

IN THIS ISSUE

KNA Information/Map 2
 Letter From the Chair..... 3
 Kenny School Gardens..... 4
 Lunar New Year Pot Luck 4
 Neighborhood Update..... 5
 Wallie Gegner 6
 Energy Assistance..... 6
 Kenny Couple Here to Stay 7
 Kenny Environmental Stories 8-9
 Swedish Reality TV Adventure 10-11
 Word on the Street..... 12
 Who’s in the ‘Hood 13
 Kenny Park News..... 14
 El Sazon & Saturday Dumpling Co. 15

Comments, questions, ideas?

Contact Kenny Neighborhood Association: 612-392-4477 or info@kennyneighborhood.org.

A publication of the Kenny Neighborhood Association. The Association is open to all Kenny residents. We meet to determine neighborhood needs and establish a sense of community.

The mission of KNA is to foster a welcoming, thriving community that is inclusive in all that it does.

To that end, KNA will encourage and support community involvement in the Kenny neighborhood; to stabilize and improve the residential, educational and economic status of the community; to function as a non-partisan, non-sectarian community action group keeping residents informed of proposals that affect the neighborhood; to coordinate and publicize activities in the community; to facilitate programs and projects to improve the neighborhood; and to represent the Kenny neighborhood before city boards, commissions, and other governmental entities.

Get Your Spoons Ready: The Kenny vs. Armatage Chili Bowl is Here!

By Kim Rosenfield



Bundle up your secret ingredients and dust off that crockpot — the Kenny Neighborhood Association’s most popular winter tradition is returning! The Kenny vs. Armatage Chili Bowl is heating up, and this year we’re joining forces with the Armatage Neighborhood Association for our biggest competition yet on **Saturday, February 21, at the Armatage Recreation Center.**

Think you make the best chili in Southwest Minneapolis?

Here’s your chance to prove it! Whether you’re perfecting a classic beef recipe, experimenting with wild game, or crafting a unique white chicken chili, we want to taste what you’ve got.

Last year’s showdown featured seven talented chili makers and drew neighbors from across Kenny who braved the February cold for a warm, delicious afternoon. Past entries have included everything from elk and venison chilis to creative seven-pepper blends. The competition was fierce and tasty!

This year’s champion will take home the coveted Chili Bowl Trophy, a \$50 gift card from a local business, and most importantly, serious bragging rights for the entire year.

Ready to compete?

Scan the QR code to submit your entry by **Friday, February 20**. The event is completely free to participate and attend — just bring your best batch of chili and your competitive spirit.



Can’t cook but love to eat?

Come taste-test and vote for your favorite! It’s the perfect way to meet neighbors, warm up during the dead of winter, and discover your new favorite chili recipe.

See you at the cook-off — may the best chili win!

Kenny Neighborhood Association

P.O. Box 19593

Minneapolis, MN 55419

Message Line: 612-392-4477

email: info@kennyneighborhood.org

www.kennyneighborhood.org

2026 KNA Board Members

Chairperson Barb Brady

Vice Chair Shelly Ragland

Secretary Scott Elton

Treasurer Vacant (contact Barb Brady if you're interested. bbrady127@gmail.com)

Kelly Barbes

Vicki Olson

Grace Barcelow

John Petrie

Joy Gottschalk

Louise Rathes

Amy Gustafson

Kim Rosenfield

KNA Coordinator: Mike Ferrin

All KNA meetings and events are accessible. Accommodation requests are welcome. Please make requests at least 10 days in advance: 612-392-4477 or emailing: info@kennyneighborhood.org.

Meetings are held at 7 p.m. on the third Tuesday of each month and are open to all community members. We meet at Kenny Park with a hybrid Zoom option. Visit www.kennyneighborhood.org and click on "Events" for Zoom meeting info or email: info@kennyneighborhood.org for the following:

- For interpreters, listening devices and/or readers.
- To place an item on the agenda or for further information.

Newsletter Team

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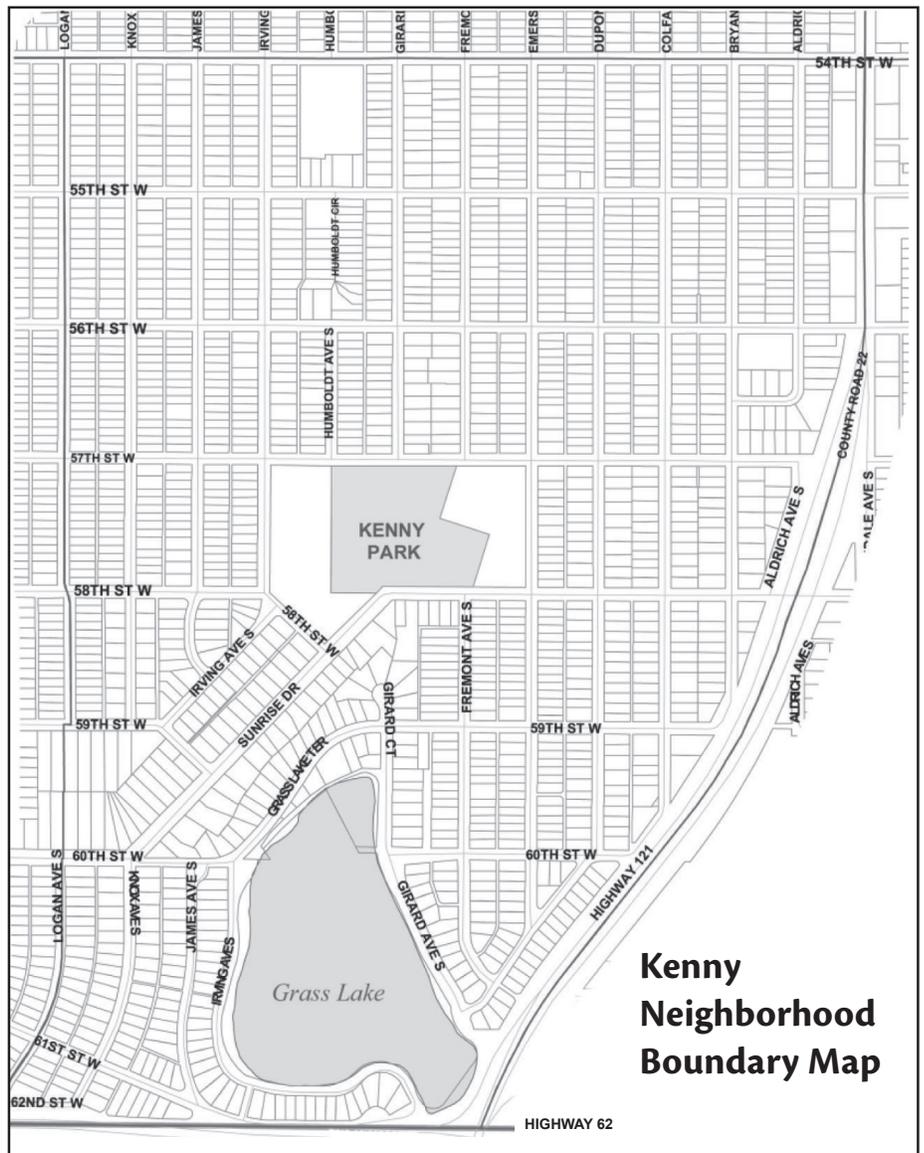
To place an ad, contact Mike Ferrin at info@kennyneighborhood.org.

KNA Board Members Needed

For more information, call KNA:

612-392-4477 or email:

info@kennyneighborhood.org.



Kenny Neighborhood Boundary Map

KNA Committees & Working Groups

GENERAL INQUIRIES AND QUESTIONS:

info@kennyneighborhood.org.

Communications: Meets the second Wednesday of the month. 7 p.m. Kenny Park. Contact Amy Gustafson, amymgustafson@yahoo.com

Community Engagement: Meets the second Monday of the month. 7 p.m. Goal is to develop and support opportunities for all neighbors to gather. Contact Kelly Barbes, barbes11@msn.com.

Crime and Safety: Promotes a safe, secure, and resilient neighborhood. Contact Kim Rosenfield, rosenfield.k@gmail.com.

Environmental: Meets the second Monday of the month. 6 p.m. Goal is to develop and support education, learning opportunities and activities. Contact Vicki Olson, vicki.t.olson@gmail.com.

KENNY INTEREST GROUPS:

Kenny Garden Club/Grass Lake

Upkeep: Contact Bridget Rau at bridgetrandyrau@gmail.com or Ann Davenport at afdavenport@gmail.com.

Kenny School Gardens:

Contact Terri Lindenbaum, terri.lindenbaum@gmail.com.

KORE (Kenny Organizing for Racial Equity)

KORE is a Kenny-based group whose purpose is to foster a spirit of anti-racism in the Kenny neighborhood, building a welcoming, safe and healthy community/city/state/country for all. The KORE Book Club meets monthly. Any and all are welcome. The only guiding principle is we read books by authors of color that the group collectively decides on from month to month. More info: Janet Dahlem: jldahlem@stkat.edu, website: <https://sites.google.com/view/kennykore>, or Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/KOREmpls>.



Letter from the Chair

By Barb Brady

Kenny Neighborhood Association Chair

KENNY

NEIGHBORHOOD

Kenny Neighborhood Association

KNA sponsors bench honoring Fletcher Merkel at Grass Lake

Kenny neighbors continue to show their grief and support the Merkel family, who lost their eight-year-old son Fletcher in the Annunciation tragedy.

The KNA Board, which represents the entire neighborhood, is dedicated to helping the family for the long run, in any way we can. In consultation with the family, KNA is sponsoring a bench at Grass Lake in honor of Fletcher. We're working out the details this winter, but you should see the bench this spring.

Special thanks to Council Member Linae Palmisano and her staff Ruth Olson, along with Park and Recreation Board Memorials & Tributes Specialist Colleen Dillon (who is a Kenny resident) for working with various city departments to make the bench a reality.

Check out this amazing story *Minnesota Star Tribune* story about Kenny neighbors' dedication to the Merckels, written by Kenny resident Reid Forgrave, at <https://www.startribune.com/a-minneapolis-neighborhood-cradles-this-grieving-annunciation-family/601540489>. Thank you, Reid!

You can still donate to the bench at KNA's website at www.kennyneighborhood.org.

Thank you, Mike Ferrin

On behalf of the KNA Board and the entire community, I'd like to thank Mike Ferrin for all his important contributions to the association and neighborhood. Mike is a wonderful staff coordinator, and we are very sad to see him leave us for a new job opportunity. His knowledge, expertise, and wise counsel will be sorely missed. We wish him well in his new job!

Home Heat Pump Survey

KNA is working on a series of videos encouraging people to make their homes more environmentally friendly, starting with home heat pumps. We'd like to find out how many people in Kenny already have them, and how you like them.



Please take this quick survey to help us better inform the public about this great resource

Volunteer Opportunity: Website Content Author

KNA is seeking a volunteer with WordPress experience to help maintain and update our community website: www.kennyneighborhood.org. We're looking for a creative individual to help upload new content, build website pages, and remove outdated information to keep our platform current and engaging.

If you're interested, please contact Amy at agustafson@kennyneighborhood.org

Kickstart your plastic-free journey: TAKE THE PLASTIC-FREE CHALLENGE

With so many single-use plastic items in our lives, avoiding them can feel overwhelming. Fortunately, there is a lot we can do to help create a world with less plastic. Are you up for the challenge? Join the Plastic-Free Challenge to explore what's possible.

The Plastic-Free Challenge is a month-long effort starting February 1 (you can still join) to reduce plastic consumption, especially single-use plastics, in ways that best fit your lifestyle.



GROWING TOGETHER: New Garden Projects Coming to Kenny School in 2026

By Terri Lindenbaum, Kenny School Garden Coordinator

The Kenny School gardens are blooming with big plans for the 2026 season. Thanks to the incredible financial support from the Kenny Neighborhood Association and the Kenny Parent Foundation (KPF), two major projects will transform our shared outdoor spaces into vibrant hubs for nature, play, and community. KNA is donating \$2,000 for the first phase of this project.

The Kenny Edible Garden & Nature Play Space (Emerson Avenue)

We are reimagining the green space along Emerson Avenue into an interactive, sustainable community hub. This new design space will include a nature play area merged with an “edible landscape” designed for Kenny neighbors of all ages to connect with nature and enjoy cold hardy variety of berries.

A “Woodland Stumpery” at the Main Entrance

The front entrance of Kenny Elementary is also getting a makeover! Funded by the Kenny Parent Foundation, the main planting bed will be redesigned into a Woodland Stumpery. This unique garden feature uses logs and stumps to create a textured, natural environment where shade-loving plants can thrive, providing a serene and whimsical welcome for students every morning.

Get Involved!

Do you have a green thumb, a passion for woodworking (wood thumb?) or enthusiasm for community spaces? We are looking for volunteers to help design and install these new garden beds.

Interested? Please contact Terri, Kenny School Garden Coordinator, at terri.lindenbaum@gmail.com to join the team!

Lunar New Year potluck

THURSDAY FEB 19 5-7PM
KENNY ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL GYM

Calling all Kenny families who celebrate the Lunar New Year! Come ring in the new year of the Horse with other Kenny Asian families for a special community potluck.

Please RSVP using the QR code below.
Questions? Contact Terri at terri.lindenbaum@gmail.com

2026

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Neighborhood Update

By Mike Ferrin
Kenny Neighborhood Coordinator

Thank You, Kenny — It's Been an Honor

After three incredible years serving as your Neighborhood Coordinator, it's with deep gratitude that I share I'll be transitioning out of the role. Reflecting on my time with KNA, I'm overwhelmed by how much this community has meant to me. In more than a decade of neighborhood engagement work across Minneapolis, Kenny stands out as the most welcoming, most dedicated, and most inspiring place I've had the privilege to serve.

From the very beginning, Kenny neighbors showed me what true community looks like. It's not just the gatherings or events — though we've had some amazing ones — it's the people behind them. The volunteers who put in countless hours, plan, set up, clean up, decorate, cook, scoop, serve, and greet with enthusiasm every single time. The board members who think big and show up consistently. The neighbors who pitch in without hesitation. Kenny's volunteer base is simply unmatched.

Together, we've built traditions and made memories. The Ice Cream Social & Green Fair grew into a signature summer celebration, bringing hundreds together for fun, environmental education, and the simple joy of ice cream on a warm night. The annual Chili Cook-Off became one of my favorite events — the competitive spirit, the creativity, and the friendly banter made it a highlight each year (and the chili was pretty fantastic, too). And of course, the Neighborhood Happy Hours created such a relaxed, fun space for people to connect, laugh, and get to know neighbors they may never have met otherwise.

But what I will likely remember most is how this community came together in the wake of the Annunciation tragedy. In a moment of heartbreak, Kenny neighbors responded with compassion, unity, and unwavering support. That strength — that instinct to take care of one another — is what defines this neighborhood. It is who you are.

Thank you, truly, for allowing me to be part of this work. It has been an honor to serve you, to grow with you, and to witness the heart of this remarkable community. Kenny is special because of the people who call it home, and I am grateful to have spent these years alongside you.

With appreciation,
Mike

KNA PROGRAMS

KNA Tree Reimbursement Returning for 2026

Keep an eye out for more information as we get closer to spring. KNA will reimburse residents who participate in and are selected to receive up to three trees through the Minneapolis Tree Lottery. Improving the neighborhood's tree canopy was voted environmental initiative #1 — and we are here to support all of you to do your part. Planting trees will shade your yard, reduce energy bills, and increase property values.



KNA Security and Safety Rebate Program

All residential properties in the Kenny neighborhood, including renters and homeowners, are eligible to apply for a one-time security rebate of \$250. Rebates can be used on home security projects like: Installing lights for exterior doorways of residential properties, purchase and installation of deadbolt locks, the purchase of home security alarm systems and doorbell cameras.



For applications and more information, visit kennyneighborhood.org/programs

Our sweet neighbor Wallie Gegner



Walter Elmer Gegner (“Wallie”), aged 100 years, died peacefully on Tuesday, Nov. 18, 2025 after battling bladder, colon and prostate cancer for two years. Wallie was born on September 13, 1925, in Milwaukee, WI. He and his wife Corrine lived on Girard Avenue South since 1949. Wallie saw combat as an infantryman in Okinawa in WWII.

Wallie loved the outdoors, especially bird-watching and walking. As a letter carrier he walked his mail route for much of his working life. After he retired, he and Corinne spent 15 years walking with the Minneapolis Hiking Club and Volksmarch. After Corinne could no longer walk, Wallie walked the Kenny neighborhood by himself, leaving chalk-drawn happy faces on his neighbors’ sidewalks. He could recite the names of all the dogs and kids he met. His family credits his long life to those years of constant exercise and fresh air, but when asked what his secret was, Wallie would say, “Butter, and plenty of it!”

Citizens Utility Board — Energy Assistance

By Steve Caster, KNA Environmental Committee

Now that winter is here, we want to remind you that you may be eligible for energy assistance with heating bills from the Minnesota Department of Commerce.

Energy assistance is a federally funded program for certain low-income households delivered through the Minnesota Department of Commerce. Remember, it’s a misconception that utilities are not allowed to shut off service during the winter! To prevent shutoff, you must have a payment agreement in place and make timely payments.

To find out if you are eligible or to start the application process, contact the Department of Commerce at: <https://mn.gov/commerce/energy/consumer-assistance/energy-assistance-program/>



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Long-time Kenny couple is here to stay

By Brenda Smeby and Pat Hagan

When we first moved to Minneapolis, we were renters on Aldrich Avenue South but had to move on short notice. In 1987, we found 5837 Irving Ave. South when the price had been reduced several times. We did not know the neighborhood and were among the younger residents at the time. While we enjoyed the access to the freeways, lakes, and parks, we were not sure this would be a long-term home.

After 18 years, we had grown to love the neighbors and all the neighborhood offers. In 2005 we went from a story-and-a-half-to two floors and stayed put.



Top photo: Before remodels. Bottom photo: After three remodels. 5837 Irving Avenue South.

We were some of the first neighbors to raise their roofs to increase living space. We remodeled again in 2017 and a third time in 2023, deciding to retire in place on Irving.

Then in 2023, a Grass Lake Terrace home with an adjoining lot came available. We decided we could stay in Kenny and have one-floor living.

The gem in Kenny is the people and neighbors who live here. The bonuses are great restaurants, grocery stores, coffee shops, and the city lakes and trails.



Top photo: Before remodel. Bottom photo: After a full remodel. 5923 Grass Lake Terrace.



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Fall intermezzo!

Music helps
reduce stress

Come play in the band

It's your community band!

www.crosstowncommunityband.org

Building Neighborhood Bridges of Habitat

By Laura Baxley, KNA Environmental Committee

Have you ever wondered how we might help nature thrive right here in Minneapolis? Imagine turning a small area of your yard into a welcoming space for butterflies and birds. To start, you can take four essential steps:

- **Plant with native species** to provide the necessities
- **Remove invasive plants** that crowd out native life
- **Reduce lawn size** to make room for diverse habitats
- **Eliminate harmful pesticides** to keep our pollinators safe.

One neighbor's pollinator garden can generously provide food, shelter, and safe passage for a butterfly or a songbird in another neighbor's boulevard garden, school yard rain garden, local park, or adjacent neighborhood. Our gardens, boulevards, school yards, community park, neighborhood lakeshore and wetland all have unlimited potential to evolve, with our help, into sources of sustenance, nurturing habitat and inspiration. The birds, insects, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and plants all need **connected spaces** to survive.

Local landscapes have changed dramatically and left us with isolated islands of forests, savannas, and prairies to support Minnesota's unique and amazing biodiversity. To help "re-stitch" valuable remnant landscapes, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources have mapped "**habitat corridors**" to illustrate and promote strengthening natural area connectivity. Habitat corridors are important and strategically located zones capable of supporting the plants and animals that define our region's identity.

The Kenny neighborhood can help by creating innovative and valuable **Bridges of Habitat** in gardens and open spaces. Minnesota's phenomenal natural beauty shouldn't be limited to far-off wild places. With teamwork, one garden at time, our collective landscaping choices can benefit all and provide **lifelines for nature** that keep ecosystems dynamic, healthy, and connected right in our neighborhood.

Share Your Story! Have you built a habitat bridge? Are you saving space for nature? We want to celebrate your hard work and inspire others.

How to share:



Photo by Vicki Olson

ENERGY TIP

Sandy Caster, KNA Environmental Committee



We've all seen headlines about plastics harming marine life and leaching micro plastics into human bodies for a while now. For years, many of us have made the effort to place plastics in a recycling bin. While recycling is important, an even better strategy is to reduce the use of plastic in the first place. Here are a couple of ways you can do that:

1. Got a travel checklist? Here's a new item to add to it and reduce your plastic use at the same time: an empty zippered pillowcase. Hotels offer in-room plastic bags for dirty laundry. After just one use, that plastic bag goes into the garbage. Instead, pack a zippered pillowcase, which is very lightweight and takes very little room in your suitcase. When you get home and do laundry, the zippered pillowcase can go in the wash, ready for the next trip.

2. The laundry detergent aisles in stores consist mostly of liquid detergents in plastic bottles. About half to three-quarters of the packaged weight is water. The washing machine has to add water anyway. So, in essence, we're paying extra for water that comes with the laundry detergent and also paying more for the plastic bottle. A better option is to use powdered detergent that comes in cardboard containers that can be recycled.

Implementing the above easy tips are just a start. We'll share more in upcoming newsletters and would love to hear your tips too.

The Grass Lake Restoration Project

Vicki Olson, Environmental Committee

One of the most satisfying experiences of the past year was to observe the care and love our neighbors feel for Grass Lake and for all the birds and animals that call it home. It was impressive how many volunteers participated in the three Buckthorn Busts in 2025 and one in 2024. Truly it is a tribute to the power of community and our commitment to environmental care of our wetland and all its diverse habitat.

We are very excited to have received a \$6,000 grant for this year from the Deane Fund at the Garden Club of Mpls (GCM). The fund's purpose is for projects that will advance the mission of GCM:

"Our mission is to increase the knowledge and enjoyment of gardening, landscaping, and horticulture through education and shared experiences to benefit our members and the community."

The project that was funded creates a 100 ft x 20 ft garden of native plants and bushes on the east side of Grass Lake along Girard Ave. You might have noticed the area that is taped off. This project will support the concept of a habitat corridor that Laura Baxley shared in a companion article in this issue.

The Kenny Neighborhood Association is providing an additional \$3,000 for fencing, signage, water, soil testing/amendments, supplies for additional Buckthorn Busts, seed mixes, and additional plantings.

Over the next couple of months, we will design the planting area and work on plant selections. Our January sowing class was filled up, and seedlings are on their way to being transplanted when the growing season begins.

Our work is just beginning. We want to engage our community in planning and maintaining this project. We also have additional needs for addressing the water quality of Grass Lake, and clarifying what land is owned by the City of Minneapolis and MNDOT and how to create a strong partnership so that we can provide a healthy habitat for our birds and animals.

Please join us at a community meeting for those living near or interested in Grass Lake for updates on Saturday, March 14, 10-11 a.m. and repeated on Wednesday, March 18, 6:30-7:30 p.m. at the Kenny Park Recreation Center.



Scan the QR code to sign up to keep up with news and events around Grass Lake.

Joel Johnson's Unexpected Journey into His Swedish Roots

By Steve Paquin



When neighbors saw Joel Johnson back home last fall and heard he'd returned from filming a Swedish reality TV show, the reaction was immediate: Wait... what? Joel, a soft spoken Minnehaha Academy teacher, ordained pastor, and dad of three, didn't seem like someone who'd spend weeks solving puzzles and competing in challenges

on Scandinavian television. But that is exactly what he did as a contestant on *Allt för Sverige* ("All for Sweden"), one of the country's highest rated shows.

Now in its thirteenth season, the program brings 10 Americans with Swedish ancestry to the homeland their families left generations ago. Contestants crisscross the country, learning local history, participating in cultural challenges, and uncovering the stories of their ancestors. One person is eliminated each episode until the winner earns the grand prize: meeting their Swedish relatives.

Joel made it to episode seven of eight, spending more than five weeks immersed in Sweden's landscapes, traditions, and history. His adventure was exhilarating, surreal, physically exhausting, and deeply personal.

A Surprising Invitation

Joel's journey began with an application he submitted on a whim after encouragement from a colleague, an art teacher from Stockholm. With nearly all of his great grandparents born in Sweden, his ancestral story was rich, though he had never visited the country.

Months passed. Then an email arrived from a Swedish casting director, which Joel assumed was spam. It wasn't. Interviews followed, then more paperwork, then instructions that made everything feel suddenly real.

"I got the final call right before Christmas," he says. "By spring, I was packing a suitcase."

Balancing Family Life and Filming

What followed was a logistical marathon. The filming schedule, from early May through early June, clashed perfectly with every end of school year responsibility: recitals, grading, sports, dance rehearsals, and nonstop kid shuttling. Joel and his wife, Megan, sat down with a calendar and prepared for the chaos.

With three kids ages 10, seven, and almost five, Megan became solo parent, chauffeur, chef, nurse, scheduler, referee, and alarm clock for 38 straight days, while working full time. Joel calls her "the real MVP of the season."

The family stayed connected through daily video calls. The kids tracked his Swedish locations on a map. "We really missed each other," Joel says. "But my whole family was so proud."

Life Behind the Cameras

For viewers, reality TV arrives in polished 44 minute segments. For contestants, the days begin early and end whenever the cameras stop rolling, often twelve to fourteen hours later. Introductions, transitions, and reactions are filmed multiple times, but the challenges are live and unscripted.

"It was equal parts exhilarating and surreal," Joel says.

He was caught off guard by how little attention the production drew in public. In the U.S., a camera crew draws a crowd; in Sweden, passersby discreetly notice, then carry on. The host even joked that Swedes don't greet celebrities, they simply walk by silently, then whisper about it to a friend a few steps later.

A Traveling Family

Of all the unexpected joys, the strongest was the instant bond among the 10 contestants, whose ages ranged from mid 20s to nearly 70.

"There wasn't one odd person out," Joel says. "It felt like traveling with cousins you didn't know you had."

On days off in Stockholm, the cast wandered museums, explored neighborhoods, tried bakeries, and walked waterfront paths. Sometimes they traveled as a full group, other times in smaller clusters. Either way, the camaraderie helped soften the sting of being far from home.

"They became family," Joel says. "In a weird way, it made being away a little easier."

The Swedish Style Challenges

The show's challenges are famously whimsical, sometimes strenuous, occasionally bizarre, and always tied to Sweden's culture and history. They aren't built with the bombastic American game show intensity, but instead reflect Sweden's thoughtful, quirky charm.

The Fortress Puzzle

At a coastal fortress, contestants received a bag of two-sided puzzle blocks and had to recreate the

image of an archway they had seen earlier that day. Wind toppled sections mid build, forcing resets. It tested patience as much as memory.

The Aqueduct

In Stockholm, contestants assembled a PVC aqueduct, sprinted to a lake for buckets of icy water, and tried to raise a flag by channeling enough water through the structure.

“It was a glorious, splashy mess,” Joel says.

Target Shooting + Sliding Block

In Dalarna, Joel stumbled through target shooting but excelled at the sliding block puzzle that followed.

“I always root for puzzles on TV,” he says. “Now I know why.”

The Forge Challenge

At a historic forge, contestants plunged their hands into salt chilled water, so cold it felt glacial, to unthread metal nuts from bolts, then re-thread them on another set out of the water.

“This was the coldest water I’ve ever felt,” Joel says. “My experience working in a bike shop paid off, because threading bolts was muscle memory for me.” He came in second.

The Ball Sports Trilogy (Elimination Challenge)

Joel’s final challenge consisted of three parts:

1. Ladderball tossed onto a single rung.
2. Balancing a basketball on a platform attached to a tall pole while walking around a soccer field and stepping over obstacles.
3. A giant version of the Moonshot rails game, guiding a ball uphill through rhythm and finesse.

“I needed maybe another minute on Moonshot,” he says. “I figured out the rhythm too late, and I finished last.” And with that, his time on *Allt för Sverige* ended.

The “Special Day”

Every contestant on *Allt för Sverige* receives one deeply personal day, filmed solo, in a place connected to their Swedish ancestry. It is the emotional anchor of the show and jokingly known among Swedish viewers as “The Crying Americans” moment.

Joel’s special day took him to Värmland, near the Norwegian border, where his father’s side once farmed under incentives from the Swedish crown. They visited the church connected to his ancestors, read documents detailing their lives, and walked the very land where they raised families, faced hardships, and eventually made the choice to leave for America.

“It changes something inside you,” he says quietly. “You feel this thread connecting you to real people who made brave choices that shaped your life. That was the heart of the whole journey.”

Discovering Sweden, and Himself

Between challenges and emotional moments, the small, everyday experiences also left an imprint: the charm of Stockholm’s cobblestone streets; the simplicity and reliability of public transit; the ritual of fika, coffee and conversation woven into Swedish culture; and the understated friendliness of the people.

Joel and the cast joked about trying to find flaws in the country.

“We kind of went looking for reasons not to like Sweden as much,” he says. “It can’t be all great, right? I learned that it isn’t perfect, but it is awesome.”

Coming Home Changed

Returning home meant returning to school, sports, carpools, and Minnesota’s human traffic patterns. But Joel didn’t return as the same person.

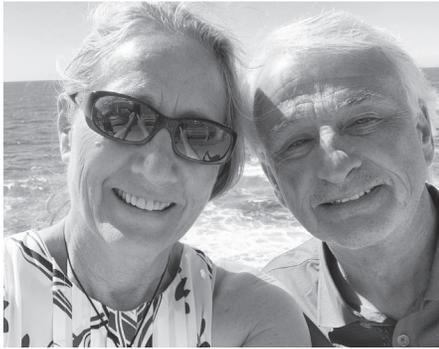
He brought back stories for his students, enthusiasm for exploring family history with his own kids, and a strengthened sense of identity.

“It wasn’t that the trip gave me new roots,” he says. “It showed me the roots I already had.”

And yes, Joel absolutely plans to return to Sweden, this time with Megan and the kids, to share the places he saw and meet the relatives he learned about.

“They’ve already got a list,” he laughs. “My daughter wants to try the sour candy we were given on the show — well, honestly, she wants to try all the candy. My boys want to see the Vasa ship in person and find out if they can brave the Baltic Sea water. And all five of us are excited to make the trip, together this time, to remake those family ties that unraveled generations ago.”





Word on the Street

Pat and Brenda asked:

What are your plans for the new year?



Evan Iacoboni with Barney

Walking Barney and cross country skiing.



Sadie and Owen Sullivan with Rudy and Loki

We plan on relaxing after New Year's Day. It has been a busy year end.



Danny with Griffey

Getting ready for my new coaching job as the baseball head coach at St. Louis Park High School.



John, Kim with Miriam

We plan on traveling to France this year. We also have home improvement projects in the works, walking our dog and going to the park and staying active with the KNA Board.

Who's in the 'Hood

By Jasmine Avent

They say that home is where your story begins. For these neighbors, Kenny has been the backdrop of their story for nearly 40 years.

Meet **Doug and Joanne Toft**, Kenny residents on 56th and Girard since 1987.

Doug and Joanne met as they were each embarking on a new adventure — freshman year of college — the summer of 1970 at the University of Northern Iowa.

“We weren't studying the same thing, we were both at the last [orientation], which meant there weren't a whole lot of classes that were still open for freshmen, so we were sitting in a lounge somewhere, commiserating over the fact that we couldn't get into any of the classes we needed,” Joanne recalls. From there, a friendship formed that turned into a life-long bond over the course of their time in school. They have been building a life and a story together ever since.

The Minneapolis part of their story started on a whim. After graduate school in Chicago, the pair decided Chicago wasn't quite right. Thanks to friends, they landed here.

“Joanne had friends here, and we heard that Minneapolis was cool, so we moved,” Doug recalled with a chuckle. “It was a little strange to do, but it worked out in the long run,” Joanne added.



Joanne dedicated her career to teaching in Minneapolis Public Schools. Doug worked as a freelance writer and editor and spent much of his career writing for the healthcare field.

As they sat reminiscing about their 50 years as a team both in love and life, Joanne explained that their very different careers made them a great team. They noted that having careers that had different kinds of demands and that were very different in scope was a huge bonus in raising their two children, who are now adults.

They are both now retired and love spending time with friends and neighbors. “We have a very active block,” Doug explained. “We both like to walk or hike, or be outside, so this neighborhood provides that. Not only to just go walking but we live in a place where we can walk up to a local restaurant, the library, Walgreens, the grocery store if we want to... there are lakes close by. The things that we do on a daily

basis can happen very comfortably. And we can still do them as we've gotten older. It works well,” Joanne said.

Doug added that he likes seeing what he calls the ‘Kenny Icon’ — parents with a stroller and a dog — out and about because it signals safety.

“We have a whole generation of kids who were raised on the block, and now there is a second generation of kids being raised on the block,” Doug explained.

“There have been neighbors, who like us, who are getting older and are starting to downsize or are moving into older communities, so we've had lots of changes on our block but we've had families with children and young couples moving in. It's been really fun to see that revitalization and have the kids back out running around. We now have a grandson so he joins in with all the neighborhood kids,” Joanne said.

“People are still connecting, and I think that's part of what Kenny is — neighbors connecting with neighbors,” Joanne explained.

If you see Doug and Joanne around, be sure and say hello!

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Kenny Park News

By Brian Hall

Recreation Supervisor at Armatage/Kenny

Kenny Park Recreation Center

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612-370-4901

RECREATION SUPERVISOR

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Hello Neighbors!

Winter season is in full swing in the New Year of 2026! The ice skating season is short as we all know and the ice depends on the weather! Ice rink staff are outside daily in the wee hours of the morning clearing ice of shavings or snow then watering, if able. It's important to stay off the ice when our maintenance folks are working on the ice with hoses and machinery and let it freeze fully before skating on it.

Our Valentine Heart Scavenger hunt takes place on Thursday, February 12, from 6-7 p.m. Sign up to join the fun!

Citywide, the parks' open hours during the MPS school year are Monday-Fridays 3-8 p.m. and Saturdays noon-5 p.m.

We are closed for six major federal holidays as well as:

- Presidents' Day: February 16
- Juneteenth: June 19
- Indigenous People's Day: October 12,
- Veterans Day on November 11.

On MPS School Release Days, the park building hours are noon-8 p.m.

Kenny Park Sports Report

Kenny/Armatage winter basketball teams are practicing now, and games began the weekend of January 16. We practice at multiple locations including Armatage school gym, Armatage park gym and Anthony school gym. We have 30 teams and 305 kids between ages 5 and 18. We also have 60 volunteer coaches to lead these young ball players learn the game, gain experience, build skills and have fun! Thank you to all those involved, especially volunteer coaches who make our athletic programs happen! Coaches are still needed as a few teams only have one and are looking for more help. Contact me for more specific information.

Summer Registration opens Wednesday, February 18 at noon

Many programs are available, but please make sure to check back for programs that can be added later. If there are programs or ideas that anyone would like to see happen at Kenny Park, please let me know.

We have added programs like Yoga, Chess, Magic, and puzzle contests because of suggestions from the public.

Questions, comments, concerns, suggestions or compliments? Please email kenny@minneapolisparcs.org

Visit www.minneapolisparcs.org for latest programs, special events and offerings.

School Out Release Days:
Park Open Noon-8 p.m.

School Year Building Hours:
(Jan. 1-June 10)

Monday-Friday: 3-8 p.m. and
Saturday: Noon-5 p.m.

CLOSED on Sundays.
Rentals available.

Did you know? Established in 1883, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) oversees a renowned urban park system spanning 7,059 acres of parkland and water.

Find the Kenny Neighborhood on Facebook and Instagram!

Find and follow us to keep updated on all things Kenny. You can also reshare content and help us reach even more neighbors. We're also looking for volunteers from the neighborhood who can share photos from around Kenny while they're out for a walk, at park activities, and more.

EMAIL US AT info@kennyneighborhood.org or sign up at bit.ly/knavolunteers



El Sazon Cocina & Tragos is Back

By Kelly Barbes

El Sazon Cocina & Tragos on Lyndale has reopened its doors, bringing back the vibrant Latin flavors and handcrafted cocktails that neighbors have been missing. After a pause late last year to “review and reimagine” the concept due to financial and operational challenges, the beloved Mexican-Guatemalan restaurant is welcoming diners again with renewed energy and a refreshed service style.

Located at 5309 Lyndale Avenue South, El Sazon initially drew praise for its chef-driven plates and spirited bar when it opened in 2023. While that chapter was temporarily halted, this reopening embraces a more casual, flexible model that includes counter and QR code service alongside table seating and a full menu of Latin street food, bowls, birria, and creative drinks.

The relaunch is welcome news for fans who have followed the journey of founders Cristian and Karen de Leon, known locally for creating authentic meals with authentic flavors. With breakfast now on the menu and the familiar community vibe restored, El Sazon Cocina & Tragos aims to be a lively gathering spot once again for neighbors to enjoy. Check out their Facebook page for the return of Latin Drag Brunch events.



Saturday Dumpling Co. expands to Southwest Minneapolis

By Anthony Rodriguez

The dumpling scene in Minneapolis just got an upgrade with the opening of the new location of Saturday Dumpling Company in the Armatage neighborhood. This is a milestone for a local brand that started as a weekend pop-up and dumpling to-go business.

After building a strong following through weekly pop-ups and its Northeast flagship, Saturday Dumpling Co. has now expanded into a standalone restaurant in the former Cafe Ceres space on Penn Avenue South.

I had heard about it for a while, so now that it is in the neighborhood I stopped in one night to check it out. The space is cozy and casual with a neighborhood feel, and the menu reflects the style of traditional and modern Asian-inspired eats and

the dumplings they are known for, along with rice bowls, scallion pancake burritos, and the only one of their options serving full breakfast additions like soufflé egg sandwiches and congee hashbrowns.

They are open Wednesday through Sunday with plans to expand hours, and while they expect plenty of takeout and delivery business, it is also a comfortable spot to sit and enjoy a meal. I can easily see it becoming a regular stop in the area, and I'll be back to try more. Next up: breakfast.



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