors, rotted wood, mushy drywall. Black residue coated tack strips, subfloors, the back of the drywall and the vapor barrier and insulation.

They called in an expert and realized their worst fears: Their new home was rife with toxic black mold.

The Midwest is ripe for black mold, called stachybotrys, said Jack Dwayne Thrasher, a specialist with the nonprofit Global Indoor Health Network and retired UCLA professor who specialized in mold and other toxins. Black mold can cause myriad health problems, including severe allergic reactions, asthma and even lung and neurological damage.

“This is dangerous,” he said of the common, though often undiscovered, problem. “If you
A once-failing IPS school makes a remarkable turnaround through a relentless push for excellence from students and staff

BY MATTHEW TULLY

A young man on the edge of serious trouble sat with his head slumped one recent morning in a conference room at Harshman Middle, an IPS magnet school that sits along 10th Street on the Near Eastside. Several adults — teachers, administrators and the boy’s mom — surrounded him at a long wooden table.

Teachers insist that the 14-year-old student is bright, capable and, at times, thoughtful. He’s a standout on the school’s wrestling team; his coach called him “amazing” as the meeting got started. But he’s also been the source of a long stream of headaches for the school’s staff. He disrespects teachers, sometimes angrily, and he has lobbed gay slurs at some students and disturbing sexual comments at others. The school recently suspended him for a few days after a fight. Then there’s his most recent report card.

“Three Ds and four Fs?” Principal Robert Guffin said. “From one of the kids who might be one of the smartest in the school? I don’t get it.”

This was an intervention. The staff talked about the student’s grades and the potential for a positive path forward. They talked about his self-professed desire to go to college and asked whether he’d be willing to make the changes necessary to make that more than a fantasy. His wrestling coach, Christopher Day, said his grades and classroom behavior were threatening his spot on the wrestling team.

Then Reggie Smith spoke up. Forty-one years old, with a goatee and a shaved head, Smith looked straight at the student and almost broke down as he talked about the mistakes too many young black males make. He told his own story, about once facing the end of a gun as a teenager, and about the students he has known who are now locked up or dead.

“All because they wouldn’t listen,” he said. “Nope, ‘Mr. Smith doesn’t know what he is talking about.’ So my thing is this: Not only am I asking you, I’m begging you: Start to listen. Because I don’t want to open up the newspaper one day and see that you’ve been in the wrong place at the wrong time, someone has jumped you, or shot you.”

As the student quietly listened, Smith spoke with urgency and, beneath it all, with a deep belief that students from tough neighborhoods can overcome mistakes, bad habits and their surroundings.

He’s not alone. That sense of urgency combined with the belief in students is a common trait at Harshman. It’s become a part of the school’s DNA and the reason that it has emerged, amid all the obstacles and bitter education debates, as indisputable evidence that at-risk kids can thrive and that once-troubled urban schools can be turned around.
Guffin sat at the front of the table that morning. That’s fitting, as the white-haired principal is at the heart of Harshman’s turnaround and its philosophy.

He arrived at the school five years ago, just after turning 60, eager to create the kind of school he’d never worked in but that he knew was possible. With the right staff, selfless teamwork and a shared vision, as well as a lot of brutally hard work, he was certain one of the state’s worst-performing schools could become a model.

And it has. In a school where nine of every 10 students qualify for free or reduced lunches, a measure of family poverty, nearly 75 percent passed both the math and English ISTEP exams last year — up a mind-boggling 44 percentage points in five years. More than 92 percent passed the math portion of the test, well above the state average and more than double the passage rate upon Guffin’s arrival.

But this isn’t just about test scores. This is about a school wholly transformed. The chaos and even danger that once filled the halls are gone. Teachers who weren’t giving their all are elsewhere. The halls are quiet, clean and decorated. Students know the expectations of them are high, and, as such, dozens stay after school every day for tutoring. Anything that gets in the way of success — from bad behavior to apathy — is tackled with the urgency of an intervention. And every teacher here buys into the credo shared one recent morning by Whitney Newton, who holds one of three instructional coach positions Guffin created.

“There aren’t good teachers and bad teachers here,” Newton said. “There are only teachers who are doing everything they can to get better every day.”

Five years into the Harshman experiment, the results are clear. Troubled schools can turn around. Children of poverty can learn and succeed. Struggling neighborhoods can be home to top schools. It’s not a fantasy. It’s reality and, at Harshman, it’s most fundamentally an expectation.

‘Every student can learn’

“Clap once if you can hear me and then clap twice if you can see me,” math teacher Rhonda Pierre told a group of 23 students on a recent morning, eager to grab their attention at the start of class.

The students clapped and a few smiled. Then Pierre told them to pair up for a math exercise, a request that led several to stand up and join classmates elsewhere in the room. Some began to talk and meander, and that wasn’t acceptable. Not at Harshman Middle School. And definitely not in Mrs. Pierre’s class.

“This won’t happen in a disorderly way,” the mother of four IPS students said. “Because that makes me nervous. And we don’t want Mrs. Pierre to be nervous, do we?”

Quiet “no’s” filled the room, as Pierre nudged the students along.

“Is there chaos in learning?” she asked, as an ambulance with its sirens blaring passed by along 10th Street. “No. So we will do this calmly.”

This classroom is success defined. Over the past two years, every 8th-grade algebra student who has come through Pierre’s classroom has passed the state-mandated end-of-course assessment. That’s the test that most students take as sophomores in high school. Nearly every one of her students passed ISTEP last year, and the year before.

Her method is clear and it explains
Harshman’s success: She calls it “no-opt out,” meaning students “are not allowed to opt out of succeeding” in her class. Failure is not an option, she tells them. Don’t even think about it. She tries to teach her students perseverance and self-esteem as well as math, and while she understands the difficult circumstances in many of their lives she doesn’t allow anyone to use that as an excuse to fail or to give up.

Pierre has been known to pull struggling math students out of after-school basketball practice, insisting they come to her room for tutoring instead. Her passion was on display one recent afternoon as she ran angrily down the hall in pursuit of a disgruntled student who had left her class without doing his work properly. She wasn’t about to let him get away without doing things the right way. Sorry, she told him, but failure is not an option. Word about the hallway sprint quickly spread through the school; it’s an example of why her colleagues compare her to a mama bear: loving, but protective and tough.

On another day, in an algebra class, it was clear that Pierre was again not pleased. Most of the students had failed a recent test, a particularly difficult test, and the period would be dedicated to correcting their mistakes. This class, she told them, would be about understanding the material so that they don’t make the same mistakes in the future.

As students got to work, Pierre sat down near a student who was struggling and gently told her to “sit up straight so you can think straight.”

“I am going to push you because I want to see you do the work I know you can do,” she told the class later. “We are going to master this. I want to make this perfect. So get ready: We’re going to be studious. We’re going to work as hard as we have to. We’re going to get this right.”

**No quick fix**

So many people are looking for a quick fix to the daunting problems in schools across Indianapolis and the nation. But there isn’t one. Although smart laws and policies are crucial, the real solution lies in the painstakingly hard, student-by-student, hour-by-hour work being done in classrooms like this one. It’s not easy — unfortunately I’ve seen educational challenges met by apathy many times in many classrooms — but the stakes are too high to expect anything less.

“I believe every student can learn,” Pierre told me one afternoon. “I don’t believe students learn at the same pace, but I do believe they can all learn. My goal is to prepare them for life, to be able to figure out real-world solutions. I don’t teach them for a test. I teach them for life.”

But because of the way she teaches them, because teaching is what she calls “my ministry,” her students thrive on the same tests that stymie many schools with similar student populations. A key ingredient, colleagues say, is that Pierre and others here work obsessively to understand every student — how they learn, what motivates and frustrates them, and what inspires them. Like a detective, Pierre scours the ground for clues about their individuality, talking to their friends, family and former teachers.

“She can tell you what their neighborhoods are like, what their parents do, how they like to learn — anything,” Pierre’s colleague
Ashley Cowger said. “She’s like an encyclopedia of every student.”

And she’s a key ingredient in a remarkable turnaround, one that began with a simple message.

“Harshman is going to be a special place.”

That’s what Guffin told each of the estimated 200 teachers he interviewed for about 30 jobs near the end of his first year as principal. The school was becoming a full magnet school, and he’d just been given the rare authority to reconstitute the staff and personally select each teacher. He wanted only those who were both stellar educators and eager to buy into a cause, a cause based on the concept that student achievement would guide every decision.

It sounds so simple. But it’s real here at Harshman. Conversations in the teachers lounge are often about students and teaching methods, not political debates that have caused such bitterness in too many education circles. Disputes about policies or tactics are easy to settle here, because the decisions are based on that bottom-line issue: What’s best for students? No time is wasted on bemoaning what can’t be changed — whether that’s an
absentee parent or a state law. And even hard decisions, such as telling a nice person that he or she can no longer teach here, are easier because they are based on what’s best for the students.

In too many struggling schools, Guffin said, “There’s the idea that kids are crazy or that kids don’t care. First, it’s not true. But also that provides an excuse. I’ve heard teachers say, ‘I deliver the lesson and they don’t get it.’ Or, ‘I taught it but they didn’t learn it.’ Well, if they didn’t learn it, you didn’t teach it.”

That’s a message that might not play everywhere, but it plays well in this school, where belief in Guffin’s philosophy and in what he calls the “Harshman Way” fills every classroom and every employee I came into contact with this semester, from administrative assistants to the vice principal to the cafeteria workers.

“The buy-in is the most important thing we have,” Vice Principal Dana Altemeyer said. “For everyone to be on the same page when it comes to a school’s goals and expectations — well, I’ve never seen anything like this.”

That camaraderie is so valued that when a government grant allowed the school to award performance-based bonuses, Guffin insisted that everyone receive the same amount, from the guy who runs the school to the people who sweep its floors.

‘Improve every day’

I’ve spent numerous days this semester at Harshman, visiting classrooms often picked at random. In each one I’ve found teachers pushing and cajoling their students, urgently seeking new and better ways to get more out of them. I’ve seen teachers demand excellent behavior and focus. I’ve seen them tell “A” students they can do better. In essence, I’ve seen them embracing another Harshman adage, one Guffin notes that he borrowed from former Butler University basketball coach Brad Stevens: “Work hard. Improve every day. And never stop.”

It’s inspiring. But it wasn’t always this way.

A few years ago, test scores were so low and student failure so ingrained that the state was on the verge of taking over Harshman. Based on test scores, it was ranked as one of the worst schools in Indiana. Teachers say they felt unsafe. The school was another sad example of the broken state of urban education in America.

“I remember when Harshman was rough and tumble,” said Dan Young, the Learning Center coordinator who has worked at Harshman for a decade and now works with students who have behavioral issues. “We used to have a heavy influence of street cliques and gangs in here. It was in a bad way.”

So what happened?

Guffin happened. The Morristown native arrived feeling a sense of urgency. That wasn’t new for him; it’s a defining characteristic. It was on display nearly four decades years ago when he quit his first teaching job out of frustration with the slow pace of his career advancement, and it was still a part of him when he returned to the classroom at the age of 42. That return came in 1990, when he took a substitute teaching position after nearly two decades in other jobs and in running his own businesses. Finally, he was back where he knew he belonged.

He arrived at Harshman in 2009 and soon received permission from
the district to start from scratch with the staff. Those in the building could reapply to stay, but given the high demands he was setting, many decided to go elsewhere. He offered underperforming teachers to other IPS schools desperate for anyone to fill a spot. He had tough conversations with some educators, including with a band teacher whose program had all but disappeared.

“They just don’t want to do this anymore,” Guffin recalls the teacher saying. The principal’s response: “Well, why would I hire you? You took that band from 75 kids to 10. Why would I hire you?”

He instead hired a young Butler graduate, Kyle Bieda, who has turned the band program into one of the school’s gems. More than 145 students now fill his six classes. On one recent day, several students spent their lunch periods in the back of his classroom, eating and watching him energetically teach, happy to spend more time in their favorite class. Bieda and his wife frequently take students to dinner Downtown and then to the symphony. Anything to increase their appreciation of music.

In the end, Guffin kept a handful of the teachers he inherited. He and his team asked the teachers they retained or hired to recommend friends who were succeeding elsewhere.

Altemeyer, now the vice principal and one of the school’s guiding forces, was the first hire and, in an example of how things work here, she later recruited one educator at the gym after striking up a conversation as they exercised on neighboring treadmills.

The school has filled its classrooms with teachers from within the district, from traditional education schools, and from programs such as Teach for America. It’s a diverse group with one shared trait: a belief in the Harshman Way.

And that means getting better every day, every semester, every year.

“I want as much feedback as I can get,” first-year teacher Hannah Caffee said one day as several colleagues prepared to watch a video clip of her teaching a science class. The footage showed her trying to engage and manage a crowded classroom.

For 15 minutes, her colleagues offered tips and suggestions, praise and nudges. Not defensive, Caffee took notes and nodded, asking questions along the way.

It was an example of life in a school built around intense professional development and collaboration. Teachers share successful strategies at weekly meetings and review each other in frank gatherings that might be tense elsewhere but are welcomed here. The meetings “are a sacred part of what we do here,” special education teacher Emily Willis said. “It’s how we achieve what we expect ourselves to achieve.”

The expectations on each other are high, just as they are on the students.

“They’ll be friends with you but they want you to do things right,” eighth-grader Telly Mayberry told me one afternoon. As evidence of that, he mentioned his Spanish teacher’s habit of calling his parents almost immediately when he fails to hand in an assignment.

“I don’t like it,” the 14-year-old said. “But I know it’s helpful. It’s why my grades stay up.”

‘We love Harshman’

The results at Harshman came quick.
After Guffin’s first year, ISTEP scores increased by six points. He said that was all about changing the culture, as high expectations replaced apathy. The next year, with a new staff, scores jumped 27 points. Then, three years ago, the school received a government grant worth $1.8 million a year for three years.

The money has been used to pay the salaries of professional development coaches, a vice principal, a program manager and several specialists who work individually with underperforming students.

The school of about 500 students became a full math, science and engineering magnet in 2010, after being a partial magnet program for years. This means expanded classes are now offered and that students have to receive an easy-to-attain recommendation from their elementary school.

Many are happy to give those recommendations. One of the city’s most respected elementary school teachers, Tammy Laughner at IPS’ Arlington Woods, smiled during a recent conversation as she said, “We love Harshman.” That’s because it provides her and her colleagues with the peace of mind that comes with knowing their students can move on to a middle school worthy of them.

Success doesn’t always come easy, though. One September morning, as students and teachers worked in classes throughout the building, the mother
of one troubled student walked into Harshman, struggling to communicate because she doesn’t speak English. Guffin and other school leaders talked about her son’s problems and asked if she could make him abide by the school’s goal of having every student stay after school twice a week.

“If we insist that he does that, would you support us?” Guffin asked, via a translator.

“She would love that,” the translator replied as the woman smiled.

The student is a troublemaker, with bad grades and a long list of infractions. But instead of looking for ways to get him out of their school, the Harshman team took the opposite approach.

“He needs more time in our school,” instructional coach Abigail Martin said. It’s easy to see why that would help. Students who spend their middle school years here succeed at rates that would have been hard to imagine not long ago. They are providing hope to all of those who want to see more students of poverty receive the opportunities in life that come with a good education.

The school’s success has attracted people such as Christopher Day, a 31-year-old North Central graduate who was working comfortably in his family’s engineering firm when Vice Principal Altemeyer, a longtime acquaintance, recruited him to coach the Harshman wrestling team. He arrived at the school not knowing what to expect from his new part-time job.

“It changed my life; it was a slap in the face,” the former high school wrestler said. “Within a week, I’d had an epiphany. I knew this was what I wanted to do with my life.”

One evening, the potential scope of an educator’s influence hit him when a student called his cellphone. The boy’s alcoholic stepfather was causing problems at home and the child needed someone to talk to. Day didn’t say much during the 20-minute conversation. He just listened until the boy was ready to return home. Moments like that convinced him to quit his day job, take a 40 percent pay cut and join Harshman as a full-time classroom assistant.

“It really put in perspective the role we play in their lives,” he said. “I couldn’t get to sleep that night. I kept thinking, ‘He’s only known me for three weeks and he’s calling me when he needs someone. Wow, I can really do some good here.’”

Doing good. Getting better. Challenging students and educators alike to pursue excellence. That’s become the Harshman Way. It’s a way forward, a way of hope, for students who deserve to go to a school that helps them reach their potential.
**IPS CHIEF FINALISTS**

"You have to identify what is not getting you value."

**THOMAS DARBY**

"I do expect more, students reach higher."

**LEWIS FORBES**

"I do think there is a certain accountability for all schools."

**MILLARD HOUSE**


### Making Their Case

**CANDIDATES TELL PUBLIC WHY THEY SHOULD LEAD DISTRICT**

By Scott Elliott

There are candidates for superintendent of Indianapolis Public Schools each argued their experiences made them the best fit for the job as they were introduced to the public Thursday.

The three are:

**Thomas Darby,** 54, executive director of New York City Schools for ASPIRA, a group that supports Puerto Rican and Latino youth.

**Millard House,** 48, chief operating officer for the school district in Charlotte, N.C.

**Louis Forbes,** 39, chief of staff for the school district in Durham, N.C.

Forbes was formerly deputy superintendent for Durham County Schools, working there he oversaw schools identified for improvement and, later, charter schools. Darby is an Indianapolis native and Tech High School graduate who worked as an engineer and then a manager for medical device company. Darby, 44, later helped start a venture capital fund in Chicago.

He said he family decided to leave Indianapolis after his son lost his hearing from meningitis. They moved to Rhode Island to enroll him in a school for the deaf, and he later graduated from Brown University.

Darby said he doesn't feel comfortable that he got a good education here. Darby said: “My wife and I are very grateful of choices because we felt it was a good education for our child. We had to move 1,000 miles away so he could get a good education.”

Darby said he would use his business acumen to identify the things IPS was spending on but not getting its money’s worth.

“We have to identify: Do I get the value of what I’m spending your money on. How do I get the cost to you, for me, and you aren’t getting what you need from us.”

Darby also addressed difficulties in his work history, including the failure of a venture capital fund he helped start that cost investors a lot of money. Darby said the problem is “the concept was right, but the execution wasn’t.”

When one of the seven companies in which it invested revealed it had major financial problems, he said, and his partners decided to risk their money to save it. They could have failed and “I’d feel guilty,” he said. “We worked to resolve the company. We have high risk investments, you’re at risk losses.”

House, a former principal, teacher, coach, principal administrator, has worked in Tulsa, Okla., where he also lives.

### Carmel could get new gun shop, shooting range

Some wary of proposed store's proximity to high school, trail

By Dan McFadden

CARMEL, Ind. — An Ohio gun shop and indoor shooting range is looking to expand into Carmel, with officials weighing the pros and cons of allowing them to set up shop at an existing auto shop at 993 Range Line Road near what could be a new hotel.

Paperwork filed in the city’s Department of Community Services indicates the property is zoned by Lancaster Realty LLC in Zionsville but is being leased by Andy Aydin.

Under the proposal, the gun store business was approved Thursday night and is one of the proposals for the area. The city is to decide on the matter by January 2014, city officials said.

The city planning commission voted to consider the proposal at a meeting at an existing auto shop at 993 Range Line Road, where there is a hotel.

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It’s as sad as it is pathetic. A group of people in the small southwestern Indiana county of Sullivan, apparently with absolutely nothing to do, got together recently to work on a cruel and mindless plan to ostracize some teenagers. They met in a church on a Sunday night and, according to news reports, engaged in a rigorous round of discrimination.

The group’s anger was aimed at a no-brainer of a decision by a local school district to allow a same-sex couple to simply attend their high school prom like other students. Yes, controversy actually erupted over the students being welcomed and not shunned, treated as just another couple as opposed to being bullied.

Those offended by the district’s decision held their meeting and began work on a plan to hold an alternative prom that would prohibit gay students from attending. Think about that: a group of people meeting in a small-town church and devising ways to keep a minority of people from going to the same places as others. Remind you of anything?

The part of the story that struck a nerve from coast to coast involved a teacher from a neighboring school district who actively supported the alternative prom and, on camera, offered a series of anti-gay comments so dumb, so mean and so ignorant that it makes you shudder to think that she is actually charged with teaching children. Rather than teach in a school, she should be sent back to one to take remedial classes on decency and civility.

The whole story should be shocking. But, of course, it’s not. Tales of gay teens being bullied and ostracized fill the news every month -- often after one of them heartbreakingly decides he can’t take the abuse any longer. The idea of holding a so-called traditional prom -- reportedly supported by its backers with biblically based arguments and tired declarations that they love the people they are rallying against -- is just a more organized version of hallway taunts. The fact that adults were participating, rather than telling the kids they guide to grow up and shut up, though, makes it worse.

Fortunately, the effort has been largely condemned. The school district has stood by its decision to allow the same-sex couple to attend the prom. And the district that employs the teacher who spoke out against gay students has also done the right thing, making clear in a statement that her comments “most definitely do not reflect our schools’ views or opinions.”

That’s good. But the story is still sad and pathetic, and it underscores the damage being done by politicians, preachers and other loudmouths intent on using their bully pulpits to beat up on, or discriminate against, some residents of our state. Cases like last
week’s also make clear the need for state leaders to permanently back away from a push to slap discrimination into the state constitution, in the form of an amendment prohibiting same-sex marriage. After all, it’s hard to criticize a small-town teacher’s ignorant comments when similar ones have been made on the floor of the Indiana House.

For many young people, coming out is not an easy thing. Think of all the complex emotions at play, and then add to that state-sponsored discrimination or organized bias in a small town. It’s really time for some people to grow up and mind their own business.

In the end, everyone would be wise to listen to the words of Mark Baker, superintendent of the Northeast School Corp., which employs the teacher whose anti-gay comments set off last week’s controversy.

“Our first priority,” he said, “is to ensure that our students feel welcome and safe.”

That’s such a simple and obvious concept, in schools and elsewhere. It’s just hard to understand why some people can’t grasp it.