

# Alumnus models well-rounded success



Photo courtesy of Emma Bute

Ravi Chaudhary, a CHHS grad, was recently hired in a prestigious US Air Force position.

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**A** Columbia Heights High School (CHHS) alumnus is taking his life to new heights — literally.

Ravi Chaudhary graduated from CHHS in 1988, at which point he decided to go into the Air Force Academy. Unfortunately, he didn't get accepted right away, so he attended the University of Minnesota and was able to get a scholarship from the U.S. Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps. With that scholarship, he applied again to the Air Force Academy and was admitted!

Now, in 2023, almost 35 years later, Chaudhary is the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Energy, Installations and Environment. He previously served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Energy. After Chaudhary graduated

from the Air Force Academy in 1993, he completed 21 years of service helping with a variety of assignments, some of which consisted of flying and engineering planes while other tasks included taking on various senior staff duties.

Chaudhary has completed combat missions stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan. He was also a part of ground deployment in Iraq as Director of the Personnel Recovery Center, which is an area that provides a safe space and area for people that are injured. Chaudhary and many others were in Iraq ready to help any citizens who needed assistance. He played a pivotal role in local and civilian-assisted injury recovery efforts.

"I've flown to just about every continent in the world," Chaudhary said. "Some days I had to pinch myself — gazing at the

aurora borealis in the night sky while flying at 40,000 feet, seeing the curvature of the Earth while doing supersonic test runs in a fighter [and] practicing building the space station at Johnson Space Center with NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) astronauts. It's all just a blur."

Although Chaudhary knew in advance that he was being promoted to the new role of Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Energy, Installations and Environment, he was just recently officially sworn in on April 7 at a ceremony held at the United States Pentagon.

"My role is focused on ensuring we are energy efficient, our installations (or military bases) are ready and the environment is safe and clean," Chaudhary said. "I work at the Pentagon, where we ensure the Air Force strategy is supported with good planning so that our airmen who are in the Air Force have the right tools to execute their important missions. It is my dream job to serve my nation at the Pentagon!"

Chaudhary retired from active duty in the Air Force in 2015 and thought his time in the Air Force was done. Then, he received a call from the White House under President Joe Biden to come back and serve in the Air Force again. He is now a senior civilian at the Air Force. He is responsible for providing airmen and guardians with the best tools possible to do their jobs efficiently.

Chaudhary is now currently presenting the Air Force budget to Congress. He receives information on big issues to do with Air Force Installations and leads a big staff full of military members and civilian experts that inform him about important decisions that need to be discussed or finalized. Chaudhary also makes recommendations to the Air Force Secretary that sometimes make their way all the way to President Biden. A lot of work and thought go into every aspect of this very important job.

Ravi Chaudhary isn't the only Chaud-

hary from Heights doing great things in this world either. Dr. Bala Chaudhary, Ravi's younger sister, graduated from CHHS in 1995. She's a soil ecologist and associate professor who specializes in plant-soil-microbial interactions and mycorrhizal symbioses, which is the study of the kind of fungus that helps plants grow. She is a world-famous scientist at Dartmouth University and is also a member of the National Academy of Sciences. Dr. Chaudhary travels around the world trying her best to save our environment, thinking about and working towards ways to broaden scientific participation and growth in local communities. She works to promote racial and ethnic diversity, equity and inclusion in STEM as well.

Meanwhile, Chaudhary's older brother Satveer Chaudhary graduated from CHHS in 1987. He went on to attend St. Olaf College. As an undergraduate, Satveer was a part of the student senate, the multicultural student association, political awareness committee organizer and greatly fought for student coalition. He then went on to formally serve in the Minnesota State Senate and become a member of the Minnesota House of Representatives. Now, Satveer is an American criminal and immigration lawyer. Satveer was the first ever Asian American to be elected to the legislature in Minnesota, which of course made history, and he also became one of the youngest and the highest ranked political officers of South Asian descent.

Ravi left the Hylanders an encouraging and rewarding philosophy that they can carry with them for the rest of their lives! "Don't ever let somebody tell you who you are or put you in a box," Ravi Chaudhary said. "In my career, I've had folks doubt me in nearly every endeavor I've undertaken. In the end, you must chart your own path in life. Never let someone talk you out of chasing your dream. Stand tall, [and] be proud of who you are. We are Hylanders!"

## Returning event brings art back to local park

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**T**he year is 2023, and there are three deities that control the world around you. No, I'm not referring to a politically charged abrahamic construct, I'm referring to money, the internet and government. But what if I were to tell you that there's an event in Columbia Heights that subverts at least two of these admittedly tired norms? Art in the Park, featuring dozens of artists of numerous varieties, is returning to Kordiak Park on 49th Avenue on June 3 starting at 10:00 a.m., and this time officially under the name of local arts collective Shattered Hill, led by Heights resident and artist Andy Newton, who have developed the celebration "with the mission of bringing more visibility to the arts community within Columbia Heights and the surrounding area."

The amount of focus which this event puts on the hyper-local, communally driven and calmly sociable nature is rather stunning. The event doesn't charge admission, takes place at a local park and provides the opportunity for anyone and everyone to meet and greet local artists, thus promoting the visibility and profitability of the work of talented and creative minds, each with a singular voice but common vision of sharing and championing independent art.

"The original intent of Art in the Park was to give the Heights community a sizeable art festival of its own [and] bring more exposure to local artists and artisans and to aid in the establishment and exposure of an art collective," Newton said. "With this new, reorganized Art in the Park, Shattered Hill Art Collective will have achieved that goal."

So, it'd sound as though this year's Art in the Park will be bringing plenty of publicity and visibility to the many and varied

artists in the metro scene, which is great news for all of our blossoming David Firths and Van Goghs of the world.

This year's event will include some new additions too, including an interactive art piece for the public to finish, three food trucks (including 'El Taco Loco', the rest are to be announced) and, Newton says, "maybe a few surprises."

So, the event is not only free to attend and features several tents worth of art by local blossoming artists for sale. But on top of that, it's also a way to offer some communally oriented non-financially focused (though that option is on the table for those both philanthropic and/or collective by nature) activities for the public. Newton also makes it clear that the event also has absolutely no affiliation with the local government (even if he appreciates the promotional efforts put forth by the City of Columbia Heights) A social event prioritizing interconnected and intersocial involvement including involvement and participation on the end of local artists.

At the risk of sounding like a faux-socialist, in the uniquely urban/suburban environment that is Columbia Heights, it can be extraordinarily challenging to maintain active and healthy social experiences. That is one of the primary reasons events like these are so important to the community. In a world where everything you could want or need is already held in a big house or even not-so-spacious apartment, it can be challenging to remind yourself to go out and get some air. It can be just as challenging for an artist or artisan to make a living out of, or gain public traction, for their work. By bringing together the community as well as offering a platform for and recognition to local artists, Shattered Hill's Art in the Park is a massively relevant and important aspect of community, and it is massively deserving of praise.

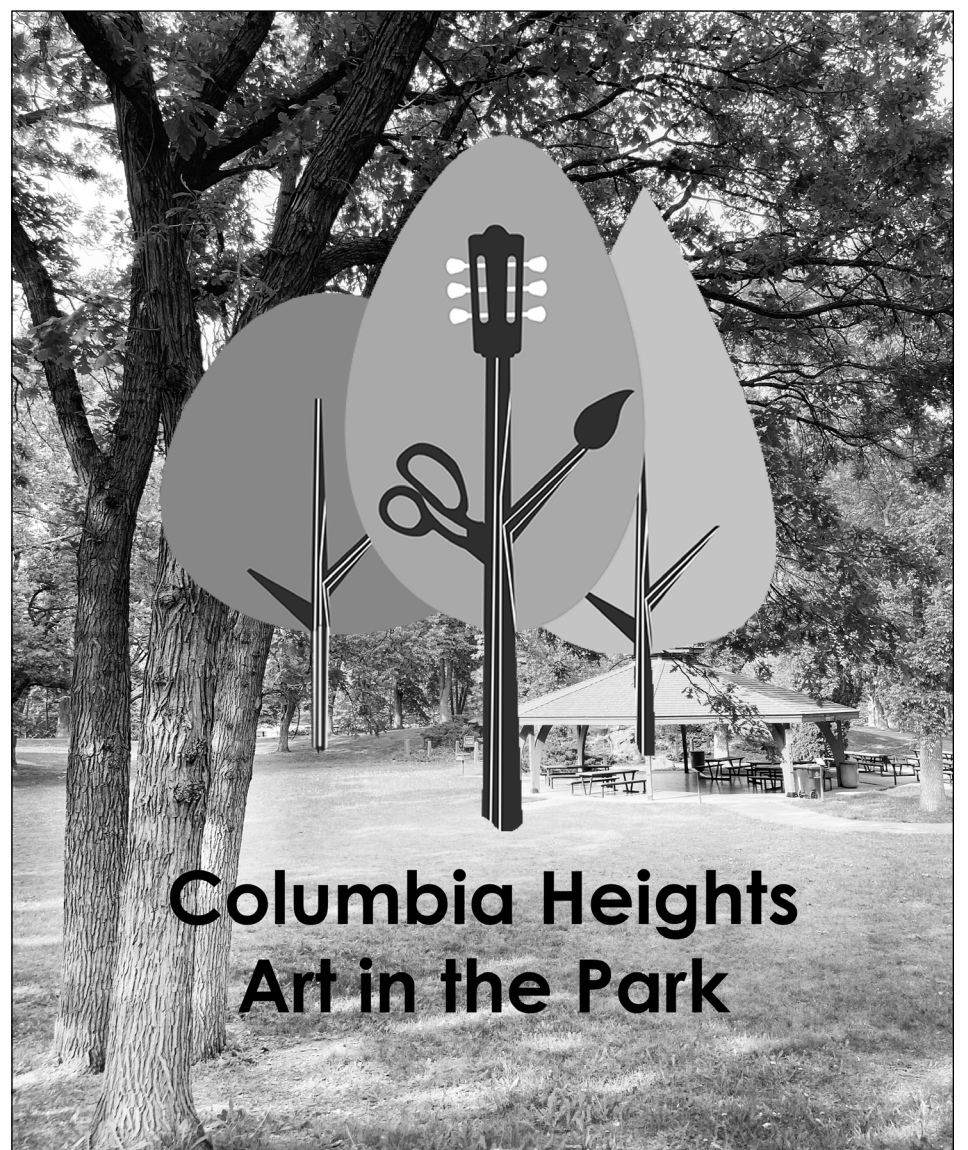


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Columbia Heights will be putting on Art in the Park at Kordiak County Park this June.