

the bridge

Connecting people, places and ideas across our city from the downtown east

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Business owner Randy Spearing outside his shop, Merchant of York, on Queen Street East.

Photo: Andre Bermon

Small businesses prepare for looming second wave

Sophia de Guzman

As Ontario hunkers down for a second wave of Covid-19 and a possible second lockdown, small businesses are looking warily into the future. Concerns for small businesses are growing as the pandemic rolls on. Many fear that government aid for businesses will become more inaccessible. And as winter closes in, restaurant revenues from outdoor seating will disappear. “I’m scared of the long run. Without the support of the government, I don’t think we’ll be able to survive,” expressed Siva Sathasium, owner and operator of Uncle Tony’s on Wellington Street East.

During the initial lockdown, government aid programs served as a lifeline for small businesses. Federal programs included the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy and forgivable loans. The City of Toronto instituted CaféTO, a program to help restaurants and bars provide outdoor seating during the summer that meet social distancing guidelines. Unfortunately, the guidelines for some of the aid programs were a problem for many small businesses. Some forgivable loans required businesses to demonstrate at least 75 per cent drop in revenue, which simply wasn’t the case for many. “Even though you had a lot of costs still, you weren’t qualified for it. So, thankfully they

adjusted it as time went on. Unfortunately, for some businesses it might have been too late and too slow but they did slowly adjust it and make it available to more businesses,” said Randy Spearing, owner of home goods store Merchant of York on Queen Street. New businesses and those with few or no employees were left out of the beginning stages of federal aid. Though these businesses were among the most vulnerable to the consequences of lockdown. A universal concern during lockdown was rent. Several small businesses relied on the whim of their landlords, either negotiating an arrangement to get through the coming months, or hoping that their

landlords would go through the process of applying for government rent assistance. “The rent is month after month. You don’t know what will be the help for rent for next month. We don’t know how long we can survive like that,” said Marie Lancette, general manager of Le Papillon restaurant on Front Street. Despite many problems, some small businesses are persevering. Siarhei Laurenau, owner of Third Wave Coffee on Church Street, cites community support as the reason it is still in business. “We’re here by the grace of our patrons, by the grace of our regulars. They’re very responsive, they’ve been very supportive,” says Laurenau

What is Larco Investments?

Development

 Watch 

Andre Bermon, Publisher

In a new series examining development in downtown Toronto, the bridge will profile construction projects and the developers behind the multi-billion dollar industry that’s changing the face of our city. This is the first of a two-part story on Larco Investments Inc., a B.C. real estate giant and now developer of 1 Front Street West. Purchasing a Toronto landmark for a quarter-billion dollars and adding two high-rise buildings with little public attention is exactly what the owners of Larco Investments Inc., Canada’s largest private real estate company, had in mind. In Ottawa, a lengthy legal battle over Larco’s planned addition to the historic Chateau Laurier Hotel, which the company had purchased in 2013, had turned into a public relations debacle. It must have reminded Aminmohamed, Mansoor and Shiraz Lalji, who rule over the real estate empire, the merits of keeping a low profile. Since immigrating to Canada in the 1970s, the Lalji brothers have amassed a multi-billion-dollar fortune, making them the 26th richest family in the country.

Larco continued on p8

Bond Place Hotel turns into temporary homeless shelter

Donald Higney

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the City of Toronto has leased the Bond Place Hotel as a provisional shelter for homeless people. The hotel at Dundas Street East and Bond Street has been used since August 21 to house the homeless for the fall, but the lease will likely be extended until next spring. Dixon Hall, a not-for-profit organization that runs two year-round shelters in Toronto,

is operating the Bond Place facility. Near the end of September, the hotel had 141 residents, but maximum occupancy is 200, according to David Reycraft, Dixon Hall’s director of housing services. Residents of the hotel, single adults or couples, have mainly come from a Dixon Hall program at 188 Carlton Street, and the recently closed temporary Broadway Avenue shelter (near Eglinton and Yonge Street). Staff also plan on reaching out to homeless people in the Yonge and Dundas area.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, 318 shelter beds have been relocated out of Ward 13 Downtown East, leaving 1,615 beds among 25 programs. Ward 13 has always had the most shelter beds out of all of Toronto’s neighbourhoods. Two thousand people have been moved into 20 hotels, and 3,500 people in total have been moved to physically distanced spaces to limit the spread of Covid-19. In the past six months, the city has opened 30 new shelters, compared with

the past average of one or two per year. Finding facilities equipped to house many people has been a challenge. Sites need to be big enough to meet physical distancing guidelines, have enough open rooms for those in need, and require only minimal changes. At a virtual information session on September 10 for Ward 13 residents, Justin Lewis, planning and development director for the city’s shelter, support and housing administration (SSHA), said Toronto

doesn’t have enough spaces that check those boxes. One person asked why homeless shelters are not located in industrial areas. Lewis cited the lack of services. “An individual [who] needs to access a pharmacy, a library or transit doesn’t necessarily go into an industrial area.”

Shelter continued on p2

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is an independent community newspaper published monthly and distributed by a mix of delivery services to a varying readership. 4,000 copies are circulated throughout the downtown east - Moss Park, Corktown, The Garden District, Regent Park, Cabbagetown South, the St. Lawrence Neighbourhood - and to community hubs that extend across Toronto.

the bridge strives to source up-to-date activity and diverse interests from heritage, planning, culture, development, arts and opinions that advocate a collaborative and level playing field forum.

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A step towards permanent housing

Shelter continued from p1

"People didn't start off as homeless; people don't want to have labels of homelessness," said SSHA Manager Monica Waldman when someone asked why the site is close to the Toronto Eaton Centre, a major tourist attraction. "They want their own home [and] they don't want to be in the middle of nowhere with no amenities."

Under the HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan, the goal is to transition Toronto's homeless population to

permanent housing.

Dixon Hall's Reycraft said about the Bond Street Hotel, "We're providing individuals with a room [so] they have a place to go. It is incumbent on us to develop effective programming at the site to occupy their time."

It's easy for us who have been housed for most of our lives to not understand those things, but this is a fundamental shift for many of the men and women we're working with."



The Bond Place Hotel at Bond Street and Dundas East Street. Photo: Donald Higney

With help from the community, Building Roots authors a story of hope

Dustin Stern, Director of
Programming, Building Roots

Building Roots has always been committed to cultivating vibrant and resilient communities. Covid-19 put that mission to the test when on March 12, 2020, everything changed.

Having to think fast, we used past insights and input from the communities we serve and set in motion a slew of new programs and partnerships.

All programming aimed at three specific goals: providing food for the most vulnerable in our community; offering at-home educational and recreational resources for children, families and seniors in need; and ensuring access to vital information about Covid-19 and government supports that they would not otherwise have received.

We quickly connected with residents, partner agencies, community leaders and volunteers to achieve these goals. With gratitude, great learning and even greater collaborations, in the first 25 weeks of Community Helping Community, together we accomplished:

6,000+ food bags of fresh and local produce, non-perishable staples, and delicious meals and treats distributed to 300



Helpers get their picture taken at the Moss Park Market.

Photo: Thu Nguyen

households;

500+ activity kits procured and distributed to children and families, as well as 1,000+ books and colouring books with works of local artists, with a focus on promoting mental health;

200 Veg2Grow Kits for Kids to families in Downtown East Toronto, so children could learn how to grow food safely from their homes;

25+ socially distanced performances by Black, Indigenous, women, people of colour and LGBTQIP2SAA+ musical artists and dance perfor-

mers. We worked with community members to animate public space so everyone could safely enjoy the summer.

Thank you to everyone who supported us, funded our projects, volunteered, donated or otherwise cheered us on through this incredible show of community spirit the past few months.

These have not been easy times for anyone ... thank you for being part of our story of hope.

Read the whole story at buildingroots.ca

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Chorley Park



Bruce Bell, Senior Columnist

A few years back, I was invited to the Lieutenant Governor's Suite in the Legislature Building at Queen's Park to attend an art exhibit for people with special needs, a cause close to then Lt. Governor Onley's heart.

The event was also a chance to see the new elevator that was recently installed so that people with mobility issues could access the grand and imposing rooms used by Ontario's Lt. Governors since 1937 for official functions like the art show I attended.

As I wandered the impressive suite with its high ceilings, crystal chandeliers and marble fireplaces, I saw not only inspiring works of art by Ontario artists but also a set of paintings depicting former Toronto homes that were once used as the Official Residences of the Lt. Governor.

The first Vice-Regal Residence of Upper Canada, a one-storey frame house built at Fort York, was occupied by Lt. Governor Peter Hunter and was destroyed during the War of 1812 when a nearby powder magazine exploded.

The second residence, built in 1798, was located on the block now occupied by Roy Thomson Hall. It was originally the home of Chief Justice John Elmsley and during its time as the Lt. Governor's residence, from 1815 to 1841, it

was still known as the Elmsley House.

After the building was destroyed by fire in 1862, plans were put forward on the same site for a third home to be "more opulent than any other in the province."

Completed in 1870 by one of Toronto's finest architects, Henry Langley, the new Lt. Governor's Residence was built in the French Second Empire style and featured sloped mansard roofs overlooking a large landscaped garden. Both the drawing room on the first floor and the state bedroom on the second floor faced Lake Ontario. Sadly, this exceptional home was torn down in 1912 to make way for more railway land.

To get an idea of what this gorgeous home looked like, take a look at one of Henry Langley's remaining architectural jewels, the Bank of British North American, now the home of the Irish Embassy Pub on the NE corner of Yonge and Wellington streets.

After the destruction of Langley's masterpiece, it was time for the 4th Official Residence and in 1915, after three years of construction, we have the grandest of them all: Chorley Park. A monumental French Renaissance inspired chateau in the heart of Rosedale.

In a mere 100 years from a clapboard cabin at Fort York to a lavish castle in Rosedale, Chorley Park was not only the most copious home ever constructed in Toronto but probably in all of Canada.

This great palace rose up with tall chimneys, detailed cornices, dormer windows, each with canopies to shade the summer sun, and corner turrets giving the castle a distinctive French style. Adding to this splendor, the entire roof was



covered in red terra-cotta tiles.

Chorley Park only served as the Official Residence of the Lt. Governor for a mere 22 years. Probably because of its out of the way location, its ultimate demise was an easier decision for the government of the day.

I also felt, had the great home been built on Bloor Street at the head of Church Street like it was originally proposed, it would have created a grander vista for the magnificent residence, and might still be standing today.

However in 1937, during the Great Depression, the provincial government, thinking such an outlandish palace was too expensive to maintain (965 tons of coal a year to operate whereas the average home used only six tons), sold the estate to the federal government where it served as a military hospital during World War II, then the Toronto headquarters of the

RCMP, and finally, a home for refugees of the 1956 Hungarian uprising.

In 1961, just as the ultra modern New City Hall and the Gardiner Expressway were being built, the great Chorley Park home that once overlooked the Don Valley was torn down. Nothing was ever built on the site to this day and nothing was ever built to replace it.

Since 1937, Ontario's Lt. Governor uses a suite of rooms (originally built as the Speaker's apartment) for receptions at the Ontario Legislature and lives in his or her private Toronto home, or is provided a rented residence elsewhere in

the city.

While Chorley Park might have been too extravagant as a residence, it should have been maintained as a tourist attraction, hospital, or school. Its destruction was nothing but a waste; a total utter waste that Toronto's heritage has never fully recovered from.

I will be doing **free walking tours** of Old Town Toronto every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday during the month of October. To book a space contact, me through my website www.brucebelltours.ca or call 647-393-8687.



Former Lieutenant Governor's residence at Chorley Park, 1940.

Photo: Courtesy of the Toronto Public Library



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the bridge: Book Review

Glenda MacFarlane, Columnist

In My Own Moccasins

By Helen Knott

University of Regina Press, 2019

Helen Knott is renowned internationally for her advocacy on sexual violence, as well as Indigenous and environmental issues. Not yet thirty, she has spoken before the United Nations and has been recognized by the Nobel Women's Initiative; her work makes connections between communities and addresses urgent concerns. Her memoir, *In My Own Moccasins*, looks candidly at her life so far. As Eden Robinson notes in the foreword, Helen Knott's story is an all-too-familiar one: a young Indigenous woman dealing with the legacy of residential schools, racism, sexual violence, and addiction. If the book merely related the struggles of an Indigenous woman who manages to break free from a cycle of violence and despair, it would be a valuable contribution to our literature. But in the hands of the luminously talented Knott, her story becomes so much

more. *In My Own Moccasins* is a political journey as well as a personal one, and a lyrical testimony to the healing power of sisterhood, family, and ceremony.

In 1899, Helen Knott's great-great grandfather, Chief Makanecha, was one of the signers of Treaty 8, which opened the west for mass European settlement and marked the end of a way of life for Indigenous peoples. The repercussions of this echo down multiple generations, and Knott's church-going family in Fort St. John was no exception. Her mother, although loving, struggled with alcoholism and mental illness; her father worked too much. Life became more complicated for Knott following a sexual assault when she was a young teenager, and later, with the birth of a baby boy who she was unable to care for. As a young woman she first flees to Prince George and then to Edmonton – struggling to survive, addicted to alcohol and drugs. Knott provides harrowing details of that life, a cycle of sexual violence and substance abuse that brings her close to death.

Moving backward and forward through time, Knott recounts the moments that led to her ultimate sobriety and her journey toward reclaiming her identity as a Dane Zaa and Nehiyaw woman: kind words from friends, her son's small voice on the telephone, a sacred night at a sweat lodge. Slowly she learns about the lives of her mother, her grandmother, and her ancestors; she reunites with her young son. With the help of a therapist and her family, she faces the things she has done – and the things that were done to her – and she begins to write poetry. Knott begins to make connections between the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada and her own history. "Healing yourself is a revolutionary act," she says. "Healing yourself is the ultimate act of resistance."

In her introduction to the book, Helen Knott addresses women who have experienced sexual violence, those who struggle with addiction, and Indigenous women. "I wrote this for you," she tells them. Those to whom she speaks, and many others, will find this memoir a gift.

The pandemic has people on the move, but what does it mean for our communities?

Ben Bull, Columnist

My street is on the move. And it's all because of Covid.

The sell-off started in April, when Greg (I've changed the names to protect the innocent), got kicked to the curb by his landlord. Greg's house was an Airbnb. His rent was cheap because he ran the place, but when the tourists stopped coming, the house had to go.

Next on the block was Sally. Sally moved to the cottage because she didn't have to go into work anymore. And now, my next-door neighbour Frank has just announced that he'll be backing up the moving truck soon. He wants to cash in, "before the housing market crashes."

All over our city, people are getting restless. Businesses are running on fumes; people without a paycheck are downsizing; and landlords are getting the hell out of dodge. And those of us left behind can only wonder, "What will become of our communities?"

I asked Frank where he was going.

"I'm not staying in the city," he told me. "The kids need more space."

And now that he doesn't need to go into office, he can give it to them.

"I'll probably move to the suburbs," he said.

I never found out where Greg went. He was on a fixed income and couldn't afford to live downtown. I'm guessing he

moved far away.

When it comes to homeowners, dire predictions are abound. Moody's Analytics forecast a seven per cent decrease in home prices across Canada for next year – all caused by falling incomes, rising rental vacancies, and an immigration slowdown. In other words: Covid.

Our economy isn't bouncing back anytime soon either. A recent Canadian Federation of Independent Business report noted that one in seven Canadian small to medium businesses are at risk of shutting down. And that's just today. What will our storefronts look like six months from now?

I worry about our mom-and-pops. Local businesses form the backbone of our community and yet, so many are going down. Who will replace them? I hear the one-percenters are doing quite well. Will our local entrepreneurs be replaced by out-of-town CEOs?

There's a lot of talk on my street about renting. Marco from three doors down works for a bank, but now he can work anywhere with WiFi. He wants to move his desk to California and be closer to his sister.

Home rental companies like NomadX see this trend. They cater specifically to the 'half-tourist' – a new breed of worker who works from home, in someone else's house.

For those of us who are travel-averse, Airbnb has shifted its business model to promote

staycations. So don't expect that house-hotel on your street to be closing anytime soon.

How will all this work-freedom affect our communities? Strong communities are nurtured by residents, not short-term renters. People who have a stake in the neighbourhood are the ones who work to make it stronger.

Our neighbourhood association president is part of the Covid-19 exodus. Sadly, no one is rushing to replace her. We've seen how hard she worked, and we understand it takes a special kind of dedication to fill that role.

Strong communities are forged through common aims and a willingness to work together. But they also need leaders.

As Covid-19 drags on (and on), I worry about what will happen to the most vulnerable members of our community, especially the kids. Until six months ago, Frank's two little tykes were destined to grow up downtown and be immersed in the cultural diversity we all enjoy.

I wonder how strong their new community will be.

Frank has just tossed out another load of garbage. The 'For Sale' sign will be going up soon. I hope our new neighbours will love this neighbourhood as much as I do. I hope they will want to work together and invest in our community.

I hope they will help us make it stronger.

I hope they will stay.



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Life after WE: the future of Queen and Parliament

Andre Bermon, Publisher

In the wake of the announcement by the Kielburger brothers to close down WE Charity in Canada and liquidate its assets, many wondered if the sell-off would include WE's sizable real estate holdings in the Queen and Parliament area.

Between 2015 and 2019, WE's associated social enterprise had spent \$26.1 million to buy 13 properties, forming a complex of office and storage buildings that one local was named "WE-ville." A majority of the properties are former commercial storefronts, including the Marty Millionaire building, which was renovated in 2017 for the charity's global headquarters.

Other WE buildings on the south side of Queen Street East were slated to be part of an adult school development, but the plan was cancelled when the Kielburgers found themselves mired in a cronyism scandal with the Trudeau government.

Now that the smoke has cleared and WE buildings sit idle, what will become of the Queen and Parliament corner?

On September 23, people

representing the Encampment Support Network, a volunteer housing advocacy group, staged a demonstration in front of the buildings and proposed that they be used to house homeless people.

Toronto's housing crisis has undoubtedly been laid bare since the Covid-19 lockdown occurred in March. Tent encampments have sprouted across the city, particularly in the downtown core, as underhoused people avoid crowded respite centres and shelters for fear of contagion.

The WE site is on the periphery of Moss Park, a historically marginalized neighbourhood. Social services and public housing have concentrated nearby for decades, resulting in a disjointed and transient community.

While there are merits to housing those in need close to existing services, it would be irresponsible of the city to place a vulnerable population in an area known for organized drug dealing, with Moss Park being the epicentre of Toronto's opioid crisis.

In all likelihood, pressure from the development industry would be strong. Condo buildings have slowly crept their way up Parliament

Street, with ONE Properties planning a high-rise at the Shoppers Drug Mart at the southeast corner of Queen and Parliament.

A zoning by-law amendment to allow further height and density at the intersection would make the three-storey WE HQ building and adjacent properties ripe for development.

Instead of bowing down to developer demands to build vertical housing, city planners should prioritize retail and other small businesses in the area. After all, the city views Queen Street East as an important "retail main street." Increased foot traffic from commerce is exactly what a remote corner like Queen and Parliament needs.


Sometimes, it is necessary to look to the past to find answers for the future. Marty Millionaire was a retail hotspot whose eclectic furniture attracted life to the neighbourhood.

WE's short-lived takeover kicked out small businesses. Now, it's time we brought them back.



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Amazing Moss Park Art Fair Postponed

Carol Mark

Life turns on a dime. Such as life with the updated Public Health rules and the uptick in Covid-19 cases, forcing the Moss Park Art Fair to be postponed until next Spring. The artists, musicians, and crafters will then greet folks with their creative work and a limited number of free face masks. We will come out at the other end of this pandemic.

I have always admired the resilience of humankind, particularly the special group of artists and creative people who have lived full lives and acted as witnesses to their lives and the historical events of their era.

Our battle with Covid-19 makes me recall the life-and-death fight of an earlier time – the struggle of the Lakota natives of South Dakota, who survived attempts by U.S. military forces and others to wipe them off the face of the earth.

In 1837, the U.S. Army supplied the Lakota with blankets contaminated with smallpox, which nearly wiped out the tribes. The Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890 left some 150 Indigenous people dead, in what was the final clash between federal troops and the Lakota Sioux. In 1973, members of the American Indian Movement



occupied Wounded Knee for 71 days to protest terrible conditions on the reservation.

Part of my volunteer work at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, was to help build the first Indigenous hospice. The hospice allowed Indigenous people to die in their own community and not travel 100 plus miles to a hospital in Rapid City. As part of our team, we all came with different skills and I ended up visiting families to distribute donations and cook three or more meals a day for the volunteer building crew and locals.

During my volunteer work at Wounded Knee, I had an unexpected privilege to spend time with Victoria Chipps, better

known to her friends as Vicky. She was the great granddaughter of the medicine man for Crazy Horse, regarded by his people as the greatest of all Sioux Warriors. Crazy Horse was a Lakota war leader who led his people in the fight against the U.S. government to gain back their land. He participated in the Battle of Little Bighorn as well as the Black Hills battles. The Black Hills were sacred lands that the U.S. government wanted to secure in order to get the gold rights to the area.

Vicky, who passed away in 2009, was a remarkable and spiritual woman who, despite the loss of her peoples' lives and land, found joy in each day.



Victoria Chipps

Humour, kindness and a love for her fellow humans were Vicky's answers to everyone.

Perhaps we can learn from the great heartedness of Vicky and the Lakota Sioux by cultivating these traits of kindness and generosity in ourselves to help weather this Covid storm.

If you are an artist and interested in making a difference in

our community: the artists will be donating a percentage of sales to Yonge Street Mission

Contact us via www.amazingmossark.ca

New urban designs promise to transform Port Lands into film industry hub

Jayne Kitchen

On September 22, the City of Toronto held a public consultation, which included a proposed urban design plan for a 33-hectare area of industrial land that spans along Carlaw Avenue and Commissioners Street in the Port Lands. The plan aims to transform the area into a vibrant, urban employment hub with a focus on the film and media industry. The presentation covered a range of topics including sustainability, the range of building sizes; and how the area will be optimized for the film industry.

Deanne Mighton, the presenter of the proposed new development, said that buildings in the area are likely to be low to mid-size and not include any residential dwellings. She added that she didn't envision the area to be dense with tall buildings, although they wouldn't be completely ruled out in an effort to support the existing employment district in the area.

A notable component of the presentation focused on a proposal to make the Port Lands a net-zero energy district. This would entail for all buildings in the area to fall under the



Site location of the proposed film and media hub in the Port Lands.

Photo: Courtesy of The City of Toronto.

Toronto Green Standard, which requires for private buildings to meet a minimum energy requirement and for public buildings to exceed their energy requirements. Since the area is close to Toronto's Harbourfront and has been prone to flooding, one of the proposed sustainable initiatives included the regular reuse of stormwater.

When asked how the area will be optimized for the film

industry, one of the development representatives explained that traditionally narrow streets and sidewalks that allow for foot traffic would be made wider, while various building walls would be more accessible for filming. Similarly, parking would be more accessible to large crews and equipment. And unlike other film industry hubs around Toronto, the Port Lands would be redesigned

with the public in mind, allowing visitors to freely explore the area.

Another issue raised during the meeting was access to transit and the question of potential plans for the LRT to ultimately reach the Port Lands as it continues its expansion east. According to representatives, the LRT is set to reach Parliament Street in the next 10 years, after which it would head further

along to Commissioners Street and end in Leslieville.

For an area that has largely been industrial for many years, the proposed 50-year development plan for the Port Lands district promises a vibrant transformation and an additional boost for Toronto's already thriving film industry.

TIFA celebrates diverse voices

Jesse Cohoon, with material by Courtney Greenberg

The Toronto International Festival of Authors (TIFA), Canada's largest and longest-running literary festival, will take place October 22 to November 1, 2020, and deliver more than 200 virtual events and activities, primarily for free and accessible from around the world.

TIFA celebrates emerging authors in one of the first events of the 41st annual Festival by featuring six writers from two new anthologies in a live event on October 22 at 5PM, hosted by Al Moritz, Toronto's 6th Poet Laureate.

The writers were mentored by professional authors in a 10-week series of workshops held by the Toronto Writers Collective (TWC), an organization dedicated to encouraging voices from diverse communities. They will read excerpts of pieces they created, exploring themes of poverty, homelessness, family, grief and courage.

"The TWC is thrilled and honoured to launch our two inspiring anthologies at the Toronto International Festival of Authors," says Susan Turk Mozer, Founder of the TWC. "It is a privilege for our writers to present in the company of some of the world's best-

known authors and thinkers. We are proud of Al Moritz's support, in celebrating these once unheard stories."

In total, 34 authors contributed to the anthologies, *Front Lines: Bent, Not Broken* and *Front Lines: Until the Words Run Pure*. The workshops offered them a space to be brave and vulnerable, develop their skills and receive feedback on their writing from professional authors.

"The Toronto Writers Collective does wonderful, crucial work by nurturing the writer hidden in so many people who were never allowed to believe they have a voice," says Al Moritz, Toronto's Poet Laureate. "I'm proud to work with TIFA, and with TWC in its creative, soul-strengthening outreach through writing to our most vulnerable people...our greatest untapped resource!"

The project was funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation, Ontario Arts Council, Toronto Arts Council, and the Azrieli Foundation, and supported by the Toronto Public Library branches and Working for Change.

This marks the second time the Toronto Public Library has played a role in the publication of a TWC anthology. The first, *Front Lines Series: Voices* from the Toronto Writers Col-

lective, was published in 2017. It shares the stories of 23 emerging authors.

"This is a perfect example of how the library's spaces, collections and staff can add great value to these kinds of partnerships. Toronto Public Library is happy to support TWC in bringing this initiative to our branches, and to Torontonians wishing to express themselves through creative writing," says Toronto Public Library Director of Service Development & Innovation Pam Ryan, adding that the resulting anthologies

are an "impactful and thought-provoking collection of creativity."

TIFA is also supporting the TWC by connecting it with Union Station. A video installation of excerpts exploring the idea of "Where I'm From" will be presented at Union Station throughout the Festival.

"Representing all the voices of Toronto is a vital part of the Toronto International Festival of Authors," explained Roland Gulliver, Director of TIFA.

"I am really excited for our installation at Union Station. It offers the TWC writers the opportunity to see their wri-

ting screened in the heart of the city – especially when not everyone has easy access to digital resources - and it offers audiences a different way to access stories and engage with digital content in our everyday environments."

To learn more about the event visit: <https://festivalofauthors.ca/event/toronto-writers-collective-launch/>

The anthologies can be purchased through the Toronto Writers Collective's website, www.torontowriterscollective.ca or borrowed from your local library branch.

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Regent Park's new youth centre was days away from opening. Then the pandemic hit.

Julia Simioni

In 2014, the building that housed the Dixon Hall Youth Centre was demolished as part of Regent Park's ongoing revitalization. In the years following, the centre operated temporarily out of a portable behind Toronto Community Housing buildings on Gerrard Street East.

Late this winter, opening celebrations for a new facility were planned for March. But later that month Ontario entered a state of emergency due to Covid-19.

The launch "was literally hand-in-hand when Covid really broke out here," said Lauren Thiboutot, communications manager at Dixon Hall Neighbourhood Services, the multi-service United Way-supported non-profit that owns and operates the youth centre.

"Right away, our focus became adapting all of our programs, because we did not have that physical space; we were focused on our community."

Within a week of the city-



Bill Graham Youth Centre in Regent Park.

Photo: Julia Simioni

wide closures, the centre's music program was put online. During the lockdown, 33 online music classes were available each week and nearly

250 youth attended for free as a result of a donation from the Azrieli Foundation. (The music school typically assesses incomes to determine fees.)

"School was put on hold, and everything else was a bit confusing and challenging," said Thiboutot. "Parents reached out to us to say, this is the only thing that my kid looks forward to doing...It really helped to engage them while they were at home."

In September, Dixon Hall's website announced that the new facility, the Bill Graham Youth Centre, was finally ready to welcome the community at a limited capacity to meet Covid-19 guidelines. The colourful 10,000-square-foot building includes a kitchen, multipurpose rooms, a recording studio and a jam room.

Murals designed by Toronto artists Jacquie Comrie, Peru Dyer Jalea, and Kirsten McCrea can be seen on interior walls.

Since opening, the centre has become a home base for Dixon Hall's employment services incubator, an eight-week program for youth ages 18 to 29 who are Ontario Works recipients and are considering careers in trades, food services, or hospitality.

The Bill Graham Youth Centre is at the corner of Wyatt and Nicholas Avenues, next to the Regent Park Athletic Grounds.



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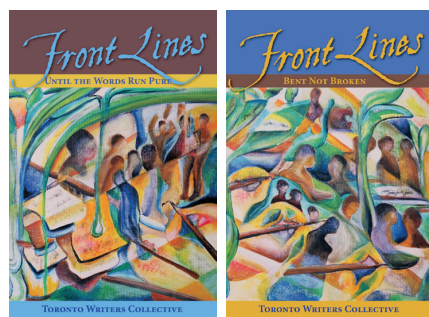
TIFA celebrates emerging authors in its 41st annual Festival

Live Book Launch: October 22 at 5 pm

Host: Al Moritz, Toronto's 6th Poet Laureate

festivalofauthors.ca/event/toronto-writers-collective-launch/

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In 2017, the federal government sold the Dominion Public Building to Larco Investments Inc. for \$271.1 million. The office building houses around 1,500 employees, including Canada Revenue Agency workers.

Larco continued from p1

They did it with so little fanfare and notoriety that a *Globe and Mail* investigation in 2006 dubbed them, among other clandestine elites, “The Hermit Kings.”

In an industry intensely fueled by money interests, it’s no surprise that Toronto’s real estate boom has attracted controversial players. What is Larco Investments and what does its 2017 purchase of 1 Front Street West – the Dominion Public Building, the massive and grandiose Beau Arts former custom house beside Union Station – mean for Toronto?

Unlike the city’s more conspicuous and moniker-heavy developers, like Brad J. Lamb, Larco operates in the shadows, behind a legion of subsidiaries and shell companies, stretching across Canada to the United States, the Caribbean, Britain and Europe. The family’s intensely private life adds little more information, as the brothers give no interviews and are rarely seen in photographs.

While its visible holdings include shopping malls, hotels and storage buildings, Larco has collected a portfolio of federal office buildings, with 1 Front Street West ranked as its biggest catch.

In 2007, the company negotiated a controversial 25-year sale-lease-back agreement with the Harper government’s public works minister, Michael Fortier, for seven office buildings at \$1.4 billion. The arrangement was hailed as saving taxpayer funds by extricating the federal government from maintaining the aging structures while reducing the federal deficit by offloading valuable real estate in urban centres across Canada.

Critics who slammed the deal



A Toronto landmark, the Dominion Public Building will undergo a major transformation by their new private owners.

Photo: Tania Correa

as a massive give-away of public assets were vindicated in 2014 when documents obtained by the CBC showed the deal had turned sour. According to the CBC report, years of legal threats over parking fees, millions of dollars in unexpected budget increases and squabbles over repairs, salaries and operating costs had undermined the public-private partnership.

Neither Larco nor Canada’s Public Works department agreed to be interviewed by the CBC. A Larco representative claimed the company was contractually bound “not to disclose the substance of its relationship with the government.”

If Larco’s affiliation with Canada’s highest government body didn’t warrant closer public scrutiny, revelation of the company’s offshore holdings,

exposed in 2016 in the Panama Papers, made the case.

Three of the federal office buildings purchased in the 2007 sale-lease-back agreement housed Canada Revenue Agency workers. In an ironic twist good enough for Hollywood, the landlord of the government’s tax collection agency had routed hundreds of millions of dollars into tax havens through the British Virgin Islands into a private foundation registered in Liechtenstein, according to a report by Unite Here Canada, a hospitality union representing employees of Lalji family companies.

Marco Chown Oved, the Toronto Star’s foreign affairs reporter and member of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists that

exposed the Panama Papers, collaborated Unite Here’s findings in a piece published on December 14, 2016. Oved detailed Larco’s elaborate tax avoidance scheme involving a Panamanian law firm, a Nevada casino holding, and a parent company listed in the British Virgin Islands.

But the exposé of the Lalji family’s back-channel dealings did not deter the federal government, by now under Justin Trudeau’s Liberals, from selling the Dominion Public Building a mere three months later for \$275.1 million to Larco Investments Inc. To add to the irony: the 1,500 employees housed in the federal office building contained CRA workers.

(Until now, it is not known if federal authorities have investigated the Lalji family or any of

its subsidiaries for tax evasion.)

1 Front Street West, Canada’s most extravagant public works project of the early 20th century, will soon undergo its most significant transformation. The change will mark not only the future of heritage conservation in the financial district, but how our city leverages the legacy of the past to fulfil the needs of the future.

In Part 2, the bridge will dig into why 1 Front Street West was sold and trace the development proposal’s evolution since July 2018.

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