The East York
OBSERVER
CENTENNIAL COLLEGE

VOICES OF THE PAST

■ Students celebrate black history in song Page 4

Serving our community since 1972 | Vol. 46, No. 4 | www.torontoobserver.ca | Friday, March 17, 2017

Lea Sheffield /// The Observer

Ready to make sweet music

Lily McIntosh waits her turn to play the violin at the 2017 East York Music Festival at Westminster Presbyterian Church on March 4. The festival featured 140 performances, including Lily's. See page 8 for another photo.

Candlelight vigil sparked by murder in Thorncliffe

By GIORGIO LEE and ZIA ZARAWAR
The Observer

Children and adults gathered for a vigil earlier this month in the wake of the murder of a young man in Thorncliffe Park.

They carried candles to illuminate an issue that they see as destructive to their community: gun violence.

They rallied on March 2 at R.V. Burgess Park — the small greenspace in the middle of the cluster of densely populated and marginally maintained highrises that looms over East York's northeast corner.

The vigil was a response to the shooting death of Shoaib Asakzai. Asakzai, 25, from Toronto was shot multiple times close to Thorncliffe Park Drive and Overlea Boulevard on Feb. 25 at around 6:20 p.m. He was rushed to the hospital with life-threatening injuries and was pronounced dead two hours later.

Police said they were called at 6:22 p.m. after a report of shooting at 71 Thorncliffe Park Dr. They found Asakzai in the back parking lot of the highrise, with life-threatening injuries.

Asakzai was the city's 11th homicide of 2017. The Toronto police homicide unit is now handling the investigation. There have been no reports of any arrests.

A neighbourhood resident familiar with Asakzai said the victim lived in Scarborough but visited Thorncliffe Park fairly often. Published reports from July 2011 say that Asakzai and a friend were arrested after a violent altercation at the East York Town Centre that left three people slightly wounded. Asakzai was charged with pointing a firearm and conspiracy to commit an indictable offence.

But at the March 2 vigil, some who had gathered remembered a very different person,

■ See THORNCLIFFE, page 8

Local activist faces friendly fire at roast in his honour

By NICOLE ROYLE
The Observer

It's 45 minutes after the event was supposed to have started. The organizers are pacing, trying to get everything ready. The speakers are being briefed and readied for their turn at the podium. The stage is lit, and organizer George Tory, the mayor's son, is at the mic.

All that's missing is the guest of honour.

"The reason Justin is always late is that none of the six cellphones he keeps on his belt have access to a bus schedule, so he has no idea when he's going to get anywhere," said Tory, in reference to the honouree's efforts to get printed schedules at every TTC bus stop.

The crowd then follows his gaze toward the star of the event, Justin Van Dette, as he dramatically shuts off his phone and, with a laugh, thrusts it into his belt (accompanied by only two other phones). The main attraction is ready to take the stage.

Tory's good-natured jab was one of many shared by big names such as his father, Mayor John Tory, along with Ontario Premier and Don Valley West MPP Kathleen Wynne, former Toronto police chief and MP Julian Fantino and Canadian hockey icon Don Cherry.

They hurled their friendly barbs at a roast for Van Dette, held on March 2 at the Peter Street venue downtown called UG3 Live.

Van Dette is a staple of community activism in East York. He's been a behind-the-scenes political operative for several local politicians. He's the omnipresent community relations manager for the Michael Garron Hospital Foundation (formerly the Toronto East General foundation). He's a tireless advocate for East York, most recently rallying residents for better TTC service at a December protest and then advocating for an East York "Hall of Fame" at the February meeting of the Kinsmen club.

Columnist Joe Warmington of the Toronto Sun affectionately refers to him

■ See GIVING, page 8

Nicole Royle /// The Observer

Mayor John Tory (left) and Premier Kathleen Wynne with the roast's guest of honour, Justin Van Dette.

POLICE & FIRE

Driver flees after van flips on Danforth

The night owls who inhabit Greektown on weekends got more of a spectacle than they bargained for in the wee hours of Saturday morning when a minivan hit a traffic pole, then careened into a light post and a concrete planter, before rolling onto its side in the middle of the Danforth, near East Lynn Avenue.

Police said passersby helped flip the vehicle from its side to free the occupants — but then the driver ran away.

Scott Mackie, a resident who lives nearby, said he heard a loud bang when the car struck the pole. "My neighbour told me what happened was... it was a van full of eight people," he said. "They missed the first pole; they hit the second one square and took it with them as they drove; then they ran over the bike pole, flattened that and they hit the tree stand and that's what flipped their van over on the side.... At least they didn't wake my kid up." The police are asking anyone with information to contact them.

~Michael Linennen

A van rolled in the middle of Danforth Avenue early Saturday morning.

Small venue, big story

Artist pays homage to rainforest with depiction of bear

By NEIL POWERS
The Observer

Jean Fode is an artist who recalls early life on the family farm in Saskatchewan, without conveniences as basic as electicity. She remembers going to school in the winter in a horse-drawn sleigh.

Now, with the wisdom garnered from that humble start and a long life since, she's using her artistic talent to make a statement about the extraordinary Great Bear Rainforest on the cost of British Columbia.

The rainforest is a defined area where 85 per cent of the territory is protected from industrial logging. She's created a dramatic visual representation of it in a tiny venue with an appropriate name: "The Closet Gallery" of the East York campus of Centennial College.

First, a little background to an unlikely story.

How special is the Great Bear Rainforest? It is the largest coastal temperate rainforest on Earth. The region, about the size of Nova Scotia, has been stewarded by First Nations people for thousands of years.

It includes old-growth forests with a wide range of animals and sea-life, like sea-otters and orca whales. One of the more interesting species is the Kermode white bear — the result of a recessive gene in some of the region's black bears.

The Great Bear Rainforest agreement among five logging companies and three environmental organizations was hammered out after a second phase lasting 10 years. It was then approved by First Nations communities and the B.C. government in February 2016. There are 26 First Nations impacted by the agreement.

The result: over three million hectares of forest area permanently protected from industrial logging. One hectare is about as big as a rugby field.

Douglas Neasloss is the chief councillor of the coastal Kitasoo band in Klemtu, British Columbia. He supports the agreement.

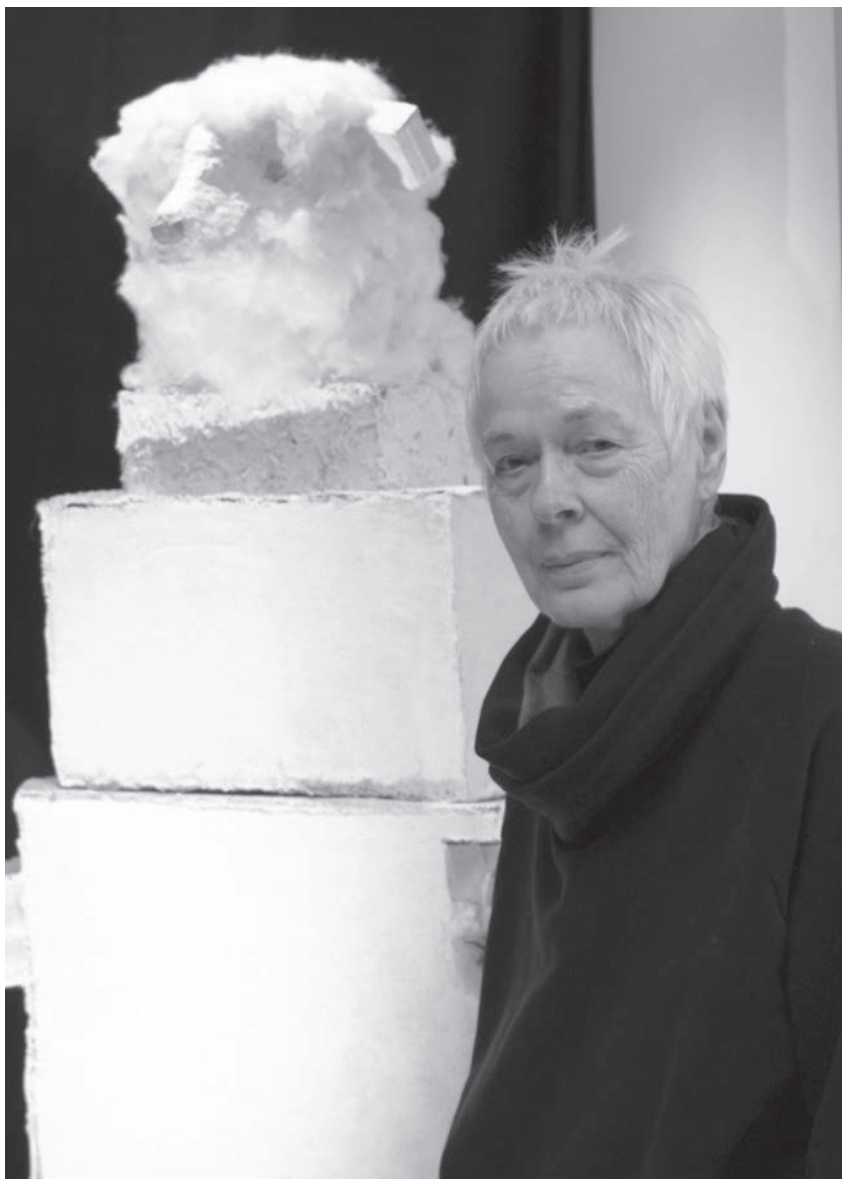
"You take care of the land and it will take care of you," he told the Observer in a telephone interview from B.C.

He talked of many First Nations people being dependent on the forest for sustenance. He called the Great Bear Rainforest "Canada's Galapagos (Islands)," with a great diversity of animal, plant and sea-life.

"Ecotourism has taken off," Neasloss said. That includes 50 jobs in his community of 350 people.

He sees some enduring challenges, such as the B.C. government still providing permits for trophy hunters to kill black bears. Nine First Nations communities are collaborating to work toward ending black bear trophy-hunting. Neasloss seees First Nations governance in terms of monitoring the agreement as an issue that needs to be better clarified with the provincial government.

Karen Brandt is vice-president of corporate affairs and sustainability for Interfor, a large Vancouver-based forestry company. She was one of the negotiators to the agreement.



Neil Powers /// The Observer

Artist Jean Fode stands by "Norm" the bear at the Closet Gallery of Centennial College's East York campus.

"It's tough because you're trying to balance a whole bunch of needs," she told the Observer about the negotiations. "(It's) hugely complex."

She described everyone as committed to collaborating and arriving at an agreement. She described the group's approach to building a consensus this way: "Put your fear on the (negotiating) table and let's address it."

She pointed to the Eco Based Management (EBM) as an innovative approach to logging. The environmental group Sierra Club describes EBM as "Taking into account both human well-being and ecological integrity."

Eduardo Sousa is senior forest campaigner for Greenpeace. He was involved in the successful negotiations. Also calling from Vancouver, he told the Observer that "a lot of lessons were learned (in negotiating the agreement)." He spoke of First Nations people having more decision-making authority over land in the Great Bear Rainforest.

An issue that he said is bubbling up is ensuring that First Nations people in the region have enough say over their territory. He said that some First Nations communities will need more resources and capacity to ensure the agreement is being adhered to over time.

"We stand by it," Sousa said of the overall Great Bear Rainforest agreement.

Closer to home, in the Closet Gallery on the second floor of the Centennial campus at 951 Carlaw Ave. — where the college's fine arts program is headquartered — Fode has installed her depiction of a large white bear, whom she calls Norm. Beside Norm, who stands over two metres tall, are two cans of motor oil.

Look closer through the floor-to-ceiling glass case and you see that oil has spilled, impacting the grond, the paws of the bear and the colourful fauna plant (represented by strands of coloured fabric) in the corner.

There's irony in art about a great rainforest in such a modest space.

In the sign-in book meant for people to write comments on the exhibit, one gallery visitor wrote of not knowing what the oil cans were for. Someone else countered that just below that with this jotting: "Read the description." That's good advice generally — and Fode's explanation of the art hangs just to the left of the exhibit. The public is welcome to come and see it.

Norm is made of recyclable materials, including cardboard from Canadian Tire and pillow stuffing. The background of the installation is black.

"The Great Bear Rainforest appealed to my imagination," Fode said, and "the news about (climate) change" added urgency to her depiction.

Until last year's agreement protecting this northern B.C. coastal region, the Great Bear Rainforest was under threat. But Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced cancellation of the Northern Gateway pipeline, which could have impacted the region. Trudeau ordered a ban on oil tanker shipping in the north coastal region.

Regardless, Fode uses her art to press her message to keep remembering what is at stake if we don't step up to protect the environment.

She said she sees our need to treat people, animals and the environment much better.

"Life is more important than art," she said, "but what a poor life without art."

WHAT'S UP IN E.Y.

Society will make history

The East York Historical Society has two events coming up, including one that verges on historic itself. First, on Tuesday, March 28, the EYHS's regular monthly meeting will include guest speaker George Kourounis, the producer of "Angry Planet," which airs on the specialty cable network OLN. He'll discuss "exploring earth's extremes" at 7 p.m. at the S. Walter Stewart library branch. Then, on April 5, the historical society is holding its 35th anniversary dinner at the York Masonic Hall, 1100 Millwood Rd. Former East York mayor and MPP Michael Prue will be the guest speaker. Tickets are $75 and RSVPs are required by March 31. For more information, go to eastyork.org/eyhs/events.html

Celebrate Earth Hour

St. Cuthbert's Anglican Church is holding an "Environmental Fair" next weekend in addition to its observance of Earth Hour. All are welcome. Church Primate Archbishop Fred Hiltz will speak at 10 a.m.; more than 20 exhibitors will hold an environment fair between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m.; and then the church will observe Earth Hour itself from 8:30-9:30 p.m. It all takes place on Saturday, March 25, at the church, 1399 Bayview Ave. Call 416-485-0329 for information.

~ Divya Rajan

■ PUBLIC SPEAKING

Speech on food waste takes the cake at contest

By MELISSA STEPHENSON
The Observer

When the trophy entered the room, the participants' excitement couldn't be contained. The contest was fast-approaching.

Students huddled, practising the speeches that they were about to present in front of their families, friends and teachers. Each student had picked a topic that they were passionate about — and that passion shone through in how they presented their speeches.

"I believe that food waste is a problem that can no longer be ignored. Many things have to change in our society," said Manny Szeptycki, a Grade 8 student from Westwood Middle School on Carlaw Avenue.

Szeptycki was eventually crowned the winner of the 2017 Agnes Macphail Public Speaking Contest, which was held at the East York Civic Centre on Feb. 22.

This speaking contest is half of a two-award program in honour of East York's 'favourite daughter,' Agnes Macphail — a social activist, the first woman voted into the House of Commons, and one of the first two women voted into the Ontario legislature.

Lorna Krawchuk, a member of the organizing committee and the MC for the Feb. 22 event in the civic centre council chambers, said Macphail is an especially strong role model "because of her history. She is a woman who fought against very long odds to get where she got."

The speaking contest finalists were students from grades 6-8 in East York-area schools belonging to both the public and Catholic school boards. They advanced to the finals after semi-finals held at their various schools. Their speeches were about topics that were both significant and serious. Their speeches covered a variety of topics, from the Trump presidency to racial profiling.

"We start at grade 7 and 8 to encourage them to do public speaking — to help build their confidence," Krawchuk said.

The other half of the Macphail awards is the community's highest honour for civic activism. This year, the recipient is Jim Parker, the pastor at Bethany Baptist Church who has an impressive record of youth work. He'll receive the award next Friday night, March 24 (the anniversary of Macphail's 1890 birth) in a ceremony at the civic centre.

(L-R) Pauline Adams, councillor Janet Davis, Manny Szeptycki and MPP Peter Tabuns with the trophy.

Andre Saunders /// The Observer

Democracy in... inaction

A student at Centennial College's East York campus on Carlaw Avenue casts his vote in a college-wide referendum held on Feb. 21. Almost 20,000 full-time students across all of the college's east Toronto campuses were invited to vote on a measure that would have altered their health care plan, which is sponsored by the student association. The association later reported that although 85 per cent of voters cast ballots in favour of more comprehensive health and dental benefits, low turnout at the polls meant there wasn't enough participation to make the referendum valid.

City issues kits to help fight fentanyl addiction problem

Toronto preparing for possible opioid crisis

By EMILIE MUST
The Observer

Like many inventions of science, drugs can be used for good or ill. And few drugs demonstrate that more dramatically than opioids.

They're powerful pain relievers — a blessing when used properly. But they can be powerfully addictive, and that's become something of a curse in certain North American communities. Vancouver is already grappling with a crisis involving abuse of the extremely powerful opioid fentanyl.

And recently, Toronto Mayor John Tory convened a meeting of stakeholders to begin preparing the city for a potential epidemic of abuse here.

The city's acting medical officer of health, Dr. Barbara Yaffe, has said that overdose deaths from fentanyl almost doubled from 2014 to 2015 — from 23 to 45. Still, that's nothing like the extent of the crisis in some places, and opioids still work well for some people when properly prescribed and taken.

Dr. Kevin Michael Workerton is a family doctor at Michael Garron Hospital in East York — the former Toronto East General — and he has successfully prescribed opiates to patients in the past.

"I have prescribed opiates to patients and I have patients who suffer from addiction, but not all patients who take opiates are addicted," Workerton said.

Still, there are fears over what fentanyl might bring to Toronto.

Fentanyl is 100 times stronger than morphine and some drug users don't even know that it's been mixed with their drug of choice.

Naxolone kits have proven to be an effective way to reduce the number of drug-related deaths since they were first administered in 2011.

The POINT (Preventing Overdose in Toronto) program, created by "The Works" in 2011, trains drug users on how to effectively use naxolone kits during overdoses.

The Works is the public health department's harm reduction program for drug users. Its media relations advisor, Brian Kellow, said harm reduction is an effective strategy.

As evidence, he points to the drug users visiting safe injection sites in the city — like the one at the corner of Victoria and Dundas streets.

Inside the Toronto Public Health office, The Works operates a needle exchange program – one of three safe injection sites in Toronto.

"To date, 3,500 kits have been distributed with 575 administrations reported, although this is likely an underestimate as not everyone reports back on their use of naloxone," Kellow said.

Harm reduction services are in high demand, he added, with more than 100,000 client visits to safe injection sites in 2015, including almost two million needles distributed in that time.

Cost of childcare 'completely unacceptable': Davis

Councillor says capital money needed to create new facilities

By FARHEEN SIKANDER
The Observer

One of the leading proponents of enhanced childcare in Toronto says that next month will be a turning point on the issue.

Janet Davis' public profile has risen recently as the East York councillor steadily campaigns for more affordable childcare. And she's adamant that her campaign isn't over yet.

"The cost of childcare in the city of Toronto is completely unacceptable," said the councillor for Ward 31/Beaches-East York in an interview. "It's reached the point where the majority of families can't afford it."

She said that Torontonians pay an average higher than anywhere else in Canada. She added that one recent study shows that 75 per cent of families in Toronto have trouble affording childcare.

That same study showed that the city can accommodate 7,000 more spaces — but an increased supply will still have to be accompanied by more subsidies and enhanced direct funding for centres.

"We have a plan," Davis said. "We have a report coming in April that is a growth strategy for the City of Toronto, and it will provide a blueprint for addressing fundamental change to childcare in Toronto."

She said the report will include an expansion plan for licensed spaces and other initiatives to approach affordability. But in order for that plan to work, she added, Toronto will need assistance from Ottawa and Queen's Park.

"I hope that it will set out a plan that will address the needs for Toronto's families for high-quality, affordable childcare and include proposals of cost-sharing with the other levels of government," Davis said. "Toronto cannot do it alone."

Davis said she is especially concerned for middle-income families, who earn too much to receive fee subsidies but too little to afford childcare.

She explained that what's needed to make childcare affordable in Toronto is capital money to create new facilities and operating grants for the centres themselves.

That, she said, will ultimately aid all families, including those that aren't eligible for subsidies.

"We have to do a multi-pronged approach to make sure that we have high-quality childcare for all," Davis said.

For now, she said, families that can't afford childcare should contact their local politicians at all levels and urge them to make money available for childcare.

Yvano Wickham-Edwards /// The Observer

At left, Centennial College music students (l-r) Natalie Morris, Markus Jackson and Lesley-Ann Dean perform in a Black History Month presentation at the college's East York campus on Feb. 24. (Right) Roy Tugbang delivers a heartfelt version of 'A Change is Gonna Come' by Sam Cooke.

Black History Month ends on a high note

By YVANO WICKHAM-EDWARDS
The Observer

Black History Month went out on a high note — literally — at Centennial College's East York campus.

The Story Arts Centre on Carlaw Avenue featured an ambitious agenda of observances throughout February, all meant to heighten awareness of the challenges and achievements among black Canadians. They were open to students, staff and members of the public.

The celebration culminated at the end of the month with two performances by students in the college's Music Industry Arts and Performance (MIAP) program, which is headquartered at the Carlaw campus.

Led by second-year music student Natalie Morris, they performed a two-part series of songs called 'Still I Rise.' These interpreted the struggles of black people throughout the course of history into music. The first part depicted the early stages of that struggle, from the days of slavery to the era of Martin Luther King and the civil rights battles of the 1960s.

One of the songs in that first five-song set was called 'Wade in the Water.' Morris said the motivation behind that song was to highlight the struggles of black people escaping their conditions.

"People think of it just as a normal Negro spiritual," Morris said. "But it's a song that's helping to lead slaves into the free land."

But she added that the song was also a warning… literally.

"When it was sung, it was a warning to the slaves that were running away that the slave-catchers were on their tails, and they should go into the water so that they don't get caught and that the scent doesn't catch on," Morris said. "It was easier to get to freedom."

Part 2 of Still I Rise, Morris explained, was a bit more modern in motif: "A little bit about reggae, rap and hip-hop."

She added that its artistic goal was to "shine some light on the systematic and mental oppression that we (black people) go through" to this day.

Local students discover the beauty of engineering

By NICOLE REIS
The Observer

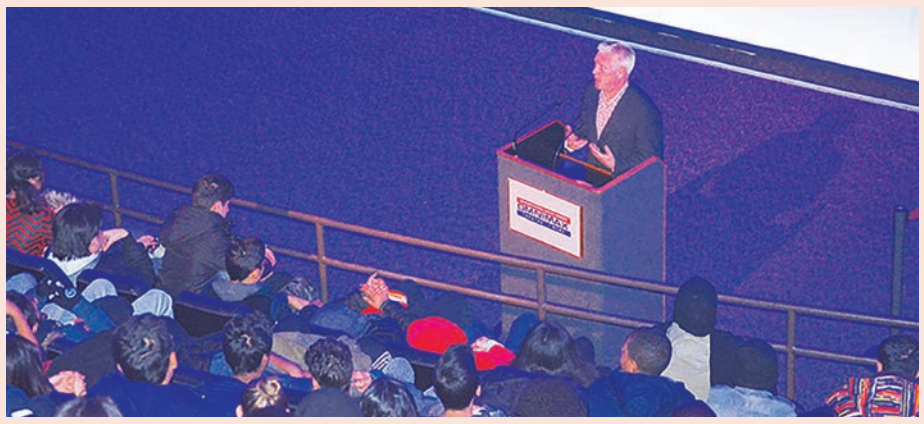
Priscilla Daniel sat in a large meeting area at the Ontario Science Centre. She just had an unexpected movie experience.

"I thought we were just going to watch a movie," she said, "but it was more than a movie. This was an experience."

Shronak Datta saw the same movie. It explored an unusual aspect of engineering.

"Engineering is often too closely associated with economics," he said. "The movie focused away from that and focused on how engineering is a method of problem-solving in society. That really resonated with me."

The two 17 year olds both attend the Ontario Science Centre's Science School. They had just viewed the IMAX film 'Dream Big: Engineering Our World,' a 40-minute film that explores the possibility of engineering by using nature as inspiration for innovation. Daniel and Datta are among 235 elementary and high school students who viewed the Science Centre premiere of the film — which has now joined a rotating slate of IMAX movies running through the spring.



Nicole Reis /// The Observer

Film creator and engineer Steve Burrows shares his passion for science with students in grades 7-12 at the Ontario Science Centre.

"I felt like I just witnessed the beauty of engineering products and how innovation is really rooted in simple solutions," Daniel said.

At the premiere, film creator and engineer Steve Burrows spoke to grade 7-12 students from the Ontario Science Centre Science School, Don Mills Collegiate Institute and Valley Park Middle School.

He echoed Priscilla Daniel's perception of science.

"Currently, one of the biggest things that is inspiring engineers is nature," he said. "We're finding that nature solves problems."

Burrows used an example of designing buildings similar to the way termites build their mounds. Inside, the mound is cooler than outside, and the film shows buildings engineered to mimic the same properties.

"Every time we examine nature, we learn something new," he said.

For the young to be successful engineers, Burrows noted a change in his field. He suggested that creative designers don't have to be degreed engineers. He said he has a team of psychologists, biologists, artists and people who study plants and animals on his design team.

Daniel said she is grateful to be at the Science School because every day is a surprise to her.

"I felt like I just travelled the world," she said. "The whole IMAX experience really puts you there."

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NEIGHBOURLY NEWS

Highlights from the pages of the East York Observer.
Wednesdays at 8:30 a.m. and Fridays at 4 p.m.
On CJRU/AM 1280.

Farheen Sikander /// The Observer

Wendy Breau (right), organizer and founder of the East York chapter of 100 Women Who Care, speaks to members of the organization on Feb. 28. With the help of the East York group of women, the organization raises funds for community organizations in Toronto.

Charity begins at home for E.Y. women

100 Women Who Care group aims to raise $40,000 for community

By FARHEEN SIKANDER
The Observer

They haven't yet achieved the "100" part. But they've shown that they are indeed "Women Who Care."

On Feb. 28, the Danforth's Globe Bistro hosted a meeting of the East York chapter of a unique group called 100 Women Who Care.

"I founded this chapter in August of 2013," said Wendy Breau, the organizer of the meeting. "We started off me and a friend." She used to be a member of the downtown chapter, but the location wasn't convenient for her.

The website for 100 Women Who Care Toronto describes the idea behind the initiative:

"Each member commits to donating $100 per meeting, four times a year.… Any member who has signed a commitment form and who is current with her donations may… nominate an organization for consideration at a meeting. The nominating members of three randomly selected organizations will make a five-minute presentation about the organization to the group and a Q&A session will follow. Each member who has signed a commitment form and who is current with her donations may vote (by ballot) for one of the three organizations. Each member will write a cheque for $100 to the organization receiving the most votes."

"I said, 'the east end could support this,'" Breau said. "There's enough charity work and organizations based in the east end that I bet we could support our own chapter." She spoke to the Toronto-Downtown organizers and they agreed Breau could start an East York chapter.

The first meeting consisted of two members: Breau and her friend.

"We started in August. It was a terrible time to start something new, because everyone is away on vacation. But we stuck with it, and we've been building and building every meeting ever since," Breau said.

The East York group's goal is to raise $40,000 over the course of four meetings held during the year. The meetings are scrupulously held to an hour in length.

Becka Soyka has been an active member since 2015. She's pitched three times and her proposals have won twice (including at February's meeting).

The first time she won, she pitched a charity that she was working for at the time. And at the most recent meeting, she pitched for Dr. Jay's Children's Grief Centre, where she currently works. The centre provides grief counselling for children who are dealing with the death or terminal illness of a family member.

"We operate on a million dollars every year, and we don't get any government funding," explained Soyka, "so we rely on things like this to keep us afloat."

Also pitched were Counterpoint Community Orchestra and Children's Book Bank — Readers to Leaders. There were 40 attendees and 34 votes (plus some late cheques and online donations from members who couldn't attend).

"Four meetings. Four hours. Huge difference," Soyka said.

The format of each meeting — and in particular, the counting of votes — allows for guest speakers, and at this meeting, the speaker was Toronto-Danforth Liberal MP Julie Dabrusin.

"East York is a very tight community, engaged community and very generous community, and that's what you see tonight," Dabrusin said. "It's women who're looking out for the community and looking out for each other."

The proverbial bottom line for this meeting was $3,400. Breau and her team haven't reached their goal of $40,000 yet. But they're sure they will.

Titanic rises again, in professor's book on Marconi

Author visits Ontario Science Centre to promote book on the inventor of radio who had Canadian connection

By BAMBANG SADEWO
The Observer

The year was 1912. On April 15, the sinking RMS Titanic sent out distress signals received by nearby ships. While more than 1,500 died in the sinking, during the next few hours on the North Atlantic rescue ships picked up more than 700 survivors. Marc Raboy believes there was an upside to the disaster.

"(It) really opened the imagination to the importance of wireless communication," he said.

He credits wireless radio inventor Guglielmo Marconi.

"The world would never be the same again," Raboy said. "We now had the capacity to do long-distance communication."

On March 4, Raboy, author and professor at McGill University, spoke to an audience at the Ontario Science Centre on Don Mills Road. The event included a presentation of Raboy's book 'Marconi: The Man Who Networked the World.'

While introducing Raboy and his biography of Marconi, Kevin von Appen, director of science communication at the centre, praised Marconi's influence and "dominance" in the area of wireless communication. More than just an inventor, he was also a venerable scientist and entrepreneur, he said.

Raboy, who teaches communication studies, said Marconi was a well-known figure across the globe.

"He was followed by paparazzi wherever he went," he said.

The McGill professor added that the media's fascination with the inventor was justified. In 1901, Marconi successfully sent a wireless signal across the Atlantic, from the west coast of England to St. John's, N.L.

Before Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, and Mark Zuckerberg, there was Guglielmo Marconi.

Bambang Sadewo /// The Observer

Marc Raboy (left) presents "Marconi: The Man Who Networked The World" at the Ontario Science Centre.

EDITORIALS

Mind the (gap)s

If 2017 real estate sales slow, the City of Toronto faces a day of reckoning that threatens the current level of public services in East York. Why?

The city's Municipal Land Transfer Tax (MLTT) is a tax on the sale of property and assumes a roaring real estate market will deliver an all-time high of about $715 million to city coffers.

But plan on budget gaps if the real estate market slows… or tanks.

That's why published comments, like those of Bank of Montreal chief economist Doug Porter, are worrying. Porter has said that Toronto is in a "housing bubble" market.

Even if 2016's record MLTT $640 million were matched this year, city staff will have to scramble to make painful cuts to the 2017 budget — and that likely mean cuts to services.

Senior city staff wisely recommended that $40 million of $715 million in expected MLTT revenue be put in the capital budget. If there were a shortfall in the operating budget, some or all of these funds could be transferred from the capital budget to cover gaps in operating funds.

City manager Peter Wallace and chief financial officer Rob Rossini cautioned about reliance on the MLTT to help cover operating costs, calling it a "significant amount of revenue risk."

Cut the fat? Mayor Rob Ford pushed for lean operations. Mayor Tory asked all departments to offer up 2.6-per-cent cuts for this year's budget. If there are budget shortfalls, would East York residents support the city making even more cuts that could impact local services?

Consultant KPMG's 2016 report to the city described 12 new revenue options. Will the mayor and councillors revisit those options? Like raise Toronto's relatively low property taxes? (Councillor Gordon Perks lost on a 10-32 council vote for raising property taxes an average of $62.)

Staff will report the first three months of MLTT revenue to the executive committee this May.

The leadership of the mayor and our councillors is needed. They should explain to East York residents what their backup plan will be to avert a budget crisis this year or next, if MLTT revenues fall short of expectations. Will they cut further or heed senior staff calls for more reliable revenue sources?

~ Neil Powers

Welcome, guests

Ask a sample of East Yorkers what they think of Airbnb and, like other Torontonians, they'll probably divide into two camps: The people who have used it and love it… and the people who have experienced or heard about some of the abuses and hate it.

But let's not allow the controversy around Airbnb's core business — as an Internet matchmaker between people who want to rent living space — sway us when it comes to a new program it's started that could be a real boost to the Danforth and other tourist districts.

This new program connects travellers to "expert" hosts that will guide people through an area's landmarks, diversions, restaurants and bars, etc.

It has already been used in 13 other cities, but now it is being started up in Toronto — and the Danforth is one of the target areas. So visitors to Canada's largest city will now be able to get foodie tours through Greektown… which happily is situated on East York's doorstep.

Granted: Airbnb has been encountering issues around things like homeowners turning their houses or condo units into virtual hotel rooms — and renters abusing the property (and the neighbours).

Sometimes it comes across as just another variation of strangers hooking up on the Internet. And as a result, many people don't trust the concept. Similarly, with this new program, people may worry about trusting arrangements for a stranger for a tour or an "expert" experience (even though Airbnb says it will ensure that all experts undergo background checks).

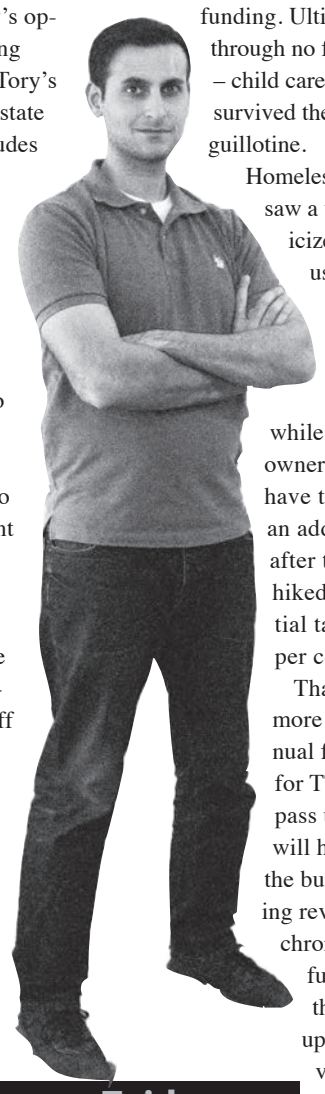
But this new addition to the Airbnb app is a great way of allowing people to get a more localized perspective on the city they are visiting. And that promises to be beneficial for areas like Greektown. After all, despite its many virtues, the Danforth is slightly off the tourist-beaten path. But locals know it well… and will hopefully share their knowledge with visitors to Toronto. Hopefully they'll impart a more authentic feel for the city, encourage guests to meet down-to-earth Torontonians and show off community features outside the downtown core — like the Don Valley and Evergreen Brick Works and the Aga Khan Museum, etc. Also significantly, they'll bring guests to neighbourhoods like ours to eat at our restaurants and drink in our bars and buy in our shops.

So this could be financially beneficial; it will be an opportunity for East York (and Little Italy and Chinatown and Toronto's other colourful corners) to receive more attention (and revenue) from tourists.

~ Melissa Stephenson

COLUMNS

Let's get progressive



Zaid Noorsumar

Torontonians can count on two certainties: death and Mayor Tory's opposition to raising property taxes. Tory's refrain on real estate taxes often includes a reference to the hardships of first-time homebuyers and senior citizens, whom the kind mayor does not want to burden.

With the city needing a way to balance its recent budget without that lucrative revenue stream, Tory's executive committee commanded city staff to find ways to reduce funding for all departments by 2.6 per cent.

The mayor's neoliberal dream of a leaner government meant that public transit, childcare and homeless shelters were among the services slated for decreased funding. Ultimately – through no fault of Tory – child care and TTC survived the budgetary guillotine.

Homeless shelters saw a widely criticized cut while user fees for recreational programs went up.

Meanwhile, poor homeowners on average have to shell out an additional $90 after the council hiked up residential taxes by 3.29 per cent.

That's about $30 more than the annual fare increase for TTC Metropass users, who will have to bear the burden of raising revenue for a chronically underfunded agency that will barely upgrade its service.

Such patently unfair distribution of costs is apparently logical in the fantastical world inhabited by Tory.

Many transit users are likely to be poorer than the average homeowner, whose mean household income is twice as much as those of renters.

The latter are already disadvantaged, with 43.5 per cent spending more on rent than is considered manageable. They, however, don't seem to find currency with the mayor.

Though some homeowners may indeed be living precariously, they are not in the same pool as those who reside in $2-million homes and earn more than the $115,000 average income of a Toronto property-owning household.

There may indeed be senior citizens and first-time buyers who face financial constraints, but there are also people who own multiple properties and make a windfall on Airbnb.

Why then are all homeowners lumped in the same category?

Clearly, a more progressive tax regime can be applied to generate more revenue from those who profit off their good fortune.

Take the time to smile

Lindsay Pinter

It was a regular Monday evening in East York as I waited for my bus to take me home from school.

I was forced to avert my attention from the game of Sudoku that I was playing on my phone when the 185 Express rolled up.

As I climbed onto the bus, I was met with a smiling driver who proceeded to say, "Good evening! Lovely night isn't it?"

Replying with a short "Hello," I found myself smiling as I took my seat. The positivity and kindness from this bus driver — whose name, forgive me, I neglected to ask — was infectious.

Declaring that she was four minutes ahead of schedule, she stopped at every waiting person along the way to pick them up… even at stops that were not express.

She greeted every person with a "Hi! How was your day today?" and made sure to tell every person exiting the vehicle to have a great week.

Positivity and kindness are traits that can get lost in busy schedules. Those same busy schedules result in long days that leave you tired, stressed, and impatient to get home.

Soon enough, smiling as you pass a stranger on the sidewalk gets replaced with hurriedly shuffling to your next destination with your head down and your mind elsewhere.

A simple 'thank you' to the Tim Horton's employee who just made your coffee gets replaced with silence as you grab your beverage and quickly move to the next item on your to-do list.

Sometimes people don't have time to strike up a conversation with a stranger or say hello to everyone who walks by, and I get that.

But breaking out of your routine and getting out of your own head can be a very good thing.

After all, it doesn't take much to brighten someone's day. Ask any of the 30 smiling bus passengers on the 185.

The East York OBSERVER

CENTENNIAL COLLEGE

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Taking off into the wild blue yonder

Courtesy of the City of Toronto Archives

The Observer continues its look back on East York history through photographs from the City of Toronto Archives. Both of these pictures were taken at the storied Leaside Aerodrome, which operated between 1917 and 1931 as a hub for early airborne adventurers and visionaries. The photo on the left was taken 94 years ago this coming Sunday, on March 19, 1923, and projects some of the romance of aviation then — with a pilot in his long fur coat and an aerial cameraman (second from right) equipped for the flight. But the other picture, taken five years later at Leaside, suggests the growing practicality of aviation. This was the arrival of Canada's first regularly scheduled air express flight, in 1928. (One parcel is addressed to ''T. Eaton Co., Toronto, Canada.'') The Leaside Aerodrome had already established its credentials in this kind of venture; 10 years earlier, in 1918, Leaside was the terminus for Canada's first experimental airmail flight (with a bag of letters from Montreal — and refueling stops in Kingston and Deseronto).

Trees need space to grow and flourish, expert says

By KRISTEN DOOPAN
The Observer

Leaside is more than just a residential neighbourhood. It is home to one of the most eclectic treescapes in the city, from Norway Maples to a variety of evergreens… and everything in between.

But Stephen Smith, owner of Urban Forest Associates Inc., says he's concerned for the future of the trees in Leaside — and throughout East York and in urban settings generally — because of the high demand for commercial space.

"We are in the peak of construction season and our trees are suffering," he said at last month's meeting of the Leaside Garden Society.

Some industrial areas are being renovated into retail complexes, which means that the trees must be removed in order for the space to be used. This is also often the case for older homes that are being rebuilt or replaced.

The more urbanized cities get, Smith said, the harder it is for trees to grow to biological maturity. The land they need to flourish keeps getting smaller and smaller.

"Trees need space to grow, but we want to occupy this space for commercial use," he said.

Smith said his company works closely with homeowners, businesses and municipalities to try to preserve trees. He also works on construction sites to try to ensure that trees on-site are not harmed or obstructed.

Kristen Doopan /// The Observer

Stephen Smith talked trees at last month's meeting of the Leaside Garden Society.

"The construction era will never fade, especially in a commercial-driven city like Toronto," Smith said. "I ensure that the trees stay intact and the construction workers are adhering to the tree bylaws."

About 70 years ago, he said, various trees were planted around Leaside.

"Some of the trees that were planted years ago are coming to the end of their cycle," he explained. This means that some have to be cut down. He would like to see them replanted, but the space is in high demand.

"It creates a nature-versus-space narrative," he said. "Both are competing for land." So Smith urges Leaside residents to plant more trees.

Lawyer ready to take fight for French school to court

By ALEXA BATTLER
The Observer

The lawyer representing East York-area parents who want a French high school says he's getting ready to go to court on their behalf.

Constitutional lawyer Nicolas Rouleau, hired by the parents to represent them, says that if the Ontario government won't give them a French school, he'll go to the Supreme Court of Canada this spring.

Rouleau won a similar fight for a French school against the government of British Columbia in 2015.

At a recent meeting in East York, he told parents who want the school that they're entitled to it as a matter of equal treatment.

That meeting was held at the Kaza Family Centre, 1386 Danforth Ave. A playful suggestion of a Francophone march down Danforth Avenue was met with laughter — but some of the attendees seemed to acknowledge that it could eventually come to that.

After all, nothing they have done in the past 10 years has worked.

"We are rights-holders, there are enough students here and the government must put a school in this area," said Lianne Doucet, an organizer with the group.

Parents overflowed the meeting to discuss suing the government of Ontario — their next step in the decade-long fight for a French high school in Toronto's east end.

"It is a rallying cry," Doucet said of the meeting.

The Ministry of Education has so far refused the parents' lobbying to put a French high school in Toronto's east end. Francophone parents eventually formed "la Coalition de Parents pour une Ecole Secondaire de Quartier," known as Coalition PESQ for short.

This fight is for "a school that's accessible, within reason, and a school that has facilities that anglophone students take for granted," Rouleau said.

Section 23 of the Canadian Charter promises access to French education outside of Quebec. This education must be equal to what is offered in English.

Rouleau told the crowd that no French high school is within a reasonable distance, and that even those distant schools are not equal to what English students can expect.

This is the case with Collège Français at Carlton Avenue and Jarvis Street, a converted media building without many of the expected elements of a high school — like a field or an auditorium.

"When students imagine what high school might be like, in their understanding of it, that does not fit it at all," said Sylvia Michelizza, who has three children in French primary school. "I believe that (Collège Français) is probably a deterrent to students continuing French language education."

Speakers feared losing the community due to limited services.

The ministry has begun the process of constructing a new Catholic French high school — but in Scarborough. The school will be near Eglinton Avenue and McCowan Road. Some students would face commutes of over an hour to reach it.

Rouleau reminded the crowd that his similar case in Vancouver took two and a half years to settle. But he added that, should this case go to trial, he will push for quick action.

East York to get its own hall of fame

By ZIA ZARAWAR
The Observer

Long-time East York activist Justin Van Dette believes that an East York Hall of Fame will help celebrate community leaders.

Van Dette, a member of the Kiwanis Club of East York, offered his vision for a community hall of fame at a dinner meeting of the KCEY at Thorncliffe Park on Feb. 15.

"I expect the East York Hall of Fame to be an organization to recognize those individuals (who) have a special relationship with our community," he said, adding that such recognition would enrich the history of East York for future generations by honouring past and present residents who have excelled in sports, politics, media and entertainment, for example.

VAN DETTE

"Some of the most prominent and well-recognized East Yorkers have nothing named after them in our community," he said.

Van Dette said he has informed Mayor John Tory and Toronto City Council that he envisions a hall of fame wall on the parkland outside the East York Civic Centre.

Kiwanis Club of East York member and past-president Ron Derbyshire said the hall is a worthwhile project and added that too many famous East Yorkers have been pushed aside and forgotten about.

"It would be great for people to walk by the wall at the East York Civic Centre and recognize the fact these people were born, raised and worked in East York," he said.

To be nominated for the EYHF, Van Dette said a candidate must have been born or have lived, been educated, played sports, worked or volunteered within the former borough of East York's boundaries. He hopes to have five nominees each year, including two inductions to the hall of fame, one recipient of the traditional "East York Bulldog" award and two young people — one male and one female.

He said the induction ceremony would be held just before the summer at the East York Civic Centre.

Van Dette believes three of East York's former mayors — True Davidson, Willis Blair and Alan Redway — should be considered when the nominations begin, and later mayors David Johnson and Michael Prue as well.

Van Dette said he formed an exploratory committee for his initiative in November of 2015. It has representatives from various grassroots organizations, including from Thorncliffe Park, the Danforth-Donlands community and church groups.

"(The committee) is a very clear reflection of our diversity," he said.

Michael Young, the former president of KCEY, endorsed Van Dette's plan. He applauded the existence of the separate Agnes Macphail Award as recognizing East York residents who are still living, but said those from the past are not included.

Lea Sheffield/// The Observer

They call him mellow cello

Milena Rabu performs a piece on the cello during the 2017 East York Music Festival. It was held at Westminster Presbyterian Church on March 4 and featured local music students.

Giving back 'addictive,' activist says

Cont'd. from page 1

as "The Shaker," for the way he likes to rattle cages.

The MC of the night was Ken Reid of Sportsnet. While introducing the roastee, Reid showed the crowd a long list of over 25 community organizations — and explained that this was page one of two of Van Dette's community service resume.

For his part, Van Dette recalled his "rebellious" high school days, when he would skip classes to attend community meetings at the East York Civic Centre.

"To me, it's very addictive to give back and make a difference," Van Dette said in response to the various jokes about his nearly insane level of community involvement.

The most popular cheap shots centred around Van Dette's friendliness with both Conservatives and Liberals, his skinny physique and its inability to move gracefully, his relentless calling of people to promote events or solicit contributions to a cause, and his seemingly insane love of the Montreal Canadiens (despite living in the city of the Leafs).

Don Cherry couldn't attend the event, but instead pre-recorded a video capturing his love of Van Dette and his disapproval of the subject's hockey loyalty.

Aside from all of the banter and wit, everyone who stood up to the mic had an equal amount of material that spoke to the brilliance of Van Dette's character.

"There has been no more loyal supporter than Justin," said John Tory (whose campaign Van Dette worked on). "He is a volunteer extraordinaire and there is no event honouring Justin that I wouldn't attend."

Julian Fantino got a laugh borrowing from Donald Trump; Fantino said Van Dette is trying to "make East York great again." But after the laughter and applause faded, he voiced his serious sentiments to Van Dette.

"Justin has incredible energy, tremendous energy that makes him who he is," Fantino said.

"This is leadership, people."

Kathleen Wynne said she drew close to Van Dette through his endless activism. She saw him volunteering, contributing and campaigning everywhere she went in Toronto. Wynne said she loves Justin's infectious charisma and respects how much he cares for his city.

"Justin gives to the community all the time. Everywhere I go, I see him volunteering," Wynne said. "He is just a terrific community activist and guy. He really walks the walk."

Van Dette responded: "When people ask me where I'm from, I always say East York. It's a strong, vibrant community within our great city."

Although the event was in the spirit of comedy, the cause was more serious. Proceeds from the night went to the AIDS Committee of Toronto, an organization that Van Dette advocates for. During his speech, Van Dette read out the cost of AIDS medications for someone without a drug plan: $1,461.60 per month.

"I think it needs to be on the public agenda," Van Dette said to the crowd — no longer laughing.

The event raised $250,000 for the AIDS committee, surpassing expectations.

Thorncliffe residents concerned by episodes of violence

Cont'd. from page 1

a "wonderful young man" who was a leader for youth in the community.

Ahmed Hussein is the executive director of the Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office and he helped organize the vigil. After residents stood for a moment of silence, Hussein was passed a megaphone.

"I encourage you to get the resources available to you," Hussein said. "Talk to each other because violence won't solve anything. It will just hurt (more) people."

Also in attendance was Don Valley West MP Robert Oliphant, who walked around greeting residents and organizers. Despite the cold and windy weather, Oliphant said it was important to reassure residents.

"I wanted to listen to the community to see what their concerns are and what their worries are," Oliphant said, "but also to remind them what a safe place Thorncliffe Park is, so they can enjoy this part of the city."

Oliphant attributed crime in Thorncliffe Park to the economic challenges facing the area. A 2010 study of the neighbourhood called it Canada's most heavily populated immigrant community and described serious poverty and overcrowding. The city has prioritized Thorncliffe as a "neighbourhood improvement area."

"There are concerns of kids having too much free time on their hands," Oliphant said at the vigil. "So if we keep people busy and engaged then this will be a healthier and safer community."