

the bridge

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

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Jayne Kitchen Phil E. Roth Christina Walsh

Forced out after nine years, ice cream shop finds a new home in Regent Park



Denise Soueidan-O'Leary, owner of the Lansdowne Cone in Regent Park.

Photo: Julia Simioni

Julia Simioni

If you have walked by Regent Park's Paintbox Bistro recently, you may have noticed an irresistible new scent—the smell of freshly made waffle cones from the new ice cream parlour.

The Lansdowne Cone in Regent Park is a community scoop shop that was without a home for the summer 2020 season.

Formerly located in the Bloordale community near Lansdowne, the parlour was evicted in April from its home of nine years after the building was sold. This came after six weeks of negotiations with the new landlord.

Once locked out, Denise

Soueidan-O'Leary, the Lansdowne Cone's owner and program developer, had to sign a cease and desist letter to pick up her belongings. She says this is why she moved formerly private conversations to a more public forum.

"The building at the corner of Lansdowne and Bloor has been sold, and the new owners refuse to have any contact with us to negotiate a continued space to serve our community," she wrote on Instagram.

"It is maddening that developers buy up land and bulldoze community resources, without a care for how it will affect the community. We are sad. As proud members of Bloordale, and part of the local small business fabric of the community,

we loved our work serving great ice cream and supporting employment opportunities for those with barriers. We will do everything we can to come back again."

The Lansdowne Cone, as Soueidan-O'Leary describes it, has evolved into much more than a scoop shop. It's also a community hub with a mission to be inclusive. Early on, Soueidan-O'Leary decided to buy a portable ramp to make it accessible.

The shop's employment training program is a big part of that mission. Through the program, Soueidan-O'Leary supports youth who face multiple barriers, specifically those with brain-based disabilities, by providing supportive employ-

ment.

Last year the shop created six paid positions and 16 unpaid training positions for youth with barriers to employment. The shop has also partnered with the Yonge Street Mission and the Geneva Centre for Autism.

In keeping with its mission to be inclusive, the parlour offers products for those with dietary restrictions and allergies, such as gluten-free cones and vegan and dairy-free options.

"We want to be as welcoming and open as possible," said Soueidan-O'Leary.

Ice Cream continued on p6

Single-person households continue to increase in downtown east

Andre Bermon, Publisher

As students and young professionals flock to secure apartments close to universities, colleges and the bustling financial district, single- and two-person households have become the norm in the downtown east.

In the quickly gentrifying Garden District neighbourhood, high-rise towers have begun to replace dilapidated old buildings in the still marginalized community around Dundas East and Sherbourne. The two Menkes Developments sites at 218 and 219 Dundas East, for example (the latter still being planned), will devote 70% of their apartments to studios, one-bedroom and one-bedroom + den units.

Steps from Ryerson University and the commercial/business corridor around Dundas Square and Bay Street, the two projects have bet on high demand from young and working-age people.

How will this narrow demographic affect revitalization efforts in the nearby community? Can a transient-prone, renter class of young people anchor this emerging neighbourhood? Or would more families with children improve the community's social fabric?

Households continued on p7

A peaceful pandemic - but how long will it last?

Ben Bull, Columnist

One of the supposed benefits of this Hollywood disaster movie we're living in is that we can slow down and take some quiet time for reflection. Unless you're an intensive care nurse or patrolling a beach in Miami, pandemics are peaceful. The roads don't roar. Billy Bishop is barely a whisper.

As I write this, I am looking out my window listening to the birds. Kids are laughing up the street. And a strange whooshing noise is whistling through the trees. Is it...the wind?

We all want COVID-19 to go away, but I, for one, don't miss the pre-pandemic racket.

Noise is a part of city living, of course. During a bylaw blitz last year, Toronto police handed out 44 noise tickets in a week.

And for good reason: Noise can be bad for you.

The World Health Organization estimates that up to one million healthy life years are lost every year from traffic-related noise in Western Europe. Over 30% of EU residents are exposed to overnight noise levels disturbing their sleep. Approximately 20% are exposed to traffic noise exceeding 65 dB.

That is loud.

A 2020 European Environment Agency report estimated that 20% of Europe's population is exposed to long-term noise considered harmful to health. "Long-term exposure to noise can cause a variety of health effects including ... sleep disturbance, negative effects on the cardiovascular and metabolic system, as well as cognitive impairment in child-

ren," the agency's environmental noise expert noted.

With our house backing onto the train tracks east of Union Station, we've become accustomed to the clickety-clack of passing trains over the years.

Bull continued on p8

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and ideas across our city
from the downtown east

the bridge

is an independent community newspaper published monthly and distributed by a mix of delivery services to a varying readership. Over 3500 copies are circulated throughout the downtown east - Moss Park, Corktown, The Garden District, 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 level playing field forum.

Publisher/Editor: Andre Bermon

Copy Editor: Eric Mills

Contributors: Bruce Bell, Phil E. Roth, Ben Bull, Carol Mark, Glenda MacFarlane

Designer: Patrick Lee

Questions, comments or queries?

thebridgedowntown@gmail.com

260 Adelaide Street East Toronto,
On M5A 1N1 Box 12

More effort on preservation needed



Andre Bermon, Publisher

The downtown east contains a vast array of old housing stock. From the brightly coloured Carlyle Block to the industrial designs of the Dominion Brewery and the iconic display of the St. Lawrence Market, heritage is a defining feature for many communities.

But as old town Toronto embarks on its 21st century transition, we need to better account for the number of heritage properties scattered across our city.

The recent fire at the Davies Terrace rowhouses, near Sumach Street, is an enduring example of the vulnerability of our community's heritage. Had the 143-year buildings been designated under the Ontario Heritage Act, or at the very least, listed on the city's Heritage Register, some parts of the building could have been saved from demolition.

Conservation largely rests upon the tireless effort of residents to nominate properties in lengthy procedural processes. The timeline between the initial proposal and designation can

often take years. Far too long to effectively protect large swaths of buildings that share a common history, like rowhouses or industrial complexes.

Preservation Services have been known to take a reactionary approach in their own nominations. When a building is threatened by development, the property is then designated. A lackluster approach that is often susceptible to appeals.

Thankfully, a more systemic method to preservation has been pursued in the downtown east. In early 2018 a study conducted by Preservation Services with the help of residents pointed out buildings for potential nomination. Staff have said they will complete their work by the end of this year.

The outcome of this study should be the beginning of a more streamlined process for heritage. Now that the city has a clearer idea of the landscape, their list for historical designation should be extensive.

Covid-19 has limited the municipality's ability to govern, but construction has gone unhindered.

Better heritage protection is needed now so that future generations can enjoy fruits of our cherished past.



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Community thrives at the Moss Park Market

Ubah Guled, Building Roots

Working with Building Roots this summer has really affected the way I view Moss Park and our community. Growing up downtown, I lived really close to this neighborhood and remember my dad taking me to Kabul Farms to buy various spices in the supermarket or going to Kullubi to buy injera when my family was making a big Ethiopian meal.

I always had the privilege of good food at home and parents who understood nutrition and its importance. Growing up I took healthy food and food literacy for granted, but through working with Building Roots, I was able to recognize the prevalence of food insecurity in a community so close to home.

During the Covid-19 lockdown we have provided more than 5000 fresh food baskets for our clients! We also started summer programs with children and live music in the Moss Park market.

Building Roots has introduced "Kids Kits" and Veg2Grow garden kits. These include books, creative resources, planting kits and information on growing food at home. Not only does this give kids a better understanding of nutrition, the kits are entertaining and a resource for children who are not in summer camp or schools due



Family outside the Moss Park Market.

Photo: Building Roots

to Covid-19.

Kids just wanna have fun! Our live music brings the community together and provides artists with paid gigs and a fresh food basket, both essential during these times. My favourite part of working with Building Roots is connecting with volunteers in Ashbridge Estate and heading west on the streetcar to enjoy some wonderful live music at Moss

Park. On Saturday afternoons, kids, parents and Moss Park residents can pick up our food baskets, enjoy some music and create community in the heart of downtown Toronto.

Something I would have loved as a kid – and I'm sure my parents would too.

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Woolworth Building



Bruce Bell, Senior Columnist

For generations many of us have known the curved building on the NW corner of Queen and Yonge.

Some remember it as either a Woolworth's store, a Royal Bank, a Towers Record, or most recently, an Atmosphere clothing store.

The famous building originally opened its doors in 1895 as the Philip Jamieson Clothing Company.

By 1910, the S.H. Knox & Company toy store moved in and it wasn't until 1913 that the American retail giant, Woolworth's, took over the space.

Once Woolworth's took ownership, it covered the Philip Jamieson Clothing Company's name, which was etched into the brick, with its own signage.

Today, the building is in the midst of massive overhaul and the original name was uncovered and will be included in the new structure.

When it first opened, Canada's Woolworth was under the control of Ralph Connable Jr., who lived in an enormous estate on Lyndhurst Drive, just north of Casa Loma.

In 1919, a 20-year-old left his home in Oak Park, Illinois to

mentor Connable's son, Ralph III, in Toronto.

Connable and his wife Harriet wanted their boy to toughen up and felt he would benefit from the companionship and influence of this man.

Not only did this American friend influence the young Ralph, but he also went on to secure a job at the Toronto Star, and later would become one of the most prominent writers of the 20th century: Ernest Hemingway.

By the Roaring 1920s, there was talk in Toronto of building a second Woolworth store that would match the colossal Woolworth building in New York City, at one time, the tallest in the world.

However, with the Great Depression and WWII, plans were scaled back.

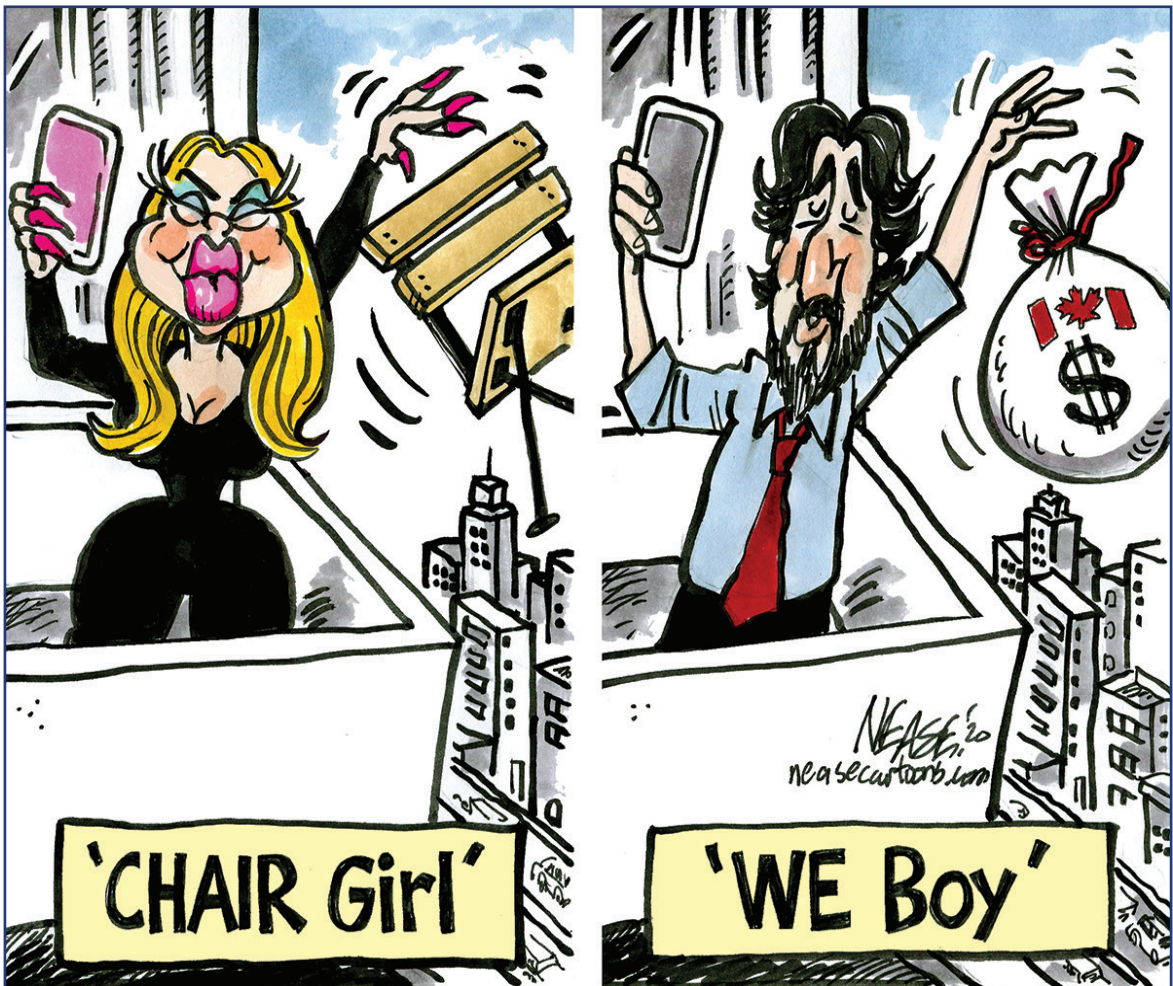
It wasn't until 1949 that downtown Toronto finally got its second Woolworth store, albeit less grand, on the southeast corner of Adelaide and Bay.

The downtown core now had two Woolworth stores, only a few blocks apart from each other.

Sadly, the second store, a wonderful, post-modern structure on Bay Street, was torn down in the 1990s.

Eventually the Trump Tower, now the St. Regis Hotel, would rise on its site.

By the 1960s, back at the original Queen and Yonge location, the entire façade was covered in white metal cladding, concealing its stunning brickwork.



After Woolworth's moved out in the '90s, most of the cladding was replaced with greenish grey metal panels that left half of the original brick exposed.

Then a Royal Bank branch moved in, to be followed by Tower Records which remained until 2001, and most recently it was home to Atmosphere.

The entire interior has been completely gutted, and presently the building exterior has been covered in a mesh casing thus saving the 100+year facade.

Bit by bit, the greenish grey panels have since been removed, exposing the original let-

tering of the Philip Jamieson Clothing Company.

Soon, the building's entire 19th-century façade is about to be revealed which I have been waiting with bated breath for the past few years.

When completed the landmark building by Zeidler Partnership Architects will have added a glass enclosed top floor and the whole building be transformed into a yet unnamed flagship store.

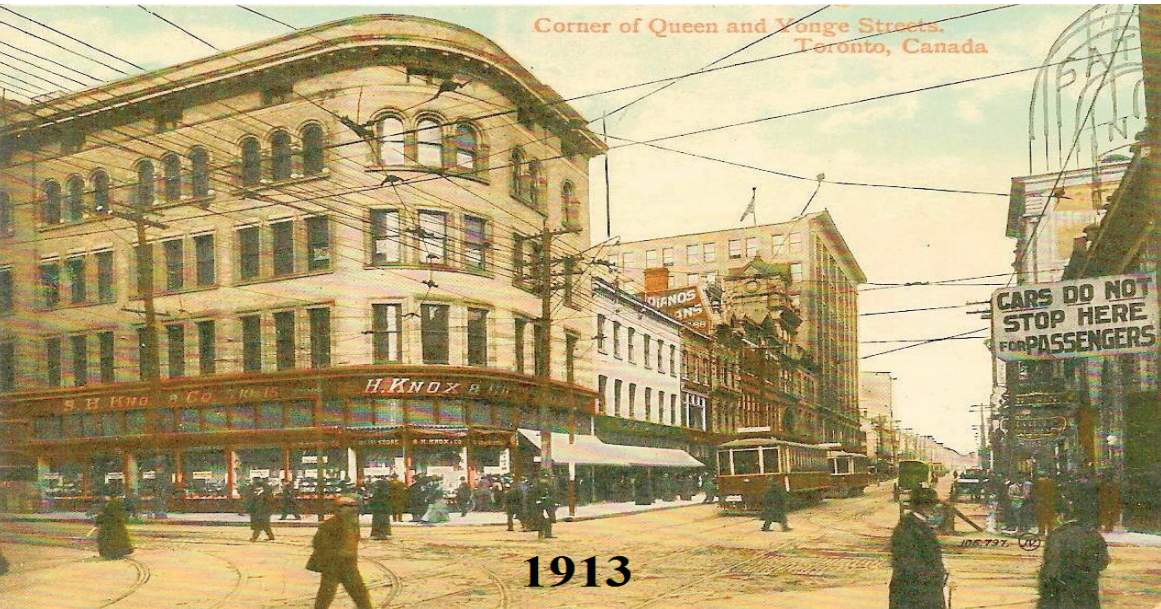
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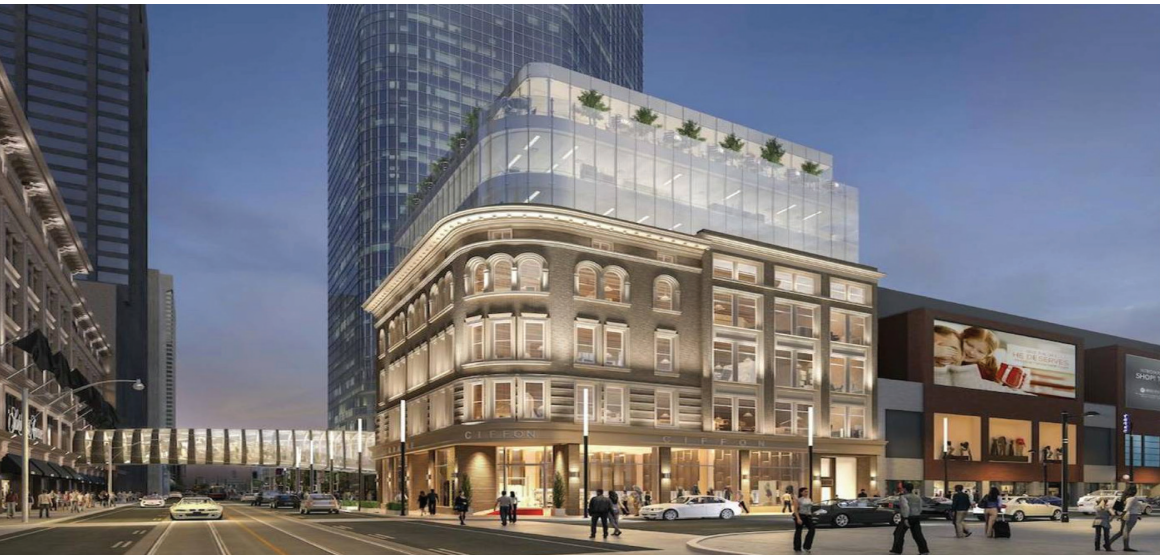
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Queen and Yonge, 1913.



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Cycling lanes spur much needed improvement on Shuter Street

Jayne Kitchen

The scheduled reconstruction of Shuter Street from Sherbourne to River, which carries heavy downtown commuter traffic, is well under way. At a January drop-in event, the city presented plans to adjust parking along the stretch and install cycle tracks. Aiming to improve the safety of cyclists and pedestrians, the cycle tracks will not only be demarcated from the rest of the road but physically separated by concrete bollards. 21,000 surveys were distributed to local residents; of those returned, 92% favoured the changes.

At the drop-in several concerns were raised on both sides. People favouring the bike tracks cited safety and incentivizing people to cycle instead of drive. Those opposed feared that reduced parking might affect local businesses, and said cycle tracks are less utilized in the winter than roadways.

The biggest point of contention was the parking. Opponents said removing the three-hour as well as pay-and-display parking would increase pressure on local residents who rely on permit parking. Two options were proposed to mitigate the strain, differing over whether Shuter's north or south sides would retain pay-and-display parking. Although only 15% of



Construction on Shuter Street.

Photo: Phil E. Roth

respondents preferred Option A versus 35% who voted for Option B, Option A was ultimately recommended to City Council. Option A preserves the most parking spaces and involves fewer seasonal switches between the north and south sides. Some people voted against both options, saying they wouldn't remove sufficient parking from the street.

The City's Infrastructure and Environment Committee recommended Option A to resolve the parking problem, and City Council adopted that option on April 30.

The bike lanes' design is the most unique part of the project. Safety is the main focus, ac-

cording to survey respondents who said the current lanes are too narrow, making cyclists risk 'dooring' from cars parked on the street. Others said parking and driving in a busy cycling area is frustrating, especially when cyclists enter the roadway to turn at an intersection.

Construction is set to end on October 24. Crews are currently digging up the road surface and replacing curbs, concrete and some sidewalks. Bike lane bolsters are being installed, including flowerpots that add flair to the lanes environmentally friendly atmosphere.

Not only are the cycle tracks a practical addition, given

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the city's need for more bike friendly roadways, but they are spurring much-needed long-term improvement to Shuter Street.

From takeover to makeover: WE in the neighbourhood

Andre Bermon, Publisher

Back in March *the bridge* reported on extensive property acquisitions by Marc and Craig Kielburger's WE to ME social enterprise and its subsidiaries near the organization's global headquarters at 339 Queen Street East, near Parliament Street.

According to deeds at the Land Registry office, the for-profit arm of WE Charity spent about \$11 million on real estate from 2016 to 2019 on the south side of Queen East between Parliament and Berkeley streets. WE also owns three rowhouse properties on the north side.

WE to ME bought the south-side land for a new Social Entrepreneurship Centre (SEC), a school for adults under 35 to promote social enterprise by building leadership and interpersonal skills. Initial planning and pre-application consultations with the City of Toronto were said to be complete.

Influential people on the SEC advisory board include superintendents with Toronto's public and Catholic school boards; Jennifer Tory, chief administra-



Southside of Queen Street East between Parliament and Berkeley streets.

Photo: Andre Bermon

tive officer for the Royal Bank of Canada and sister of Toronto's mayor; former Olympian Rick Hansen; former deputy prime minister John Manley; and Paul Polman, a former Unilever CEO.

During the ongoing controversy over the federal go-

vernment's contract with WE Charity to administer a \$900 million student loan program, several key sponsors have parted ways with the organization.

RBC's Jennifer Tory, a long time fundraiser for the Kielburgers, is a high-profile philanthropist on the SEC advisory

board whose employer has severed ties to WE Charity. Both the public and Catholic school boards in Toronto are also reviewing their relations with WE Charity.

WE's arrival and expansion in the downtown east was hailed as a major steppingstone

in revitalizing the Moss Park/Regent Park corridor. The charity's community outreach involved participation in the Queen Street East Committee of the Corktown Resident and Business Association, staff volunteering at the local Good Sheppard ministry, and a youth camp education program with Jessie's Centre.

In a major turnaround from its rapid takeover of the Queen and Parliament area, the WE organization looks to be at a standstill. Its offices have remained quiet since the WE Charity scandal, and no information can be found about the future of the Social Entrepreneurship Centre.

By press time, WE had not yet responded to *the bridge's* request for comment.

As the scandal continues to unwind, whether WE will resume an active role in the neighbourhood is up in the air. The restructuring effort the Kielburgers claim will return WE Charity "to its roots" could result in divestiture of real estate assets across the city.

Whatever the case, a makeover of its Queen and Parliament operation is likely.

There is a lot to love...About the Distillery District

Phil E. Roth, Columnist



With summer in full heat, there quells a desire to go out and explore the city to its fullest. One of the most attractive locations for Torontonians and visitors alike is the unique and quaint Distillery District. It offers a multitude of appealing stops for shopping, dining, art exhibits and galleries, all set in historic Victorian industrial architecture that conveys a feel of a different era in Hogtown (as Toronto was nicknamed in the 19th century).

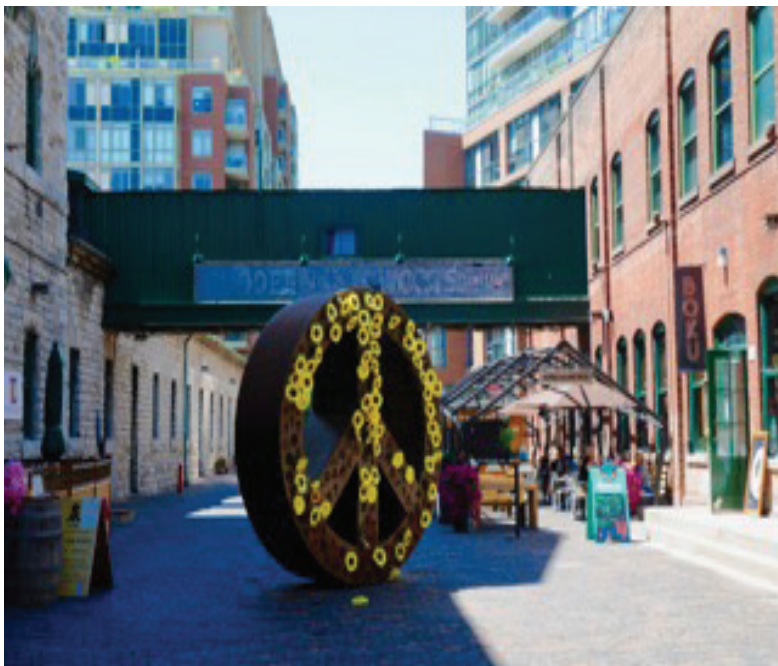
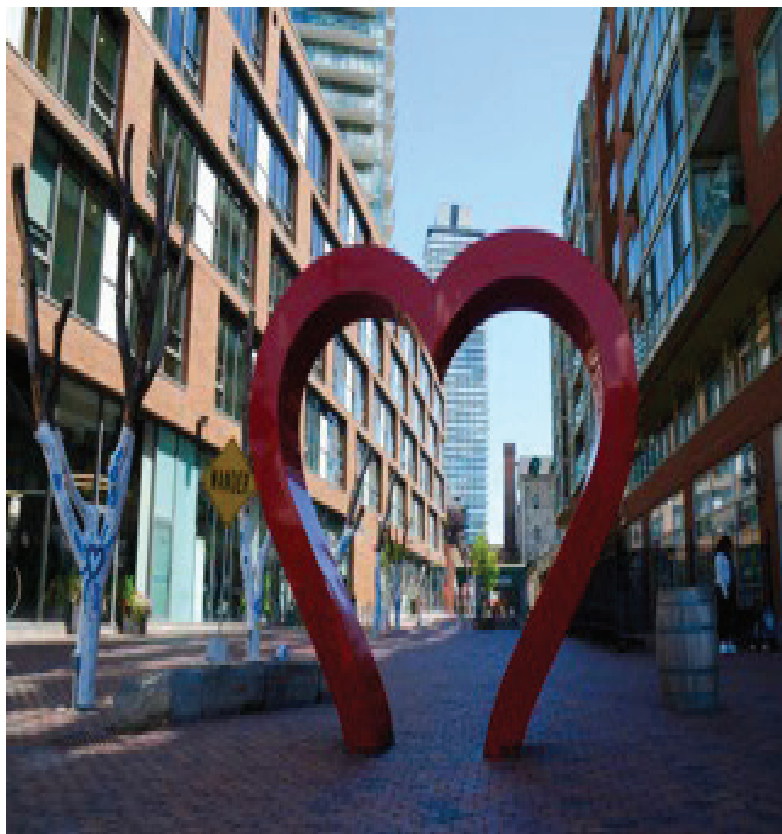
South of King and east of Parliament Street the District owes its name to William Gooderham and James Worts, a brother-in-law collaboration that created the largest distillery in the British Empire of its day. Most original buildings were erected between 1859 and 1895 and are still standing.

Whether casually strolling on a hot and hazy summer day or going out to enjoy a cool beverage or spirit on a patio or restaurant, locals and tourists find the ambience inviting and appealing.

Specialty shops catering to health and beauty, home décor and jewelry accessories offer one-of-a kind gift options for gifts or to treat yourself. Dining can be formal or in a relaxed setting; hospitality choices vary from bars and bistros to restaurants, cafes and bakeries. And without forgetting to mention specialty alcohol ranging from craft beers, gin and Saki can be purchased or enjoyed on site, which lends its name to the self-contained historic site.

There is much to discover and to enjoy. It is worth visiting whether entertaining out of town guests or meeting up with friends and family to catch up and socialize.

Photo credits: Phil E. Roth & Tania Correa



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the bridge book review: Read Indigenous!

Glenda MacFarlane

Much of the vigour of Canada's current literary scene comes from the work of Indigenous writers; many of the most popular and critically-acclaimed books in the country are Indigenous titles. Here are four books for your "must-read" list, from four literary genres:

Empire of Wild by Cherie Dimaline, Random House Canada, 2019.

Cherie Dimaline, author of the spectacularly successful YA title *The Marrow Thieves*, brings us *Empire of Wild*, a rich and mysterious novel about a marriage, a disappearance, and a legendary creature known as the Rogarou. Joan has been heartbroken since her husband Victor walked out after an argument and failed to return. As Joan tries to come to terms with this loss, two startling events occur: her grandmother is killed by some sort of beast, and she stumbles upon Victor, who is now a travelling revivalist preacher with a new name and no memory of his past. Dimaline's ability to create complex characters and to evoke a vibrant sense of place immerses her readers in a world where Indigenous and western values clash, with unforeseen consequences.

Cherie Dimaline is a Métis writer and activist from the Georgian Bay Métis Nation in Ontario.

#IndianLovePoems by Tenille K. Campbell, Signature Editions, 2017.

Tenille K. Campbell's exuberant first poetry collection is an unabashed look at love and lust through Indigenous eyes. In this sensual celebration of desire, Campbell summons the smell of campfire smoke at a teenage bush party, the taste of sizzling fry bread, and the buzzing of mosquitoes, as well as the act of love itself. The poetry is suffused with humour and erotic joy -- but Campbell's work makes some serious points about colonialism, too.

Tenille K. Campbell is a Dene and Métis poet and a photographer from English River First Nation in Saskatchewan.

A Mind Spread Out on the Ground by Alicia Elliott, Penguin Random House, 2019.

Covering a wide range of topics from parenthood to Canadian literary circles, from sexual assault to poverty, from mental illness to gentrification, this book of essays from Alicia Elliott makes connec-

tions between the violence of Canada's colonial past and the present realities faced by Indigenous peoples. In the process, Elliott reveals details of her own life, including her experience with mental illness, in order to pose vital questions about racism, classism, and sexism in North America.

Alicia Elliott is a Haudenosaunee writer who grew up on the Six Nations of the Grand River reserve in Ontario.

Honour Beat by Tara Beagan, Scirocco Drama, 2019.

Aficionados of drama will embrace the characters of Rae-Anna and Anna-Rae, two sparring sisters who have been at odds their whole lives. When the sisters reunite at the hospital bedside of their dying mother, they discover some hidden history within the familiar stories this Indigenous family has told itself through the years. With the help of their mother's youthful spirit, the sisters begin to look for a way forward.

Tara Beagan is a playwright and theatre artist of Ntlaka'pamux and Irish-Canadian heritage based in Calgary.

“It's the experience of community”

Ice Cream continued from p1

Chris Klugman, president and CEO of Paintbox Bistro, operates his restaurant with a similar mission: to provide employment opportunities to Regent Park's oft-marginalized community.

Klugman and Soueidan-O'Leary met while working on the social development plan for Regent Park. When he heard that she was losing her old space, he said moving into the bistro was a “perfect fit.”

Klugman walked Soueidan-O'Leary into the bistro, which happened to be built with an ice cream serving window, and said, “What if you move in?” Within two weeks, the Lansdowne Cone was back in business.

“It was a really nice coming together of different circumstances,” said Klugman.

Throughout its transition from Bloorale to Regent Park, the sense of community and inclusiveness brought and kept employees like Marguerite



Photo: Julia Simioni

Jack at the shop. After retiring as a high-school teacher, Jack says that she missed the feeling of belonging that she got from the school's students and staff members—something she rediscovered at the Lansdowne Cone.

“It isn't necessarily about how quickly you deliver the

product,” said Jack. “It's the experience of community at the same time as an ice cream shop, so there's time to talk with people and actually, really ask how they're doing.”

The Lansdowne Cone in Regent Park is inside Paintbox Bistro, 555 Dundas St. E.

Like what you see?

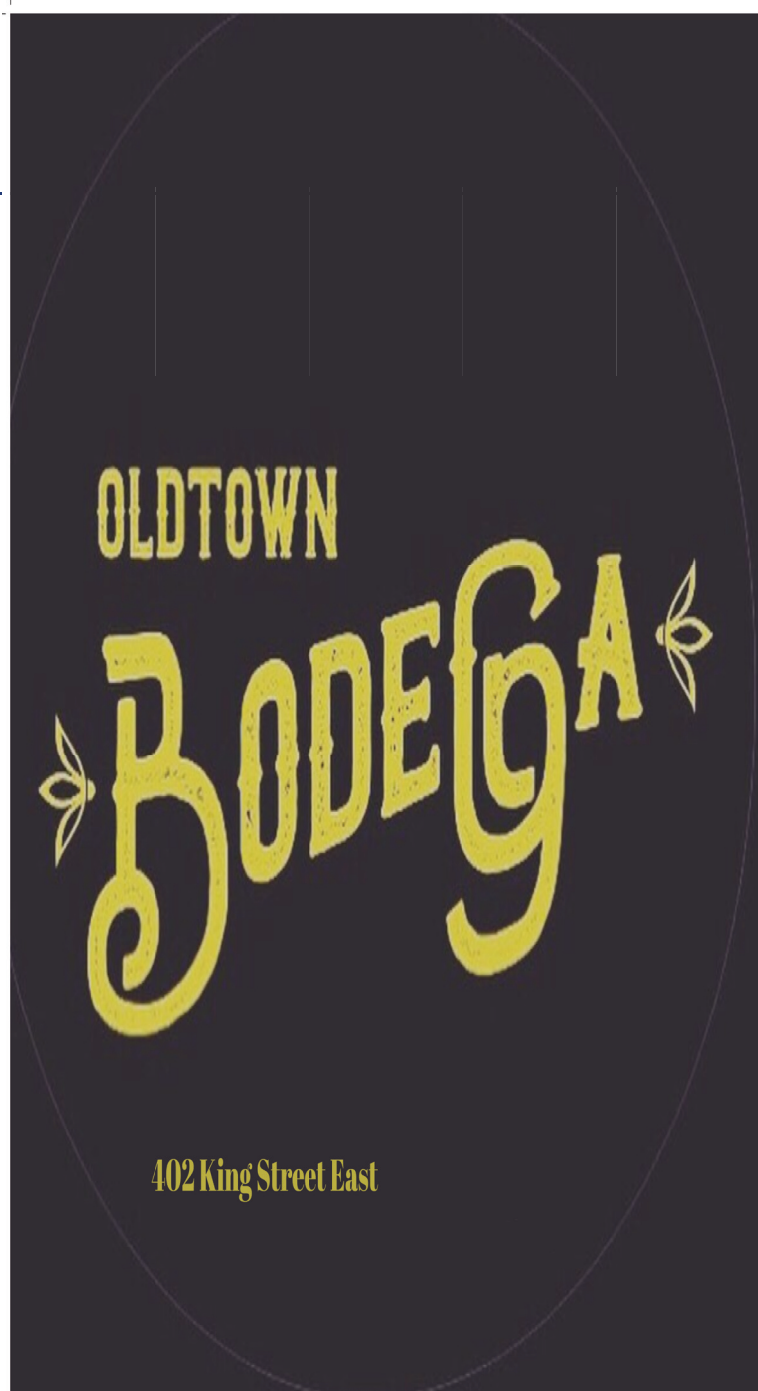
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Connecting people, places and ideas across our city from the downtown east



with more condos, family composition unlikely to change

Households continued from p1

According to the most recent census statistics, single- and two-person households compose 86% of private household sizes in Toronto Centre (Ward 13), with 54% housing singles and 32% couples. The largest family group, couples without children, consists 68.5% of families in private households, much higher than the City of Toronto average of 44.2%.

Only 29% of residents own their home, compared with the city average of 53%.

The lack of children in the downtown east has historical precedent.

Moss Park Apartments, a social housing project completed in early 1960s, were first envisioned to exclude children, as city planners considered the area south of Queen Street East too industrial for family life. However, due to public pressure, some family-friendly units were added. This set the tone for the area while furthering the concept of the single-family home, prevalent in the suburbs, as the ideal for families with children.

Mariana Valverde, a University of Toronto sociology pro-

fessor, explains, “The existence of St. James Town and Moss Park [projects] ... is precisely the privileging of the single-family home in urban planning. So low-income tenants who can’t afford a whole house (owned or rented), as well as people who need rooming houses or shelters, have for many decades been pushed into a few spots, which then become too densely populated.”

The prevalence of singles and couples downtown is “because they are being rigidly excluded from the ‘yellow belt’ – the vast majority of Toronto, which allows only single-family and semi-detached houses.”

But unlike condo-heavy neighbourhoods such as Liberty Village, the Entertainment District, Wellington Place and City Place, the downtown east has the social infrastructure to support more families with children. Within two kilometres of Queen and Parliament streets are more than half a dozen schools, several community centres and not-for-profit organizations, and three large inner-city parks: Allan Gardens, Moss Park and the newly built Corktown Commons.

Looking at the population un-

der 18, only Regent Park and St. James Town have a percentage as high as 20%. Only 10–14% of Cabbagetown, Moss Park, Corktown and St. Lawrence residents are under 18, while neighbourhoods on arteries like Queen, King, Richmond, Adelaide and Jarvis streets have about 5–7%. At bottom is Church and Wellesley at less than 4%.

Cross the Don River and the

numbers change dramatically. In more conventional residential neighbourhoods like Riverdale, Leaside and the Danforth, percentages of these young people are in the low 20s, a reflection of the predominance of single-family homes.

Given the growing number of condos standing at five or more storeys – currently 82% of all structures in Ward 13 – it is hard to conceive of a major

shift in family composition for some time. Living cost alone is a major obstacle to raising children downtown.

With family-friendly housing unlikely as developers cater to single, young professionals, the future of city building in the downtown east will continue to be a childless affair.



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Building Bridges - Building Community

Carol Mark

So much of what is on the news and social media is negative, reflecting bad behaviour and actions on the part of governments and citizens. But, there is hope that open communication and working together, as citizens, we can create a better world and vibrant neighbourhoods.

My grandfather came from China in the 1900’s following his father who had worked on the railroad in San Francisco. My grandfather headed to Canada not so much for the stories of “Gold Mountain”, the legends of overnight wealth in the Alaskan Gold mines. He was motivated by famine and the political unrest caused by the Opium Wars in China, to seek financial security for the family. My grandfather left his family to come to Canada to work and send money home to provide food for the family. Chinese immigrants were faced with The Chinese Exclusion Act July, 1, 1923 was passed by Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie-King, which banned all Chinese immigrants for 24 years. My grandfather and grandmother like all Asian immigrants were barred from having family members come to Canada.

My grandfather later bought an 18-room mansion around Gerrard St and Yonge St,



known then as the Ward, where he ran a boarding house for all the single men who were separated from their family. When my father was able to immigrate after 1948 and start a family, the boarding home residents were like our extended family with many uncles.

Yonge St was my playground for inner city adventures. The Yonge St Mission’s main facility, serving the community since 1896, was just around the corner. Despite the poverty and living on the edge, our lives were filled with the sense of community and belonging – a place where everyone knew

you by name.

In my humanitarian aid outreach as an adult, no matter if I was in isolated villages in the Yucatan or traveling along Buffalo Pass in S. Dakota I knew when I sat down to have tea and a chat, there was community being created. People would share stories and come together and at the end be long life friends bound by these experiences. Despite our different backgrounds, we were able to find common ground.

As part of the Amazing Moss Park Art Fair, we invited the Yonge Street Mission to be part of our community building



Masks shown painted by Giselle Silvestri.

Photo: Carol Mark

with the Women’s Development Network (WDN), their social enterprise for women in the Regent and Moss Park neighbourhood. Come out and support their maker crafts.

As part of our Building Community the Amazing Moss Park Artists have been busy

sewing and creating “artistic face masks” to give away on the day of the art fair.

www.amazingmossspark.ca

Please check our website for updates on location. Note social distancing and safety protocols will be in place.

My journey with COVID

(Courtesy of the Toronto Writers Collective)

Christina Walsh

*Blessings through the tears
Knowing this storm will
soon pass.
Writing has my back.*

It is mid-March, 2020. Doug Ford, our premier, says, “We in Ontario are in a state of emergency.” My heart jumped into my throat, and I knew I had to move fast.

I jumped into action, biking to different stores to stock up on food and cleaning items. Most stores did not have toilet paper. However, I had plenty of that and boxes of tissues from when I had the flu last year. Whew!

Then, I felt panic grow as I saw long rows of bare shelves. Many stores were low on canned goods, but I had tuna, beans and soup at home. I made it home with many bags, ready for the lockdown, which gave me some relief. Plus, whatever anxiety the times brought, I knew I could stay calm. I had support: weekly phone calls with my therapist and support worker, extra services in my building, and twice monthly foodbank supplies. I had reserve funds, plus the Ontario and federal governments gave me COVID emergency money, another bonus!

Naturally, there were stressors and inconveniences. I had a sore ear and needed to see my family doctor. I thankfully saw him twice in April to get

needed medication. I thought it would be hard to get a replacement battery for my cellphone, but, bingo, I got one! I waited in long lineups several times at grocery stores, but it was fine: no rush, nice weather.

I biked to the Beaches for fitness, though the lack of public washrooms sometimes caused discomfort. My neck and shoulders were in pain, and my chiropractor was not available. I checked out YouTube for healing stretches, and thankfully they helped.

Surprisingly, the lockdown has not overwhelmed me. I was not alone or scared as I had feared. I don’t have family or close friends, so am already adapted to isolation and being distanced from people. My online friends are virtual treasures; one of them gifted me three meals. Plus, I was given free masks, sanitizer and gift cards. Best of all, I have participated in numerous Zoom online writing groups, and I love it. It’s my social time. Fun-nily enough, I prefer the Zoom groups to meeting in the community. Now I’m in my creative element more than ever.

The COVID-19 threat is horrific, and I pray for all the people struggling with this terrifying disease, but on a personal level I have experienced benefits. The crisis has taught me to slow down, to learn new ways of caring for my mind and body. It’s given me a deeper level of gratitude for so much!

I find magic in little things. I enjoy staying home, doing my

late-night noise leaves neighbours sleep deprived

Bull continued from p1

We are inured to an occasional safety horn parping us off the sofa. Same goes for the Gardiner Expressway. Unless a trucker channels his inner Kris Kristofferson and toots his horn, it’s all just a hum – the price we pay for living on the cheap side of the street. But recent, rampant night-time construction noise has left me and my neighbours sleep deprived and exhausted.

In an effort to block out incessant back-up beepers and jackhammers, my wife and I now sleep with a wind machine blasting in the bedroom. You can set the storm to distant, tropical or raging depending on the hubbub outside.

I also have a range of ear plugs – wax, cotton or rubber depending on my mood – and a wrap-around headset with earbuds embedded into the cloth. Some nights I listen to ocean waves; on other nights – storms in the savanna. One night there was a cyclone over the Pacific while Aecon realigned the off-ramp.

I slept like a baby.

When morning comes, I wake up to a Green For Life garbage truck crunching up our junk or a UPS van screeching up the street. Occasionally the

own thing. I enjoy making my own food more than ever. I am biking in nice weather, taking in the scenery, and am relieved that stores are opening. It makes me hopeful that we are going to be okay, please God!

Christina Walsh has been a writer for many years. She has won two writing awards, been published in two Toronto Writers Collective anthologies,



Traffic and construction on the Gardiner Expressway.

Photo: Rosemary Frei

bloke from two doors down lubes up his leaf blower and lets it rip. He’s got a 20-foot strip of grass on a corner lot; would it kill him to use a rake? Later on, he might wheel out his weed whacker while I bang my head against a wall. I hate to think what he’d do if he actually had a garden.

I rode my bike to Kingston a few years back. My plan was to hug the lake and enjoy the sights and sounds of the Canadian wilderness. Alas, the only wilderness I saw was a hundred shirtless blokes riding up and down on their John Deere

mowers.

Toronto Island is open again – at last. The Island is a little piece of heaven, a perfect slice of peace. Tomorrow I will ride across the water, lie down on the beach and listen to the gentle sounds of the surf. That is, until a Sea-Doo whips along or the 11 a.m. plane to Ottawa thunders down the asphalt.

Ah well, it was nice while it lasted.



and dedicates a lot of time to perfecting her craft. She’s participated in spoken word events and fundraisers to promote writing because she believes in the power of voice. “My pen/paper are my duo.”

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