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## One-Year Anniversary Edition!



### Small businesses once again questioning survival amidst lockdown restrictions

Megan Camlasaran

Forced to curtail operations for the second time this year due to lockdown restrictions, small businesses in Toronto are struggling to cope with declining revenue.

Because big box stores aren't as affected, some owners say the provincial government isn't looking out for small businesses.

Don Lake of D&E Lake Ltd., a book and antique store in business nearly 40 years, said the restrictions on local businesses are "ridiculous, cruel and senseless."

"The premier has screwed the little guys and rewarded the big guys," he said.

Ontario entered lockdown on Nov. 23. Restaurants can only function with take-out, drive-through and delivery services.

Most retail is permitted to offer only curbside pick-up or delivery, in-person shopping is not allowed except at pharmacies, and grocery and hardware stores.

Anything Goes Accessories, a small boutique in St. Lawrence Market, is allowed to remain open during lockdown with permission from the city.

Owner Nesrin Akdemir, says

the shop has lost a lot of business from tourists and people from the financial district. She hesitates to buy inventory now, fearing the next few months will remain stagnant.

"If a big box store with a grocery section can stay open with 50 per cent capacity, as a store following Covid-19 protocols in St. Lawrence Market, why [was] I asked to close when the building is open?"

In the first week of restrictions, Mystic Muffin's business was down 65 percent, according to owner Elias Makhoul. He has been working for free since March, to keep his business running.

"Now is tougher than ever. It is the most challenging time in 28 years," he said.

Makhoul thinks the province rushed into the current restrictions without considering the impacts on small businesses.

He says the government could have taken other measures, such as shortening operating hours or requiring customer temperatures to be checked outside before entering shops.

"We are in a total mess," he said. "Shutting down the little guys is failing."

Small Biz continued p7

### West Don Lands residents rally against provincial zoning order

Julia Simioni

On Oct. 22, news that Premier Doug Ford's provincial government had overruled city processes for three province-owned sites in the West Don Lands began to circulate on social media and in neighbourhood community groups.

Within a week, the West Don Lands Committee (WDLC), a coalition of community-based organizations that advise on redevelopment, gathered with residents and local politicians—City Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam and MPPs Chris Glover and Suze Morrison—to discuss the Ministerial Zoning Orders, also known as MZOs.

In the past, provincial governments reserved MZOs for extraordinary cases, but this no longer seems to be the case. (On Oct. 9, the *Toronto Star's* Local Journalism Initiative Reporter, Victoria Gibson, wrote about the apparent new trend for Ontario's Conservative government to liberally employ MZOs.)

Two of the development sites, 373 Front Street East and 125R Mill Street, were already under development. But zoning orders for the third site, 153-185 Eastern Ave., a heritage site home to the old Dominion

Wheel and Foundries Company, "came completely out of the blue," according to Cynthia Wilkey, co-chair of the WDLC.

"There was zero discussion with anybody, zero consideration of the impact on the neighbouring new condos, or on the very delicate historic, very fine-grained fabric of Corktown."

The WDLC had previously opposed a proposed 29-storey building at a location nearby the Foundries site, which the committee argued would threaten Corktown's urban fabric. "The Corktown Residents and Business Association had been very concerned about developments out of scale that would destroy the unique feel of Corktown," Wilkey said.

She was shocked to find that the province permitted a building with heights of more than 40 storeys at the Foundries site. Despite the MZOs, the province's current plans for the Foundries site are uncertain; there's currently no active development application.

Ann Summers Dossena, a Corktown resident of over 40 years, was especially surprised to hear of the province's order regarding the Foundries site. For more than a year, Summers Dossena, the founder and director of the International Resource Centre for Performing Artists,

MZO continued p5



The Foundries Company building at 153-185 Eastern Avenue.



# Green Thumbs Growing Kids: Making the community greener, one school garden at a time

Heather Wilberforce



Green Thumbs Growing Kids is a local charity actively creating school food gardens in an effort to connect children to food and their environment.

For 21 years, the charity has been at the forefront of garden-based elementary education in downtown Toronto, helping teachers and families start food gardens at their schools. Currently, Green Thumbs manages food gardens at Sprucecourt Jr. PS, Winchester Jr. & Sr. PS, and Rose Avenue PS. It also supports gardening projects at Nelson Mandela Park PS.

Green Thumbs doesn't receive funding from the Toronto District School Board and depends on funding from other sources, members of the community, and friends of the gardens.

This fall, the charity aims to connect with members of the community and spread the word about the importance of its work. Anyone living in or



shopping around Cabbagetown may have noticed Green Thumbs' signature pumpkins along with information about the charity in various shops around the community. Green Thumbs wants to thank all of the local business owners who agreed to support its initiatives by displaying a pumpkin!

The pumpkins are a symbol of the type of work Green Thumbs does; they demonstrate the magic of seeds, soil, and water to children. The goal of the school gardens has been to engage children, youth, and even their parents, while the exploration of nature and healthy food is at the heart of these programs. The gardens are dynamic classrooms for vibrant hands-on learning in many different subject areas, including

planting seeds, composting, and making meals from the food that's grown.

This year, like so many other organizations, Green Thumbs has pivoted to online food and garden education in order to keep kids interested and engaged in growing their own food. The charity has also been able to use the school gardens to grow food and share it with those in need within the community, as well as to sell garden produce at the Cabbagetown Market.

To learn more about Green Thumbs Growing Kids, visit [greenthumbsto.org](http://greenthumbsto.org) or Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Feel free to reach out with any questions or to support the charity by emailing [info@greenthumbsto.org](mailto:info@greenthumbsto.org).



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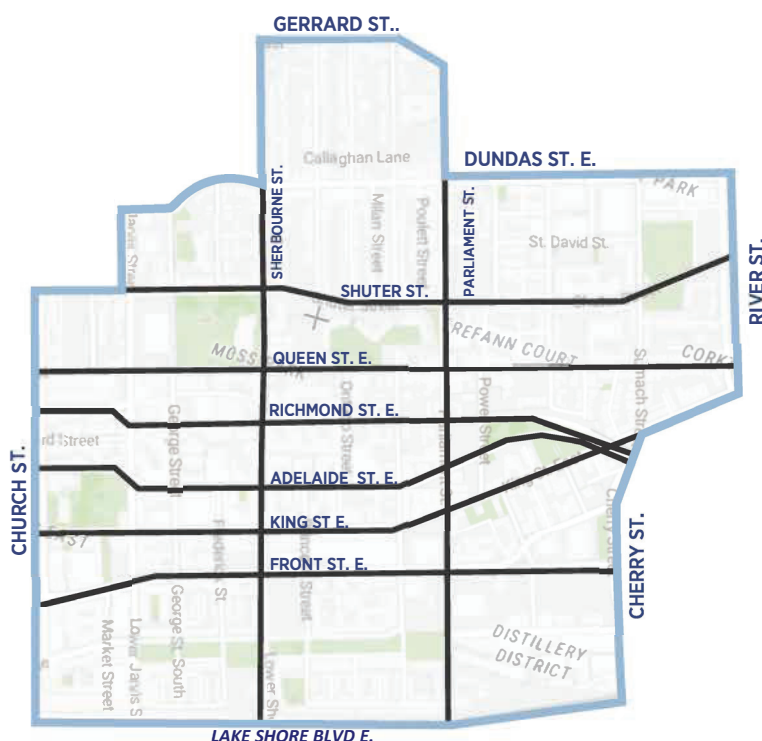
is an independent, nonpartisan newspaper published monthly and distributed by a mix of delivery services to varying readership. 6,000 copies are circulated throughout the Downtown East - Moss Park, Corktown, Garden District, South Cabbagetown, St. Lawrence Neighbourhood, Distillery District - and to community hubs that extend across Toronto.

the bridge strives to source up-to-date activity and diverse interests from heritage, planning, and development, to culture, arts and opinions.

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No January issue! Taking a break!

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# Charles Dickens visits Toronto



Bruce Bell, Senior Columnist

Famed English writer Charles Dickens, author of the classic *A Christmas Carol*, visited Toronto from May 4 to 6, 1842, staying at the former American Hotel at Front and Yonge Streets. Toronto then had a population of about 30,000.

Here's what Charles Dickens wrote about that visit, which started at Niagara-on-the-Lake...

*Our steamboat came up directly and soon bore us to the mouth of the Niagara; where the stars and stripes of America flutter on one side and the Union Jack of England on the other.*

*Thence we emerged on Lake Ontario, an inland sea; and by half-past six o'clock were at Toronto.*

*The streets are well paved, and lighted with gas; the houses are large and good; the shops excellent.*

*There is a good stone prison here; and there are, besides, a handsome church, a courthouse, public offices and many spacious private residences.*

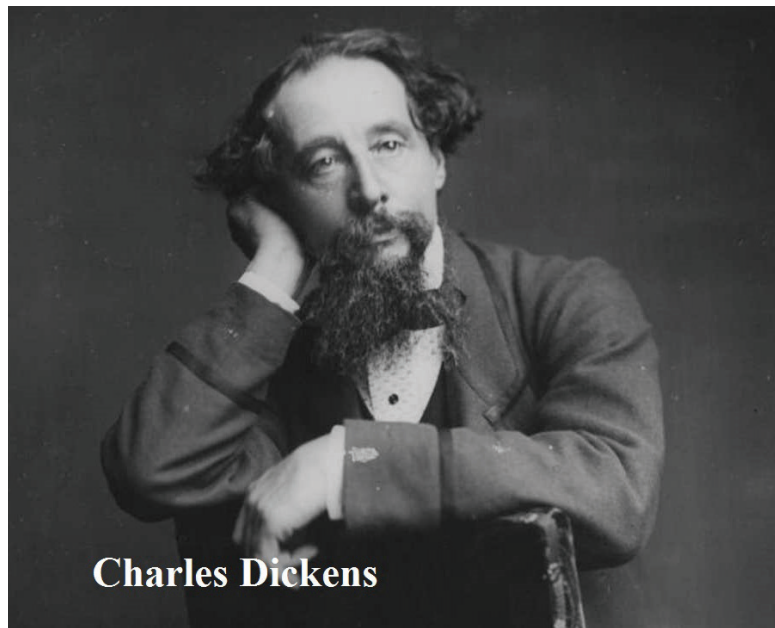
In 1842 the commercial centre of Toronto was at King and Yonge. The grandest store at that time was Michie's, opened a few years before by George Michie (pronounced Mickey) at 5 King Street West.

Michie offered his customers varied products including silk stockings, original art, exotic bamboo furniture, rare oranges, French wines, imported liquor and spirits from his native Scotland.

Just along the street from Michie's were two immense shopping emporiums: the Golden Lion and Golden Griffin, topped with a monumental lion and griffin, respectively, on their roofs high above King Street.

These stores, founded in 1842, the year Dickens arrived, would become a mainstay for smart Victorians wanting the latest European fashions and homewares.

Both these stores were demolished in 1902 to make way for the King Edward Hotel. Michie's lasted until 1947, and by the 1970s, the original Michie's



Charles Dickens



store became home to the Nag's Head Pub but was subsequently demolished in 1995 to make way for the 50 storey tower of One King West.

Another store operating during Dickens' visit was Victoria Row. Parts of this block-long women's emporium still stand today on the south side of King Street between Leader Lane and Church Street. Its facade is now being incorporated into the new Google building.

Did Dickens ever venture into these wondrous new stores?

For all its pretensions of being an upstanding British Empire city, Toronto in the 19th century had a dark side that even the great author couldn't help but see firsthand.

On that famous tour of Canada, Dickens was appalled with our prison system and the way prisoners were kept. It must have been bad, as England at that time wasn't exactly a model for prison reform.

The year after his Toronto visit, on December 19, 1843,

Dickens published *A Christmas Carol*, which became a holiday classic in books and on stage, as well as in TV and movie adaptations. *A Christmas Carol* popularized the phrase "Merry Christmas" as well as "Bah, Humbug!"

I often wonder if anything Dickens saw while in Toronto made its way into his most famous Christmas story?

While walking along King Street, did Dickens have a chance meeting with a nasty old man who inspired Ebenezer Scrooge, or did he bump into a good-natured man tipping his hat – just as the mild-mannered Bob Cratchit would have done?

I think this every time I find myself on a snowy December eve roaming the same streets the great man himself would have strolled in 1842.

This holiday season I will be offering gift certificates for a private tour with me of Old Town Toronto. Each certificate is good for two people and costs \$50. This certificate is good year-round. I can either email it to you, or you can pick it up in person at St. Lawrence Market. The gift certificate can also be made out to any number of people at \$20 per person. To order, contact me at [bruce.bell2@sympatico.ca](mailto:bruce.bell2@sympatico.ca) or phone 647-393-8687.

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# Hundreds of properties for Heritage Register await Council approval

the bridge reporter

City Council will decide whether 257 properties in the downtown east area are to be included on the City's Heritage Register. Both the Preservation Board and the Toronto East Community Council adopted the motion in the runup to the final decision by City Hall scheduled for Dec. 16-17.

The buildings in question lay within the King-Parliament Secondary Plan district, an area bounded by Queen East, Jarvis and River Streets. In 2018, City Planning was directed to undertake a study of this area of which heritage was a major theme.

Containing some of Toronto's oldest neighbourhoods, a Cultural Heritage Resource Assessment looked into the existence of potential heritage properties. These findings were collected from local organizations, experts and historians as well as several consultations with the general public. Properties were considered based on their cultural heritage value or interest.

Planning staff delivered the final list to the Preservation Board on Nov. 30.

Possible inclusions are ad-



"The Cube" at 1 Sumach Street is one of the many notable buildings that await heritage status from City Council.

resses from Corktown's Bright Street and Wilkins Avenue, which have notable ties to the community's working class roots. Others are located on the commercial strips of Queen and King East Streets which host significant collections of Victorian era row-homes.

If approved, the properties will be referred as being "listed". A listed property is awar-

ded further evaluation if there is an intent to have them demolished. Only "designated" buildings are given full protections under the Ontario Heritage Act.

The set of proposed addresses are part of a larger group of 966 properties that span several city wards. Council's verdict will conclude a year-long process to align the Register with five years' worth of planning studies.

## Survey skews support for Corktown BIA

Andre Bermon, Publisher

A summer survey released by the Corktown Residents and Business Association (CRBA) found support for creating a business improvement area (BIA) in Corktown. Of the approximate 185 participants who favour implementing and or have interest in exploring the project, the vast majority were not from the local business community.

BIAs look after broad business interests in a defined local boundary. Often organized by business and commercial property owners, they work with the city to improve streetscapes and operate marketing, events and community projects.

A business tax levy is added to support BIA staff, who work to promote the neighbourhood and facilitate discussions with City Hall if problems arise. Toronto currently has 80 BIAs.

Asked for their affiliation, 70 percent of survey participants said they lived in Corktown, but only about 5 percent owned a brick-and-mortar business. A few more said they were landlords, but results do not distinguish between commercial and residential owners.

Around 28 percent said they don't live in Corktown.

Respondents were able to choose multiple answers, meaning some could have identified themselves as both a

resident and a business owner.

Starting a BIA is usually controversial, because mandatory membership forces commercial property owners of buildings within the specified area to pay extra taxes. This tax is often passed down to commercial tenants, though residents and residential property owners are unaffected.

That support for a BIA was overwhelmingly from the non-business community suggests that the survey was skewed.

"When I saw the results and it looked liked [a BIA] was heavily favoured, it was kind of shocking," said Eugene, owner of Tandem Coffee on King Street East. "Many of the businesses here are very, very old. These guys survived this long without a BIA, so for this stuff to come now is weird."

Over the years, the CRBA has struggled to represent both residents and businesses in the community. Not only has increased development in Corktown strained the association's resources, but the diversity of interests shared by different socio-economic groups in the district has not produced wide participation.

Some areas of Corktown, including Gilead Street and Treffan Court, have their own resident associations, while businesses on Queen Street East see a lack of representation on CRBA committees as a

sign of indifference. Participation outside the organization's King Street East core is low.

Separating business needs in the form of a BIA could be more efficient than an association combining them with resident interests, says Dr. Sanjay Vakani, owner of Corktown Eyecare and the CRBA's treasurer.

"I think there is a need for exploration of a BIA simply because the residents in this community have certain needs and the businesses have certain needs. I think the current structure of the CRBA doesn't meet both of those needs to the highest levels that it should."

Especially during the ongoing Covid-19 restrictions and rolling lockdowns, some business owners question the timing of the proposal.

"In the middle of a pandemic when most of us have seen our incomes cut by 80 percent, it's pretty bad to be asking businesses to pay for a BIA," said Alexi Thibodeau, owner of a King Street East business. "Were it this time last year, I would have said, heck yes, that's an amazing idea, let's get on board ... I just think the timing of it ridiculous."


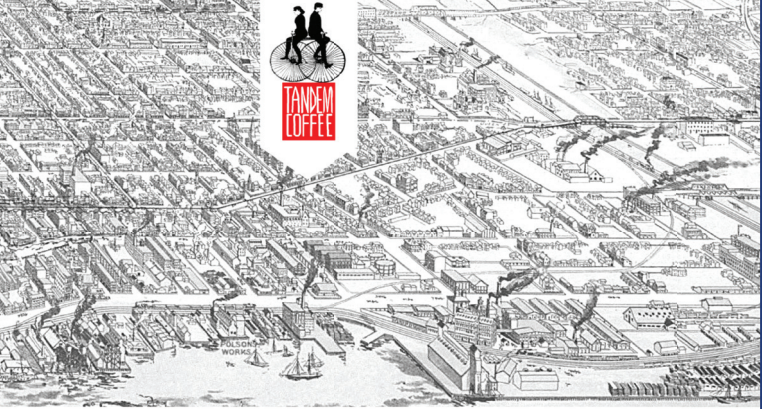
CRBA president Aaron Binder, organizer of the newly formed BIA steering committee, says support from the business community will hinge on both the costs and timeline of



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the project. Details are expected to emerge in the coming months.

Asked how much the survey results influenced the decision to create the steering committee Binder responded, "I wouldn't say it was the impetus. But it gave us the data we needed to say this is something we should be talking about, regardless of a pandemic going on."

The steering committee is responsible for deciding the BIA's boundaries. King Street East from Parliament to River Streets will likely form the core of any prospective association, with possible limbs stretching to parts of Queen Street East and the Canary District.

Another survey is to be released in January that will be

tailored to assessing support specifically from business owners. It's one of many outreach initiatives required for the steering committee to evaluate how viable a BIA would be.

The project will likely be contentious, with yeas and nays determined by geography, company size and how long businesses have been in Corktown.

"We've already done all the legwork," said Tandem Coffee's Eugene. "We've already established ourselves, gotten our customers. We don't need another added cost to justify whatever street improvements. This is our sixth year and we've roughed it out and forged our own path."



# Multiple petitions asking province to cease MZO

MZO continued from p1

hoped the heritage buildings on the site would be turned into mixed-use buildings for artists and the community. The centre's high-level plan included a large performance venue, a cafe, shared office spaces, and meeting rooms.

The IRCPA plan received a letter of support from the Corktown Residents and Business Association, and some community members have stepped up.

Josh Reiniger, an urban plan-

ner and Corktown resident of over four years, decided to use his knowledge of Corktown's zoning and development history to become involved in the IRCPA project.

"As a Corktown resident, I know that the area is lacking a mix of uses that bring people to the neighbourhood to work, learn and experience culture, as it's a residential district largely composed of condominiums," said Reiniger. "I also know that the broader area lacks a community centre and hub of com-

munity activity for formal and informal gathering."

Multiple petitions asking for the provincial government to cease using MZO have been created. MPP Suze Morrison's petition, "Respect for Local Planning," calls on the province "to stop its lobbyist-driven MZO in the West Don Lands and elsewhere, and restore transparent and evidence-based planning that includes public consultation and respect for heritage conservation, the environment and local decision-

making." The petition had 343 signatures as of Nov. 30.

Kimberley Brewer, a resident of more than three years, says she's concerned about more than the MZO. "It's not just the Foundries site or Corktown; the current government has rammed through MZO in other communities and ecologically sensitive sites."

Brewer says that the IRCPA

proposal for the Foundries site also adds education and rental housing for artists and the community.

"While there has been legitimate debate around the height of the buildings, what can't be lost is how necessary it is that the heritage of the Foundries buildings is retained and that the community has much-needed space for gathering."

## Moss Park: A love story

Dustin Stern, Director of Building Roots.

Recently, I was in a conversation on Instagram with a devastated young local business owner. As of Nov. 24, Timeless Collective Toronto sees no way forward but to close up their physical shop (still operating online @timelesscollective-toronto).

I started following the shop after stumbling in one day and learning about the owners' philosophy that an artist is merely one who creates. Whether you've had years of success in the fashion industry or just last year discovered the healing powers of pottery and got inspired to now want to spread your shiny, pottery-shaped love, the owners would be willing to put your creations on shelf. I was touched by this, and devastated to hear of the loss of the shop.

I am waiting to hear test results from a loved one I was in brief contact with who was exposed to Covid-19, and therefore may have infected me. Home in isolation since the encounter, I do not think my risk was high, but it still terrifies me. All the people they might have infected, all the people their infector might have infected – you know the thought process.

This is all so messy. People call 2020 a horrible year, but I

argue it's as messy as it is merciless. So many firsts, so much change. The horribleness of 2020 is indisputable, so instead I focus on the messy.

Messy is uncomfortable, but no change was ever created from within "the comfort zone". Push sometimes comes to shove whether we like it or not, and falling hurts, but it's also how we learn to get back up. Perhaps if we're smart, we can learn how to plant our feet and situate ourselves so the next time we won't fall down when shoved.

For example, we could change our public perception of harm reduction initiatives and enact better laws around drug use, so that next time the city (or the world) goes into crisis, we don't see an unprecedented spike in fatal overdoses.

We could ensure access to affordable, dignified housing for all, so it doesn't take city parks filling up with an upsetting number of unhoused Torontonians for us to realize we are in a housing crisis that is not going away.

Speaking from my experience with Building Roots – a local grassroots organization that works collaboratively with just about every community agency and social enterprise in Moss Park (including *the bridge*, our proud partner and collaborator since its launch), and, most important, being on

the ground hearing directly from those most vulnerable to the virus and its social implications – it's clear that the answer is going to be found in cooperation.

Perhaps it is merely the circles I am grateful to find myself in, or being situated in the inspiringly resilient and beautiful Moss Park community, but for every story of an oversized pantry jam-packed with the local grocery store's remaining stock of toilet paper, I can offer you three about the power of togetherness that could move you to tears.

People have found a million and one new ways to connect, to make one another smile, to ensure that no one goes hungry and that no one gets left behind. Speaking for myself, this community I have found in Building Roots and in Moss Park – people from walks of life I've never known existed, and displays of kindness I'd never have imagined – have made 2020 not merely a year of disaster, but ultimately a story of hope.

Thank you to all of my neighbours in Moss Park, housed and unhoused. We will get through this – and the next challenge, and the next – facing up to and taking action on our vulnerabilities, doing it together, and becoming more resilient and vibrant with each challenge we overcome.

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## No affordable units in Filmore's condo project

Jayne Kitchen

On Nov. 24, the city held a public consultation on a proposed condo development at 212-218 Dundas Street East and 279½ George Street, known for 35 years as Filmore's strip club.

The original mid-rise brick building opened in 1913 as an apartment complex and housed two different adult entertainment establishments before Filmore's took over in 1985.

The block is zoned for mid-rise buildings, but the developer's application for a bylaw amendment could make way for a mixed-use complex that waterfalls from a 46-storey skyscraper on the corner to shorter buildings at the end of the block. The current heritage building would be kept almost entirely and used as commercial space. The building is to contain 588 new units, 116 parking spaces and 596 bike parking spaces.

Presenting the project on behalf of Menkes Developments, Michael Goldberg of the Goldberg Group referred several times to the proposed tower's unique design. Paying homage to the Garden District in which the tower will sit, he said white sloping and curved balconies are intended to evoke the look of a trillium flower.

The area around this proposed building, especially near Sherbourne and Dundas Streets, is decidedly marginalized. With the erection of several other huge condo towers to the west in the last few years, pressure on the original residents has been increasing with loss of affordable rental housing. The proposal did little to address these concerns.

A similar consultation in October for a proposed high-rise at George and Richmond Streets drew much concern regarding neighbourhood housing. As a result, a portion of the units were proposed to be dedicated to affordable housing in partnership with WoodGreen Community Services' Homeward Bound program. Despite the Filmore's site being in an arguably rougher area, no such plan was presented.

The current condo market and the work-from-home trend put into question whether increasing

Toronto's condos supply is sensible. Asked about the present flight out of cities by professionals, the Goldberg team said they consider it short term in the context of a long-term development. Nonethe-

less, this project is one of three 40- to 50-storey condo projects within a few blocks. Adding a 46-storey building will boost Toronto's skyrocketing condo inventory.



Looking northeast to 218 Dundas East, image via submission to the City of Toronto



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## the bridge: Book Review

Glenda MacFarlane, Columnist

**A Good War: Mobilizing Canada for the Climate Emergency**  
Seth Klein  
ECW Press, 2020

At first glance, Seth Klein would seem to be an unlikely author for a book praising war efforts. Klein is the child of U.S. draft resisters, a long-time peace activist, and the former British Columbia director for the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. But, as Klein researched ways for Canada to combat the climate crisis, he realized that there were "instructive lessons about how to confront an existential threat" in the way our country mobilized to fight World War II. He argues that adopting these kinds of bold measures could help us battle the profound and devastating costs of the climate emergency.

Klein draws parallels between the two situations and asserts that the same tactics are needed: rallying public opinion, creating social solidarity, promoting national unity, transforming the economy, financing the effort, transitioning workers justly, and providing good leadership. (He also cautions that we need to avoid the mistakes of that era to ensure that we protect human rights and refugees.) Klein rightly states that this current crisis can be confronted only by all of us together, and, if history is a guide, a stronger community will arise.

The writer focuses his argument on three major areas. The first deals with gaining public support and bringing Canadians together in solidarity. Research has shown that we are more likely to support a "Green New Deal" initiative if the plan

is linked to measures to fight inequality and poverty, and to create jobs. Although there is already a great deal of support for climate action in this country, the WWII experience shows that it's important to enlist all of us: we must overcome denialism, defeatism, and address regional concerns in order to do so.

The next section of the book explores how the Canadian government might mobilize the necessary resources, using the example of the King government in the 1940s, which transformed the economy. Klein makes a strong case for rejecting neoliberal economics: "We are fiddling at the margins while the planet burns," he says of our current efforts. He looks at plans such as the one from Stanford University that would get us to 100 per cent renewable energy by 2050 and generate nearly 700,000 new jobs. The author explores ways we could make the changes necessary, including selling Green Bonds, creating a host of Crown Corporations, and mobilizing labour and the military.

Next, Klein moves onto leadership, calling for bold new thinking from both grassroots and political leaders. He breaks down the stances of the major parties, extols the importance of Indigenous and youth leadership, and suggests ways to curb the political power of the fossil fuel industries. A final "coda" about the pandemic proves his thesis that when an emergency is recognized, government can act boldly.

Unlike many books about climate change, this one is a hopeful and uplifting read. Add it to your winter reading list — and write to your government representatives suggesting that they do the same!

# HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

To "the bridge" and all the staff and contributors on your first year Business Anniversary.

Successfully maintaining integrity and empowering us during these difficult times. Congratulations!

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# A big thank you to our supporters!

What a year it has been!

I would like to spill some ink and thank all our supporters who made *the bridge* possible.

A special shoutout to the unsung hero, Patrick Lee, our designer, who volunteered his time every month to bring together all our collaborative efforts into a printable product. His willingness to put in long hours, often under stress of deadlines, brought *the bridge* into fruition and into the hands

of our readers. Thank you, Pat! I have learned so much!

I would like to acknowledge the contributions of our senior columnists, Bruce Bell and Ben Bull. Both joined the team in the early days and brought much needed continuity and insight to our monthly editions. Their unique stories have helped grow our readership that spans the downtown east area. Thank you, gentlemen! I hope to see you both in print in

2021.

Other important contributors to *the bridge* are Carol Mark from the Moss Park community, Phil Roth, and Glenda MacFarlane, *the bridge's* book review writer. This list also includes present and past writers, Julia Simioni, Cory Lemos, Anthony Van Zant, and Dini Petty.

*the bridge* wouldn't be a community paper without the contribution of two local organizations; Jesse Cohoon from the Toronto Writers Collective, and Dustin Stern, Darcy Higgins and Lisa Kates from the Moss Park Market. I am honoured to be partnered with like-minded individuals who see *the bridge* as a viable platform for community awareness and activism. Both organizations have been with the paper since the very beginning! Onward and upward.

To our advertisers, and there are many, your support/business is what gives the paper the ability to meet its financial obligations. By putting your brand on our pages, not only have you have demonstrated a commitment to local journalism, but you have displayed continued faith in the building blocks of our community.

I am thankful to have

established so many fruitful relations with small business owners. It's been a tough year, but community helps community, and you can bet we'll get through this and prosper together.

A special thank you to the ladies at Flux & Form Jewellery, who were the first to advertise with us. They put their trust in a local project and we delivered. Literally.

With every great writer, there is even a greater copy editor. Thank you, Eric Mills!

A nod to our photographers, Stefan Blondal and Tania Correa.

And to my family and close friends. Thank you so much! Many of you put time slugging away delivering newspapers month after month. It's an inky, sticky, sweaty and tiring job, but there is no one else I'd rather be doing it with.

And lastly, to our readers: Keep picking up *the bridge*! And don't forget to send us emails, we want to hear from you.

Happy Holidays everyone!

Andre B., Publisher



Andre Michael Bermon, publisher of the bridge community newspaper.

Photo: Stefan Blondal

## Small businesses frustrated over restrictions

Small Biz continued from p1

Some businesses don't know if they should apply for the new federal rent subsidy because they might not survive through the pandemic whether they remain open or closed, according to Makhoul.

The subsidy covers up to 65 percent of rent or commercial mortgage interest based on revenue declines, with an extra 25 per cent for the hardest-hit firms, according to the Canada Revenue Agency.

Like many others, Vincent Askaani, who runs his restaurant Chamsine, is frustrated and struggling. He shut down during the first wave, but reopened to face new challenges in an area where many don't follow lockdown restrictions.

Askaani wishes the government considered small businesses as essential as big box stores, but understands that safety has to come first. This might be a time for sacrifice, he said.

"Personally, it doesn't feel fair, but nothing about the coronavirus is fair. People are dying and numbers are increasing dramatically. If someone loses a loved one, it doesn't compare to any money," he said.

# Amazing Moss Park Artists

Carol Mark

To paraphrase Charles Dickens, the inventor of the modern Christmas: 2020 was the best and the worst of times.

The holiday season – no matter your culture or religion – always conjures up scenes of get-togethers with family and friends. However, this year just won't be the same due to Covid-19.

I believe our personal histories and our spirits will sustain us. As hard as these times are, we will find the strength to reach out to others in need and connect, maybe not in person, but by phone or email. It is our empathy that makes us truly human.

Here is what the different members of The Amazing Moss Park Artists Collective have to say:

Rachelle Soloway: "The world that we inhabit can be stressful and sometimes chaotic. Crocheting is not just a creative process, but a cathartic one as well. I have found crocheting gives me a pocket of time in which I can have a semblance of control in this topsyturvy sphere we call home."

Colour Blots Creative: "As 2020 comes to a close, let us exhale. Breathe. Listen. Love. Give way to light, truth, and life."

Giselle Silvestri: "Keep walking past the open windows," said John Irving in *The Hotel New Hampshire*. I thought



of this sentence many times throughout this last year."

Dan Philips: "Happy Holidays! What if 2020 was just a trailer for 2021?"

Alan McKee: "The pandemic is the most powerful mirror that has been held up to humanity in modern times. It has shown us just how false we are when we claim to believe in things like equality, love for our fellow man and woman, and other official "good things." If we are honest, we have seen that we

each think of ourselves first or at best, of those most important to us. Many people have behaved like Donald Trump: with total disregard for the world at large and focused only on our own wants and needs. There may be exceptions here and there. But by and large, I feel we have made a poor showing. We need to look closely at this mirror and see ourselves for what we are. That is the only way to begin changing it."

Brian A. Hawkins: "I sure

learned one thing in 2020. The future ain't what it used to be. Things are changing so rapidly that it's hard to step into a future living alone, socially distancing myself six feet from the bathroom mirror. David Bowie once said that, "Tomorrow belongs to those that can hear it coming." If that's true, I must be stone deaf. Still, 2021 is just around the corner, promising changes and surprises that will stir the creative juices in writers and artists. We never

give up. I'm predicting that 2021 will be the year when face masks are worn only by doctors, nurses, and bank robbers. And when that happens, won't that be wonderful?"

It was the best of times since many things will have to begin anew. We can do better next time.

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# Fundraising in the wake of Covid-19

Jesse Cohoon

Pivoting to meet the challenge of an ongoing crisis, the Toronto Writers Collective developed a plan to host a virtual fundraiser on November 24. The world had undergone a sea of change, with tradition and norms swept away. So how can we adapt to accommodate this new reality?

Thinking outside the box, Shelley Lepp, Co-Executive Director of the Toronto Writers Collective, and Courtney Greenberg, Outreach and Communication Coordinator, created a virtual online event to entertain and inform.

After a brief overview of the goals and achievements of the TWC, Richard Mozer, the TWC Board Chair, started the program, welcoming more than 75 attendees from all walks of life, including sponsors, donors, friends, facilitators, and writers. Also on hand were special guests Peter Tabuns, MPP Toronto Danforth, and former Lieutenant Governor, David

Onley. Mozer also introduced a video that was recently shown during the 10 days of the Toronto International Festival of Authors at Union Station.

In an effort to engage the audience and share the vision of the organization, Al Moritz – a staunch ally of TWC and Toronto’s Poet Laureate – stepped forward to present a powerful keynote speech and to read several of his poems, showing his passion for empowering the voices of people who have traditionally been silenced.

“When I became Poet Laureate, one of the things I specifically wanted to do was to reach out to the poor; not to bring poetry to them, but to find their poetry, to hear them, and to learn from them,” said Moritz. “It is not easy to find ways to access and to create communion. I was astonished to find the Toronto Writers Collective was already doing everything I wanted to do. I am grateful to be a part of this effort.”

Other stars of the evening were emerging authors Lisa

Kaitell, Maria Cristina Sabourin-Jovel, Janel Coe, and Shirin Tobie-Paul. Several of them read new pieces published in *Front Lines: Until the Words Run Pure* and *Front Lines: Bent, Not Broken*, a collection of anthologies released during the Toronto International Festival of Authors. Lisa Richter also shared a striking poem – *The Primeval Murderess Talks Back to the Poet* – from her recently published collection, *Nautilus and Bone* (Frontenac House).

There is a depth of understanding that comes from lived experience – an understanding that permeates each

line. Jay Teitel, a well-known writer and editor, has mentored many of those featured in the event. He said, “I found the writers remarkably receptivity and open to suggestions. They seemed to have a built-in sense of humility about the work that they were creating. The work was more important than they were.”

He quoted Roberta Taylor’s poem, *A Plea*:

*Give me a true friend with human soul*

*who knows the fallings and the climbs as I.*

*Who knows what it is like to be made whole.*

*To sing and cry and laugh,*

and laugh and cry.

The final presenter of the evening was Jobim Novak, who read from his autobiography that tells his journey from addiction to advocate; from despair to hope. It was a tribute to his own resilience and the value of expressive writing to growth and self-awareness.

Susan Turk, Founder of the TWC, noted about the event, “The stories shared illuminate the experiences that fill our diverse, vibrant, and changing city. Many of the writers come from tough experiences and difficult realities. They choose to write and reject silence. Simple, yet profound, our ability to create words is a gift for both those who create and those who receive that creation.”

The beauty of an online event is that it gives people from all walks of life the opportunity to share their stories and to create community. Social distancing doesn’t have to mean social isolation. The stories shared were touching, heart-warming and heart-breaking. Perceptions were challenged, the beauty of the spoken word resonated, and a goal was achieved: through writing and listening, together we change the world.

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