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LOCAL

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

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Small businesses inching to pre-pandemic levels



Jennifer Norman, long-time employee at Kochi Stores on Front Street East.

Photo: Andre Berman

Sophia de Guzman

As the provincial government lifts restrictions on indoor capacities and other public health guidelines, an earnest recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic may now be possible for many Toronto small businesses.

Ontario entered the third and final stage of its Roadmap to Reopen on July 16, after the vaccination rate among adults reached 70 percent with one dose and 25 percent with two doses of the Covid-19 vaccine. As the province reaches 77 percent with at least one dose, small businesses look forward to returning to pre-pandemic sales.

On good weather days, Kochi Stores sees a lot of foot traffic, according to Jennifer Norman, a long-time employee at the Front Street home décor store. During the pandemic, Kochi had to close twice for multiple months. But since the reopening, “we’ve been busy, immediately, because we have a clientele that knows the store quite well. But we also have a

lot of new customers.”

As of September 30, the City of Toronto limited indoor capacity for retail spaces and restaurants to as many people that can fit while social distancing. Norman says enforcing that policy isn’t difficult, since “people naturally social distance now.”

Some businesses are having a harder time recouping their former clientele. Amin Bandali, owner and manager of independent convenience store New Campus Variety on King Street across from George Brown College, gestures out his window to an empty sidewalk.

“You see? It’s just like curfew. Nothing. I’m just waiting for in-person classes to start and my business will be okay.”

During the height of the pandemic, many small businesses had little option but to close their doors. Even small brick-and-mortar stores and restaurants had to go online.

Small businesses made up 98 per cent of employer businesses in December 2020, according to Statistics Canada. In the

first quarter of 2021, StatsCan reported, the number of businesses of all sizes that made more than half their sales online increased from 2020.

StatsCan classifies “small businesses” as those with up to 100 employees. Among those, businesses with one to four employees were the most likely to make the shift to online.

Jay Cox, manager of the seafood restaurant Market Street Catch next to St. Lawrence Market, said relying on online orders was problematic.

“We’re grateful for all the online orders and all the online portals like Uber and DoorDash. But even with all of those orders, we only get a percentage. So we’re still seeing a loss because the percentage of foot traffic that usually comes in on its own is not as much as our online orders.”

Now that indoor dining capacity is limited only by social distancing, the situation of many restaurants has significantly improved.

Small Biz continued p7

Regent Park advocates push for benefits in final revitalization stages

Donald Higney

As Tridel Builders get ready to start stages 4 and 5 of the Regent Park Revitalization Project, neighbourhood groups are pushing the company and Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) to share decision-making with the community.

“The residents of Regent Park are deeply impacted by development and gentrification,” said Walied Khogali, a Regent Park community activist. “Community development must be centred on the priorities of the residents, not the developers.”

Kumsa Baker, campaign director at Toronto Community Benefits Network, says the community benefits framework is new to Toronto, which could make Tridel and TCHC hesitant to sign one.

“Once approvals happen, those things may fall off the rails or some commitments can

be watered down,” said Baker. “That’s why you need accountability mechanisms to ensure that they do what they said.”

A statement from TCHC says the civic agency is consulting the Regent Park community to develop an agreement that addresses community needs. Details of how it will happen have not been released.

In 2018 the City of Toronto signed a community benefits agreement (CBA) with One Toronto Gaming, which operates Casino Woodbine in Rexdale. The business plan is to expand the casino and add hotels, restaurants and retail stores.

In December 2020 TCHC approved Tridel as the city’s developer partner for the final two phases of the Regent Park revitalization, switching from the Daniels Corporation, which had headed the project since 2005.

Regent continued p4

Despite calls, Toronto sticks to clearing out encampments

Megan Camlasaran

The City of Toronto should repeal the “no camping” bylaw and leave homeless encampment sites alone, because the shelter system is unsafe, demeaning and overcrowded, according to the Shelter and Housing Justice Network.

“The shelter system is in crisis. It is over capacity, denies people and leaves people out in the cold,” said the advocacy group in a report on a proposed emergency winter shelter support and infrastructure plan released in October.

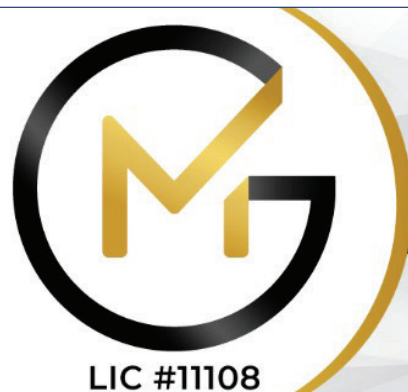
However, the city says it will

not allow encampments to remain in public parks because of concerns of public accessibility, legality and safety.

Last fall, a court agreed that the city has the right to enforce park bylaws prohibiting camping. But it cannot force people to move to indoor shelters, so before evicting them it issues a notice of trespassing to those living in homeless encampments, and offers help from city services, including referrals to indoor shelters.

The city plans to spend \$663 million on homelessness and Housing First services and supports this year and has opened more than 25 physical distancing shelters to house those coming from encampments. The Streets to Home team is working to match encampment dwellers with available housing, rent supplements and housing allowances, according to the city.

Encampments continued p6



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City executive committee unanimously backs First Parliament Master Plan

Elsbeth Chalmers

The First Parliament Master Plan received unanimous support from the city's Executive Committee on October 27, but the site's future is still uncertain.

Though executive approval will "strengthen the voice and position of the city in talks with Infrastructure Ontario and Metrolinx," according to James Perttula, the city's director of transit and transportation planning, the provincial government has given no assurances that it will take the plan into consideration as development begins.

Metrolinx's June 2021 proposal varies greatly from the city's plan. In particular, the province intends to replace the

low- and mid-rise towers with high-rise condominiums. This comes as a blow to councillors and community residents who have been working on site plans for 20 years. Suzanne Kavanagh, chair of the St. Lawrence Neighbourhood Association's development committee, said the process began as early as 2001, when an archaeological study identified the site of Upper Canada's first parliament buildings, on the block south of Front Street between Berkeley and Parliament Streets.

In 2003, Mayor John Tory, who came second in the city's mayoral contest that year, and local councillor Pam McConnell promised that the site would be preserved. After two decades of research and com-

munity collaboration she initially spearheaded, the plan was finally completed.

Current Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam said, "I feel an obligation to finish the work [McConnell] started." But though the city had offered full cooperation for building the Ontario Line Corktown Station in the area, the province announced it would expropriate the land in January of this year, mainly for residential development.

Developers are already on site despite lack of agreement on the sale price. Metrolinx and Infrastructure Ontario have provided a figure, but third-party valuation is still under way.

Former city planner Lance Alexander cautioned councillors against accepting an initial payment for the expropriated land, saying that could affect its future valuation. According to the amended motion, the city-led First Parliament Working Group and the local councillor will work to determine how the proceeds from this forced sale can be used to serve the community and achieve some of the goals of the First Parliament Master Plan. The initial payment by Metrolinx will remain in trust in the Land Acquisition Reserve until plans for the site

are finalized.

Many are disappointed by the compromise. As several speakers noted, the city never intended to use the historic site to generate revenue, but to provide a much-needed community space.

Two decades of careful purchases of the land was completed in 2013 when the Toronto Public Library sold its portion. In exchange, the St. Lawrence branch was to be built on the First Parliament site. Even with no construction delays, residents would need to wait years for a new branch, noted Stewart Linton, president of the St. Lawrence Neighbourhood Association, and the community has already been waiting 8 years.

Residents' primary concern, however, was the potential loss of promised parkland. "Parkland is the number 1 priority for the community. Don't trade it for anything," stated Linton, in a sentiment echoed by several community groups, including the Corktown Residents & Business Association.

The 44 Parliament Street site was rezoned as parkland in 2017, and the First Parliament Master Plan proposed a Lakeshore Park on it. Cynthia

Wilkey, co-chair of the West Donlands Committee, said she feared Metrolinx's "aggressive development plan" would diminish the park.

The site holds national significance. "It is one of the few sites remaining in the city to allow us to acknowledge the foundational presence of the Indigenous treaty-holders of the land," said Diana Belshaw, chair of the Gooderham and Worts Neighbourhood Association's development committee. "The importance of this site cannot be over-estimated."

The First Parliament Master Plan, online at <https://firstparliament.ca>, includes a heritage interpretation centre. Several speakers called the Infrastructure Ontario and Metrolinx proposed equivalent, which does not include an interior commemoration space, trivial.

Councillor Wong-Tam has held eight working groups about the site since January involving other councillors and community groups in collaboration with Infrastructure Ontario. Talks are ongoing.

"We are a neighbourhood," says Belshaw, and it's one that will continue to fight the province to "return as much of our land as possible for city use."

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Letters to the editor

Re: "It's the wild wild west"
Shuter Street bike lanes raise safety concerns

The title of this article is very misleading.

I assumed that the Shuter Street safety concerns were caused by the bike lanes. But after reading the article, I see no evidence that the safety concerns are caused by the bike lanes.

We all remember the terrible condition of Shuter before it was reconstructed. It was considered one of the worst streets in Toronto. It had dangerous potholes, the sidewalks were in terrible condition, and the bike lane was a painted line only, with car drivers constantly parking in the bike lane.

The reconstruction of Shuter Street was many years overdue.

What resulted was not a "bike lane reconstruction," it was a Complete Street reconstruction. The potholes were fixed, the sidewalks were improved, some of the car parking was removed, and the bike lanes became protected cycle tracks with curbs and bollards.

I walk and ride my bike on Shuter Street often, going to the community centre, the Taste of Regent Park, Sumach Espresso, to visit friends, and as a connector to streets farther east and west. I totally agree that there are safety concerns on the street.

It is ironic that after the potholes were fixed, "the new smoother road has resulted in cars driving noticeably faster, according to multiple residents." Crossing guard Mathew Halliwell says that some car drivers are driving at 70 or 80 km/h when the speed limit is 40.

I agree with local residents that the speed limit should be lowered to 30, with automated traffic enforcement and traffic calming measures. There should be design improvements to the street to stop delivery vehicles and school buses from parking in the bike lane.

Shuter intersections at Sumach and at Sackville should be four-way stops. And why are there no traffic lights from Parliament to River Street?

I see so many near-misses at the crosswalks at Sackville and Sumach. One of these intersections should have a traffic light.

For more information, see "Shuter Street Safety Improvements (Parliament to River) - Toronto Centre Projects" on Councillor Wong-Tam's website: <https://torontocentreprojects.ca/initiatives/i-25>

Donna Patterson,
 Toronto Centre

(Write to us!)
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'The Dumbells' & Ambrose Small



Bruce Bell, Senior Columnist

In 1919, war veteran Captain Merton Plunkett stood outside the stately Grand Opera House on Adelaide Street just west of Yonge Street. He took a deep breath, opened its doors and entered into Canadian theatrical history.

During the 1917 hell that was the Vimy Ridge battle, Merton and a few fellow soldiers formed a theatrical

comradeship they formed as bombs, bullets and mustard gas pervaded their daily lives. The scheduled 16-week show packed in audiences. Between return engagements, the Dumbells toured Canada for nine years and grossed a half a million 1920s dollars (about \$7.5 million today).

In May of 1921 the Dumbells opened "Biff, Bing, Bang" at the Ambassador Theatre in New York City, becoming the first Canadian musical revue to appear on Broadway.

Toronto's Grand Theatre was built as the Grand Opera House in 1874 on the south side of Adelaide just west of Yonge. In its day it saw the English-speaking world's greatest



Grand Opera House, 1913.

Courtesy of Toronto Public Library

troupe, the Dumbells, to brighten up the horrors for Canadian troops stuck in the trenches of France. The name came from the Third Division's emblem, a red dumbbell that signified strength.

Upon returning to Canada and after rehearsals in Orillia, the troupe headed to Owen Sound for a successful try-out. The Dumbells opened their new show, "Biff, Bing, Bang," on October 1, 1919, at London's Grand Opera House, then owned by theatrical impresario Ambrose Small.

Not knowing if the show would play well to Toronto's more sophisticated audience, Small booked the Dumbells to play his cavernous 1,700-seat Grand Theatre in the big city. He agreed to run the show for 16 weeks, then a regular vaudeville contract, thinking that the men who suffered through the war might not want to see it a second time.

However, soldiers were actually nostalgic for war songs, skits about the ol' captain, memories of the terrible food and most importantly the

actors, from Sarah Bernhardt to the Barrymores.

The Grand was later reconfigured into a vaudeville and movie house, but is best known for its connection with one the greatest Canadian mysteries: the disappearance of its owner, Ambrose Small.

On the morning of December 2, 1919 – just weeks after signing the Dumbells and after selling his theatre chain including the Grand for \$1.7 million – Small walked down Yonge to his bank, deposited the cheque and went back to his theatre office.

At 7 that evening he bought a copy of the New York Times from his regular newsboy at Adelaide and Yonge,



walked along Adelaide towards Church Street – and was never seen again. His disappearance was front-page news across Canada.

Was he murdered? Was he kidnapped? Did he run away on his own accord? Was a woman involved?

The mystery deepened when it was discovered that he didn't take any money with him and no one was making ransom demands. His wife, Theresa, offered a \$50,000 reward for his return, but to this day it has never been collected.

Theories on his disappearance range from Small having amnesia and leaving the country thinking he was someone else; falling down a construction site (and still buried beneath a downtown building foundation); being kidnapped and ac-

cidentally killed; his wife catching him with another woman and having his body burnt in the theatre furnace.

Part of the mystery's allure was that it happened just as the roaring '20s were getting under way. After years of war and then the Spanish flu pandemic, Toronto and the rest of the world were looking for excitement in the decade that roared.

Some Toronto reporters even got in touch with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle of Sherlock Holmes fame. At first Doyle was interested, leading to headlines like "World's Greatest Detective to Solve Small Case." But in the end, Doyle didn't chase the story.

All through the 1920s Toronto police investigated Small's disappearance, but the case remained unsolved and offici-

ally closed in 1960, when he would have been 94 years old.

The Dumbells, after their enormous success in the 1920s, disbanded in 1932 as talking pictures filled the theatres, but over the years they often reunited for charity events. The last surviving Dumbell, Jack Ayes, died in 1977 at the age of 82.

The Grand Theatre suffered neglect and numerous fires, and was torn down in 1927. Today the only hint of its existence is Grand Opera Lane running south off Adelaide just west of Yonge. A Winners store stands on the site of the once magnificent Grand Opera.

To arrange a walking tour of St. Lawrence Market and Old Town Toronto, or to purchase gift certificates for the holidays, email bruce.bell2@sympatico.ca

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Benjamin Moore

‘There’s a lot of distrust of the government in my community’

Regent from p1

Capital Developments was the third developer responding to a request for proposals (RFP).

Tridel and TCHC have also partnered on the Leslie Ny-mark (north of Sheppard Avenue) and Alexandra Park (near Spadina and Dundas) revitalization programs.

Baker said people in Regent Park had been optimistic about the Daniels plan, which included social development and job creation for neighbourhood residents.

Since 2005 almost 1700 rental units have been completed, with the majority being rent geared to income (RGI). Around 200 RGI units are planned at Block 16N, the last TCHC building in Phase 3.

Phases 4 and 5 will have an additional 5,500 new market condominium units for sale, but only 2,083 RGI units and 399 affordable rental units are planned to be built.

According to TCHC, RGI units are tied to a tenant’s gross monthly income while affordable rental units are set at or below average market rent. A tenant’s annual gross income can’t be more than four times the annual rent of the unit. Market rent is the same rate that is charged by private landlords in the neighbourhood.

In the years Daniels Corp was involved in the revitali-

zation project, promises were made to the community about social development, especially employment for residents. According to Baker, only 35 residents got full-time jobs, while more money was invested into commercial businesses coming into the neighbourhood.

One community request according to Khogali is rezoning, for which \$2.6 million was requested. Stages 4 and 5 cover the area from Dreamer’s Way near Parliament Street east to River Street, from Gerrard Street south to Oak Street.

Tridel hosted community meetings in August to get community input on Regent Park amenities.

At one of the meetings, local resident Peter Sharp said previous stages of the revitalization had been positive, such as buildings designed not too high and athletic facilities installed in parks. On the other hand, he wanted more arts facilities such as theatres, art galleries and community spaces.

The biggest problem Sharp identified is integrating a mixed-income community. “Whatever amenities are going to be added have to address the multiple cultures, ages, and incomes of the people who live in the buildings.”

Khogal said community consultations will work only if Tridel and TCHC listen to community stakeholders. “There’s a lot of distrust of the

government in my community, because so many commitments were made and not a lot has been followed through.”

A report from the Regent Park Community Benefits Coalition identified community space, employment, affordable home ownership, sustainable funding for social development, and programs for youths, seniors and people with disabilities as the main priorities.

Although the Pam McConnell Aquatic Centre and other spaces have been built to serve the community, Baker worries that people from Regent Park have limited access to them because of people coming from different neighbourhoods.

Tridel was given access to \$26.8 million from TCHC, but Khogali says Regent Park needs \$100 million long-term from all levels of government to make the community sustainable for the future. Sustainable funding is also a priority for Baker, who acknowledges that these are the final stages of the Regent Park revitalization project.

Khogali says Regent Park wants action, but also to be a part of it. “We want more accountability, we want more transparency, and we want to be at the table.”

Commffest presents a free event: Concert for Healing

Sandie de Freitas, founder, and Norman Hart, vice-president Commffest

Now in its 16th year, Commffest invites anyone who wants to attend a free-admission CONCERT FOR HEALING, paying tribute to frontline and healthcare workers who have had it tough in the last two years.

This all-star concert happens on Thursday November 25, at 7 p.m. in the St Lawrence Centre for the Arts at Front and Yonge Streets.

The show opens with a monologue by Indigenous film and television actor Billy Merasty. Then Jaymz Bee, writer and 16-year broadcaster on Jazz FM91, takes over as host for the evening, introducing Alan Cohen and friends.

Singer Tracey Gallant will be backed by Univox Choir, along with Howard Willett on harmonica. Then the Black Star dance group, a coalition of afro-influenced dancers committed to AfroFusion Dance. Next, Kollage, a band from Kolkata, India, that played with the late jazz drummer Archie Alleyne,



Joe Sealy

Courtesy of Commffest

will perform with soloist Sagelee. Finishing off the evening will be Joe Sealy, 1997 Juno winner for Africville Suite, a jazz composition that tells the tragic yet inspiring story of Canada’s oldest black community.

All healthcare workers, frontline workers and their families, as well as the general public, are invited to this special Commffest Concert for Healing. It will be an evening to energize all in attendance towards a healthier future – see you there!



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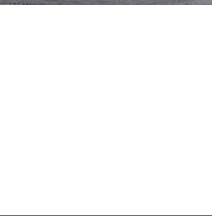
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'A tent is not a suitable replacement for permanent housing' Councillor says

Encampments from p1

However, the Shelter and Housing Justice Network notes that the city's Housing First approach requires individuals to have been homeless for six months to be considered for support.

Antique shop owner Vincent Gray, on Queen Street East in Moss Park for 50 years, has seen the area deteriorate and says he frequently witnesses drug deals near encampments. When people from encampments wander into his store, he adds, it becomes difficult to control the situation because "they don't care what they do."

Gray said local City Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam should be doing more to clear encampments out. "I don't think she's too concerned."

People in the area won't go out at night because "it's not safe," Gray says. One of his tenants was physically assaulted after a negative encounter with someone from the local encampment.

In response to questions from *the bridge*, Wong-Tam reiterated the city's position by stating "A tent is not a suitable replacement for permanent housing." She acknowledged some people hesitate to use shelter spaces provided by the city, as they can be "triggering" and "unwelcoming." Supporting the city's homeless popu-



An encampment site in Moss Park.

Photo: Andre Berman

lation requires holistic supports that also treat mental health and addictions, she said.

Rob Cesta from Drift, a fly-fishing equipment store on Queen Street East, said he knows people need a place to live, but doesn't think encampments are "the way forward." People from encampments have yelled at his employees and exposed them to unsafe situations such as open drug use, which affects their mental health, said Cesta.

Cesta has witnessed physical altercations in the area and has seen the dead bodies of people who have overdosed. "You never know what's going to happen." Local parks should be more controlled and monitored, or patrolled to ensure everyone's safety, said Cesta.

"I realize that the city's green space became more and more critical as a refuge while we've been asked to stay at home [during the pandemic]," Wong-Tam said. "I've heard the reports of at-risk behaviour and can understand the need to balance the needs of all park

users."

The Shelter and Housing Justice Network emphasized that the biggest problems with shelter programs is overcapacity, drug toxicity, and exclusionary policies that endanger marginalized people. "The city claims the evictions are necessary ... but they are motivated by the desire to make unhoused people less visible," its report states.

The city's safety concerns about encampments include drug overdoses, fire safety hazards like open flames, generators and propane tanks, and lack of access to water and sanitation. It says there have been 170 emergency fire responses in encampments so far this year, including five in mid-October.

A coalition of local health providers, community service agencies, stakeholders and others are working on a non-confrontational solution to help people living in encampments move towards housing and find necessary supports such as health care.

Staying Alive

Ben Bull, Columnist

I think somebody is trying to kill me. Every time I take to the streets, I am getting sideswiped, curbed, car-doored and clattered.

It's rough out there.

A couple of years ago an antsy driver rammed into my bike after I asked her not to squish me onto the curb. A few months before that I was pancaked by a car door that sprung into my bike lane like a paddle on a pinball machine.

Walking isn't any safer. About three years ago I got chased up the street by a minivan after being sideswiped at an intersection. The driver wanted to know why I'd rapped my fist into his door.

I was just trying not to die.

According to Toronto's Vision Zero fatality tracker, cars have mowed down 19 pedestrians and a cyclist so far this year. Sadly, that number is already out of date. On October 19 we lost two more pedestrians. That's right – two pedestrian deaths in one day.

These cars are killing us. I'm not even sure how. Five of this year's fatalities were in the downtown core. How fast can you go downtown?

The really mean streets, though, are in Scarborough, where 10 pedestrians have died so far.

I'm trying my best to stay alive. I look both ways when I cross. I don't play with my phone or listen to music. But these cars are out of control.

It's not just bad drivers – it's bad design. Walk around the city and you'll see miles and miles of wide-open highway, with good sightlines and not a speed trap in sight. It's almost as if we want people to drive fast.

After a 71-year-old man and a 69-year-old woman were run down on Parkside Drive a few weeks ago, the local councillor bemoaned the red tape holding up road adjustments:

"Efforts to get speeds re-

duced on Parkside have run up against the city's antiquated road classification system," said Councillor Gord Perks. "Major arterial roads cannot be reduced below 50 kph."

This notorious stretch of asphalt near High Park had already been flagged as deadly, with local residents lobbying the city and setting up a Facebook site – Safe Parkside – to raise awareness. And yet little has been done to make it safe.

Our city needs to start taking road safety more seriously. We need to cut the red tape. We need to stop squishing pedestrians to the side and making us wait an age at every intersection. We need to stop being forced to share the road with weaving, speeding vehicles. We need to stop swivelling our heads every time we scurry across an intersection just to make it to the other side.

By the end of the year, the city is putting in an extra 389 advanced walk signals, which give a head start on the traffic and an extra five seconds to walk across.

This will help make our journey safer, but it's not enough. We should be slashing speed limits immediately – 50 kph for three-lane roads, 40 kph for two lanes, 30 kph for one. We should be rolling out more speed cameras – one at every major intersection.

We should ban right turns on red lights during rush hour. We should close off some streets altogether.

Most importantly, we should start redesigning the most dangerous thoroughfares. Stop giving motorists an easy ride. Barriers, bends, bump-outs, blinking cameras – these are all measures that can slow traffic down.

This is a city we're driving through folks – it's full of people. It's not the 401.

I don't want to die. I'm not flinging myself into traffic. But these cars are trying to kill me – they're trying to kill us all.



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the bridge: Book Review

Glenda MacFarlane, Columnist

The Prairie Chicken Dance Tour
Dawn Dumont
Freehand Books, 2021

The Prairie Chicken Dance Tour has an irresistible premise: an Indigenous dance troupe booked on a 15-day tour of Europe comes down with food poisoning, so a group of unlikely substitutes is hastily assembled and sent off in its place.

Dawn Dumont is both a writer and a stand-up comedian, and The Prairie Chicken Dance Tour is a very funny book. We immediately fall in love with her quirky cast of characters: the reluctant leader of the replacement dancers, John Greyeyes, a Cree rancher who hasn't danced in 15 years; Edna, whose arthritis and religious devotion are both stronger than her dancing ability; Edna's wild-child niece Desiree; and the Hunkpapa dancer Lucas Pretends Eagle, who may not be who he seems.

It soon becomes clear to John that herding cattle is a breeze compared to wrangling the other three dancer replacements. Meanwhile, Nadine Redcloud, leader of the actual troupe, is pursuing the motley replacements while fighting off gastrointestinal symptoms, determined to take her rightful place on the tour.

Through chapters told from various points of view and Edna's laconic diary entries, the tour progresses from Saskatchewan to Chicago, rural Sweden, Hamburg, Munich and Rome. Along the way the characters have to deal with a hijacking,

a jail break, racist border guards, mysterious packages, peyote hallucinations, sexual awakenings, skinheads, leg wrestling matches, the appearance of an ex-lover, ghosts, fishy hotels, the Vatican police, and more. Plot twists and complications come fast and furious, and the chapters fly by quickly, the characters coming to terms with old secrets and making new discoveries.

Although Dumont keeps us laughing, the challenges faced by her main characters are serious. Most have endured discrimination, poverty and prejudice "as predictable as the rain." Some have survived unspeakable abuses at residential schools. And the dancers must, they discover, engage with politics everywhere they go, whether or not they wish to be activists. Their Sami host in Sweden tells them, "The expression of culture is a form of resistance."

But we get the feeling that the Prairie Chickens will be all right, that their humour and strength of character will get them home safely in the end. As Edna says, "Don't panic, eat bannock."

Dawn Dumont's other books include: Nobody Cries at Bingo and Glass Beads. Follow her hilarious tweets on Twitter @dawndumont

Glenda MacFarlane is a writer and editor. Glenda's writing includes the rural community-based collective creation Railroaded, the historical drama Duel at Dawn, and two non-fiction books.

Market opens at the new Riverside Common Park

Maxwell Loslo

The Riverside Common Market and the new Riverside Common Park officially opened together on October 17. Hundreds of people streamed into the park, on Queen Street near Broadview, to browse mostly vintage clothing and hand-crafted products from 30 artisan vendors.

The Leslieville Flea Market organized the market to draw people back to the Riverside community: from the Don River east to Logan Avenue, from Gerrard Street to Eastern Avenue. Events organizer Jennifer Lay said Riverside has been suffering under Covid-19 restrictions.

"We are trying to find a way to bring people in on Sundays and get people shopping and eating," Lay said. "We've got coffee shops, breweries ... it's a historic neighborhood with a lot to do."

Councillor Paula Fletcher helped launch the park, which has been in development since 2013.

"We are just starting" to organize events including Christ-



From left to right: five-year-old Soehia, Councillor Paula Fletcher, Dave Mowat, Jenny Blackbird, and Jennifer Lay cut the ribbon for the opening of the Riverside Common Park. Photo: Maxwell Loslo

mas celebrations in the space, she said. "The name 'common' means everyone owns it together ... it's pretty exciting."

The Riverside Common Market will be running monthly; upcoming dates are November 14 and December 5.

"What I love about it is that you can find cool, unique gifts for people," says Brynn Blackwood, a local from the area. "It's so different."

"People still want to smell, see, touch, and feel," says vendor Marc Devigne, adding that

markets give local businesses a "chance to go out into the community and meet the people and showcase the products."

Devigne is a founder of Pinky Swear & Co., a candle-producing business based in North York. The company started coming out to local markets last summer.

"Overall it's been a very positive experience, meeting so many cool people," says Devigne.

Increased pandemic-related shipping costs are hurting small retailers

Small Biz from p1

However, patrons must disclose their vaccination status and have received two doses of a Canada-approved vaccine.

"We shouldn't have to check everybody's status, because sometimes it shines a negative light on us," Cox said. "Sometimes customers just don't want to hear it and it's not our fault — we can get fined if we decide not to ask for proof [of vaccination] ... that the government mandated us to do."

Increased pandemic-related shipping costs are hurting small retailers like Bright Sky

Jewellery, a family business in St. Lawrence Market, operated by Sam Tarfy and his parents, who make most of their products by hand.

"It's been tough," Tarfy said. "We get a lot of [customers] coming in asking us for specific things and when we go to suppliers, because they haven't been able to travel, shipping costs have doubled or tripled. They're not bringing in as many of the supplies that we need to make our stuff, so it's really hard to find. If we do find it, it's really expensive."

Tarfy also points to decreased tourism into Canada as

a problem, because of Bright Sky's location in the popular tourist spot. But on the whole, Tarfy says, business "is slowly getting back to normal. We're starting to see tourists trickle in from the rest of Canada and that's helping a lot. We've [also had] some from the States."

On October 21st, the provincial government announced it will lift all Covid-19 public health measures, masks included, by the end of next March, which would allow all businesses to operate at their full pre-pandemic capacity.

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When art tells a political story for change

Carol Mark, Columnist

Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*, painted in 1937, brought attention to the Spanish Civil War. Its starkness, using just white, black and grey colours, and its size, nearly 12 feet by 16 feet, convey scenes of violence upfront and close.

Picasso painted this artwork in Paris after the German Luftwaffe bombed Guernica, an insignificant town in northern Spain except that its road linked the front line to the capital. Disabling the main road would cut off supplies and communication.

Innocent civilians were killed, mainly women and children. Despite being in the cubist tradition, the painting shows the chaos with a dead baby, a screaming woman, flames are drawn into the emotional turmoil, and our emotions are heightened. It rips us to the core.

Can art galvanize us into action, never mind the ballot box? With social media we are exposed to 4,000 to 10,000 ads a day. Can an artist still have impact?

Guernica was displayed at the 1937 Paris International Exposition and monies were raised for war relief. But initially, it did not get a positive response in Paris. Picasso's art dealer proposed sending *Guernica* on a multinational tour, including America, with several other leading artists. That exposure made a huge difference in how the work was



Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*, 1937.

perceived and brought a much greater awareness to the plight of Spain.

Essentially, this is what I hope Amazing Moss Park Artists can do today, though on a much smaller scale and in a very different world. With our BLANK WALLS neighbourhood art program we use art to communicate our thoughts about being home during Covid. With this in mind, I asked our members about their idea of home after living through the pandemic.

Michael Jenkins: "Home was a very crowded place of confinement, jail-like but silent and empty."

Michael Sillers: "Home isn't just where we lay our head. Home is everywhere."

Farzana Aziz: "Blissful discovery of self. While the world we knew tilted in front of us, my home is where I discovered the artist within me and my blessings that outshone in the midst of all uncertainties."

As a Chinese Canadian, I

came face to face with anti-Asian hate for the first time in my life. That's why I added the hashtag #StopAsianHate to my art. My grandfather faced such injustice during the time of the 1923 Exclusion Act, which barred most Asians from immigrating to Canada, separating families for decades.

Canada's nice polite facade seemed just that to me. If Canadians value a multicultural society that is inclusive, I believe we need to try harder.

As part of giving back, Amazing Moss Park art collective is selling the proceeds of donated art to the Yonge Street Mission. YSM as been part of our community since 1896 when it was founded by John Coolidge Davis who started out by giving food and clothing on Yonge St. Back then, the area known as The Ward was starting place for immigrants in the 19th- and 20th- century but also considered a slum and the first multi-cultural neighbourhood.

Words float free

Dela M. Raman, WCC

When I participate in a Writers Collective of Canada workshop, I transcend into a kind, brave space where I can breathe life into harrowing stories about my childhood. I write with ease, like a spider moving on a single thread, its legs dancing.

I started my first workshop in late September. The prompt to write had to do with change. I followed my instincts: I turned off the camera, closed my eyes and let the prompt take me where I needed to go.

It took me to the eve of my twenty-seventh birthday. As words and sentences appeared, echoed feelings sent triggers down my spine, I wrote them down quickly before they left me forever. I am amazed by what the other participants and I can produce in just 10 minutes. The workshop's positive and inclusive environment allows us to write freely.

Attending the weekly workshops, I have gained a sense of community. We

commit to expressing our thoughts. We listen carefully and offer supportive, sincere feedback, thereby encouraging each other to continue writing. Participating in the workshop feels like the warm embrace of the sun. I am grateful to be part of this community of writers.

Ten minutes before the workshop, I prepare a cup of peppermint tea and turn to a blank page in my five-by-seven turquoise notebook. The facilitator guides us to take a few deep breaths, informs us of the beautiful writing process inspired by the late Pat Schneider then sends us into a whirlpool of words and emotions. We catch what we like.

Writers Collective of Canada is a charitable organization that inspires exploratory writing to empower every voice, celebrate every story, and change the world. To learn more and sign up for a writing workshop, visit www.wcc-cec.org



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