



Premier faces tough talk from tenants

Thorncliffe residents complain about rats and rent increases

By ZIA ZARAWAR
The Observer

Tenants from the Thorncliffe Park neighbourhood gave Kathleen Wynne a rough ride last week during a town hall consultation held at Thorncliffe Park Public School.

The residents raised multiple complaints about their landlords and accused the provincial and municipal governments of not trying to bring management of apartment buildings under control. Wynne is the MPP for their riding, Don Valley West — as well as premier of the province.

About 150 people attended the meeting. Some residents complained about having rats and cockroaches in their apartments. Others said their landlords are not willing to renovate the apartments.

Still more complained about outdated elevators, overcrowding and large rent increases. Those increases are a practical challenge for residents of an area that has long faced serious economic

hurdles.

A report released just this past November puts the child poverty rate in Thorncliffe Park at 52 per cent — 10 times the rate in the adjoining Leaside neighbourhood, just a few blocks away.

Sadaqat Mohmand has been a resident of the neighbourhood for the last five years, living in one of the buildings along Thorncliffe Park Drive. He said he has seen cockroaches crawl out of aged cabinets. He said he has twice asked building management in writing to get rid of the bugs but he has so far failed to get a reply back.

“In the last year or so I have used four different infestation sprays on my own to get rid of it,” Mohmand said.

Abbas Kolia, the president of the Thorncliffe Park Tenants Association (TPTA), said one of the major issues for tenants is ongoing increases in rent when landlords don't provide corresponding maintenance in the buildings.

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Zia Zarawar /// The Observer

Masood Alam addresses the Don Valley West MPP and Ontario premier, Kathleen Wynne, on behalf of the Morguard Apartment Tenants Association at last week's meeting in Thorncliffe Park.

■ POLITICS

Local protesters rally behind Women's March

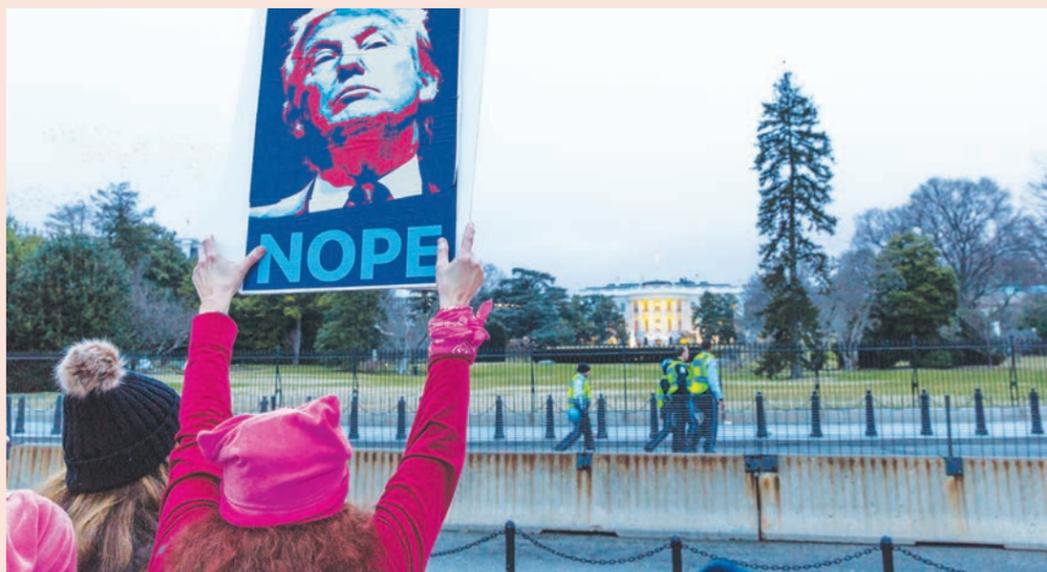
Anti-Trump activists trek to Washington for massive protest

By MICHAEL LINENNEN
The Observer

Delegations of East Yorkers joined the millions of people who marched around the world on Saturday in protest against the inauguration of U.S. President Donald Trump — and especially his behaviour toward women.

Some were among the estimated 60,000 who walked from Queen's Park to the U.S. consulate on University Avenue and then Nathan Phillips Square.

Others boarded buses or otherwise made their way to the U.S. capital to participate in the biggest anti-Trump rally of them all: estimated by U.S. media to have involved somewhere between about half-a-million and 700,000



Michael Linennen /// The Observer

Protesters taking part in the Women's March on Washington hold anti-Trump signs in view of the White House. Some East Yorkers made the trip to D.C. to join the protest.

people, larger than the crowd that assembled for the new president's inaugural the previous day.

Among the East Yorkers who travelled to Washington was Jamie

Smith. He and his mother took the 12-hour bus trip from Toronto to D.C. to stand in solidarity with Americans angry about the Trump presidency.

Different groups and communities came together to protest against President Trump's statements and actions related to the rights of women, the LGBTQ community,

immigrants, Muslims and others.

“It's a disaster. I mean there hasn't been such a bad president since Andrew Jackson. There's every indication he'll do terrible things incompetently,” Smith said. “There might be some saving grace, but the Republicans are behind him with his atrocious vice-president, who's worse than he is. Because the vice-president is acceptable to that intensely poor-hating misogynistic, homophobic Senate and Congress.”

Smith said he hopes that more Americans will become more active in political discussion — and that they will elect better representatives in the mid-term elections two years from now... and beyond. But after the march, he also said he's worried that the opposition to Trump isn't focused enough to make an actual difference at the polls. He said that some of the D.C. protesters were outside the

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POLICE & FIRE

Armed men rob pot store

The Green Leaf, a marijuana dispensary at 2145 Danforth Ave., was robbed on Jan. 14. Police say three men, one of them armed, ordered the employees to the floor and pistol-whipped one of them. They say the gun was fired once, but nobody was hit. The robbers left with cash and marijuana. Police later held a news conference to say they're concerned about the number of robberies of marijuana dispensaries — more than a dozen since June.

Teen charged in stabbing

A 16-year-old boy has been arrested in connection with a stabbing that took place on Jan. 18 in the vicinity of Coxwell Avenue and Plains Road. Two young men were fighting when one stabbed the other in the torso with a knife. The man was taken to hospital with life-threatening injuries. The suspect faces charges of both aggravated assault and assault with a weapon.

Banks robbed

Police are looking for a man who robbed the Bank of Montreal at Danforth and Ferrier avenues on Tuesday just before noon. It's the second bank robbery in less than a month in the neighbourhood. Gustav Khan, 52, of Toronto was in court on Jan. 11 in connection with a lunchtime robbery of the Bank of Nova Scotia branch at Pape and Danforth on Dec. 30.

~ Ahmed-Zahi Hagar

Thief rattles neighbourhood

Police dogs called in, school put on hold-and-secure as suspect tries to evade arrest

By YVANO WICKHAM and TIARA CHUTKHAN
The Observer

What seemed like a simple shoplifting along the Danforth last week rapidly escalated into a significant incident — with a major police response and a neighbourhood school being put on hold-and-secure.

Toronto police say that a man stole multiple bottles from the LCBO on Danforth Avenue near Playter Boulevard on the afternoon of Jan. 16.

A police spokesman said the man fled through backstreets and backyards in the area — and even changed his appearance when he saw that police were responding.

Several police cars converged on the scene, along with Toronto Police Dog Services. Police say they eventually cornered a suspect in a parking lot across from the Pape subway station.

They say that an officer was assaulted in a scuffle with the suspect, but no one was injured in the arrest. Police say they confiscated a small knife.

Jackman Avenue Junior Public School was briefly placed in “hold and secure”



Yvano Wickham // Toronto Observer

Officers place the suspect in a police car after arresting him across from the Pape TTC station on Jan. 16.

status during the incident. That means the school carried on business as usual inside, but the outer doors were locked and nobody was allowed in or out.

Anyone with information on the in-

cident is asked to call Crime Stoppers anonymously at 416-222-TIPS (8477), online at www.222tips.com, or text TOR and your message to CRIMES (274637).

COMMUNITY

Growing flowers in the dead of winter

Avid gardener shares her passion for cold-weather planting with members of local garden society

By MICHAEL LINENNEN
The Observer

For Marion Jarvie, gardening is an art form. She loves putting everything together — and not only are the results attractive to her, but the product is pleasing to other people nearby.

“It’s amazing when a neighbour copies from another,” she told a meeting of the Leaside Gardening Society last week. “Before you know it, the whole tone of the (neighbourhood) starts to improve. It’s great, that sort of thing. It goes on.”

Jarvie is a passionate gardener in her late 70s. She was invited to the garden society get-together at the Leaside library branch on Jan. 12 to share her experience in planting hellebores in cold weather.

“Many people are amazed at how many plants are in bloom at the end of April,” Jarvie said. “Don’t you all want to extend your gardening season? And it’s not all about tulips.”

Hellebores originated in Yugoslavia. They are reverse-season plants, meaning people can plant them in early spring — and they will bloom from October throughout winter, right up until March.

“They come from low-scrub areas in the mountains: the mountain area where there are still green trees and shrubs. They get winter sun and a little bit of summer shade,” Jarvie said.

“These are plants that tolerate really



Photo courtesy of Marion Jarvie

Hellebores niger, the Christmas rose, blooms from October until March.

cold weather.”

Just 40 years ago, hellebores were unheard of in Toronto. Jarvie said greenhouses and garden stores here didn’t want to take a chance on a plant that they thought had little chance of survival — until somebody proved otherwise.

“The industry is all about money, and not about beautifying plants,” Jarvie said, “but it’s way better now than it use to be.... Many plants are developed at Harvard that are just about the same temperature-climate as we are.”

Unfortunately, she added, a challenge gardeners now face is the climate change

— where the temperature is rising and the weather is becoming more and more unstable.

“The biggest danger is the drought in summertime. I mean, just look around at the park, and you will find the trees are dying. Toronto is replacing trees all over. It’s very serious. We got to look at that,” Jarvie said.

“I don’t think I could have grown my garden without constant watering last year.”

Jarvie’s advice if you want to start to do some gardening in your backyard? Make sure to get some really good soil.

WHAT'S UP IN E.Y.

Spinning for at-risk youth

The fifth annual Peer Project Spin-A-Thon will take place at Energia Athletics, 702 Pape Ave., tomorrow, Jan. 28, from noon until midnight. This is a fundraiser for the mentoring program, which matches positive role models aged 16-29 with newcomers and at-risk youth aged 6-15. At present, 400 kids are waiting to be matched with a mentor. For more information, call Edward Carlson at 416-932-1919 or email ecarlson@yay.org

Put on your dancing shoes

Want to dance, but don’t feel comfortable because you’re just a beginner? Say no more, because at 310 Danforth Ave., free beginner lessons for Scottish Country Dance will be offered on Thursday, Feb. 2, from 7:30 until 9:30 p.m. You don’t even need to bring a partner (unless you want to). For more information, visit the website www.dancescot-tish.ca

Kosher meals delivered

Kosher Meals on Wheels (KMOW) drivers are needed for two hours of deliveries Monday through Friday mornings. Drivers will be assisting seniors and people with disabilities who find it difficult to acquire meals. For more information, contact the Circle of Care Volunteer Department at volunteer@circleofcare.com or telephone them at 416-635-2900, ext. 375.

~ Mishaal Jamil

Aboriginal program focuses on healing

Smudge ceremonies and family support meetings part of program's focus

By **JODY ANDERSON**
The Observer

Every weekday morning, Little Brown Bear leads the smudge ceremony for the Aboriginal Healing Program, run in partnership with East York's Michael Garron Hospital.

First, they smudge the animals drawn on the walls to welcome them into the circle. Then they smudge the chairs to open the space. The prayer room's interior design is structured in accordance to the rituals of the Medicine Wheel. Everything moves clockwise and the walls are dedicated to the four sacred medicines: sweet grass, sage, cedar and tobacco — all to carry their prayers to the Creator.

Little Brown Bear took over the Aboriginal Healing Program about five years ago and has completely revamped it. Before his arrival, the program was a First Nations-only rehabilitation centre that did not have the smudge ceremonies, family support meetings and other culturally appropriate teachings that Little Brown Bear now offers.

Since the program's redevelopment, six families have been reunited with their loved ones, some of whom had been in foster care.

"The program (before) didn't offer a lot of what we offer now," Little Brown Bear said in an interview. "We do a lot of stuff with building healthy relationships, grief and loss and anger release, not anger management. Anger management is like having a bank ac-



Jody Anderson // The Observer

Matt Horizon is a participant in the revamped Aboriginal Healing Program that is run in partnership with East York's Michael Garron Hospital.

count, wanting to manage your account from one to another. You need to learn how to release it."

You can't take pictures of the animals in the prayer room, but you can take pictures of the community members who come there. Nicki Burlton and Matt Horizon both welcomed a reporter to do so. Little Brown Bear acknowledged that sometimes people don't come, but he understands. There are times when members relapse or go through moments of indecision.

Regardless, the program is open to

their return and has every intention of helping members on their healing journeys. Horizon admits that's one of the reasons why he keeps coming back. The program is his anchor.

"This is one of the only programs I can go to (that) if I slip up, I know that I'll be welcome. A lot of the other social programs, if you make a mistake, send you out," he said.

This is the fifth program that Horizon has joined. The Toronto East Health Network referred him to this one. He's been a part of the Aborigi-

nal Healing Program since September and has had a couple hiatuses but has always felt welcomed back. Horizon grew up in the city and said he didn't know a lot about his heritage growing up. Now he wants to learn more about where he comes from and how it can help him become a better person.

"There's always motivation to get better (and) to get back on the right path, because I knew I could always come back here," he said. "When I'm out in the wind, I always know that I can come back here. It's motivation

to get sober and clean and know that I have a place to come during the day that's safe (and) be with my own people."

The Aboriginal Healing Program is an offsite partnership with Michael Garron Hospital, the former Toronto East General. Community members are referred to the program mainly by correctional services and hospitals. Before it was the Aboriginal Healing Program it was the Aboriginal Withdrawal Day Program.

Little Brown Bear changed the name to emphasize the program's healing purposes and encourage a combination of cultural and modern practices.

"The goal is to provide the information so that people can take that information and they can help themselves," Little Brown Bear said. "People don't care how much you know kid, they want to know how much you care."

Little Brown Bear is Ernest Matton's Native American name. He also has a cartoon name: Papa Smurf. It's no surprise that he has the same caring attitude as the fatherly animated character. He calls you 'kid' and teases you, but emits genuine concern for your well-being. He's transferred his familial qualities to the group that comes every morning.

At 9:30 a.m., after they've smudged the chairs and the animals, they stand in a prayer circle. Each person bathes themselves in the aromatic smoke made from the burning of the four sacred medicines. A reporter watches as they show how. Nicki offers words of encouragement. The unity of the group is visible when a member asks if the journalist is joining the family.

Sisters saving for a rainy day

By **KAITLYN SMITH**
The Observer

Gemma and Anna Postill went out for a walk and came back with a business.

A couple of months ago, these young East Yorkers opened Be The Vibe, a not-for-profit organization. The goal of 17-year-old Gemma and her 15-year-old sister, Anna, is to raise \$3,000 to buy a sustainable rain water system for a village in East Africa.

"Four hundred and sixty-eight lives exactly," Anna said. That's 468 people living in the village who will receive the barrel once the Postill sisters have enough to pay for it.

Gemma has been making jewelry since she was about eight years old. As a child, she liked to arrange things in order by their colour. Growing up, she developed her keen eye for creating bracelets, necklaces and earrings.

"It doesn't just help people for a day or for a week, it helps them for a lifetime," Gemma said about the rain barrel they're saving for.

Last year, Anna did missions work in South America and no-



Kaitlyn Smith // The Observer

Anna (left) and Gemma Postill hope to raise \$3,000 through Be The Vibe.

ticed subtle privileges she received compared to the locals she was helping. She believes it was unfair.

"I want to help up, not help down," Anna said.

From the website, setting up shop and networking, the sisters are an independent business — uncommon for youth their age. People are shocked at their ambition.

"I think a lot of people don't really see entrepreneurship for youth," Anna said. "Having us do it has opened doors for other people to view

it in a different way."

Aimee Esparaz, who stewards the girls' funds for the rain water system, said young people taking initiative inspires more acts of the same kind.

"It's rare for sure," said the Compassion Canada representative over the phone. "(Young people) have so much capacity to make the world better."

The Postill sisters have raised over \$800 for their rain water system. Once it's ready, Gemma and Anna hope to fly down and see their hard work blossom.

■ COMMUNITY

Budget may benefit tenants

By **ALI NAQVI**
The Observer

Last month's move to bolster protection for tenants is getting good reviews from East York's councillors.

Enactment of the new bylaw depends on money being allocated for enforcement through the upcoming budget process. But if the funding is approved, there'll be a dozen more staff doing inspections and enforcement. And the city will start monitoring conditions in any apartment building with more than nine units and two storeys.

For their part, landlords will have to have a plan for good repair of their building involving only licensed contractors — as well as a specific plan for pest control.

There could even be an apartment building ranking system, like the system that puts ratings in the windows of Toronto restaurants.

"I strongly support improving the inspections of apartment buildings," said Mary Fragedakis, the councillor for Ward 29/Toronto-Danforth, in an interview with the Observer.

Janet Davis, the councillor for Ward 31/Beaches-East York, called the bylaw "groundbreaking" in an interview with another publication.

"I personally go out on... audits of buildings in Ward 29," Fragedakis said. She acknowledged that "the budget

process has just started here at city hall, so whether we hire more inspectors... will ultimately be determined by that process."

But she added that the City of Toronto "should hire as many inspectors as needed to ensure that repairs are carried out in a

timely manner."

Fragedakis said that tenant groups and individual apartment dwellers "have asked during the recent

landlord licensing debates for a host of improvements to repair enforcement,

and this includes more inspectors to do more inspections and more enforcement actions."

The executive director of the Federation of Metro Tenants' Associations agrees that this development is a good one.

"Whether inspections are being done inefficiently or whether there simply are not enough inspectors is a matter up for debate, but there are currently something like 16 inspectors for 50,000 units," Geordie Dent said. "We think that more inspectors could help better serve that number of units."



■ DAVIS



■ FRAGEDAKIS

Politicians still waiting for electoral reform

Beaches-East York MP says reform likely won't happen by 2019 election

By RYAN ORLECKI
The Observer

The MP for Beaches-East York believes that electoral reform will not happen by the next federal election.

In 2015, following the election of Justin Trudeau as prime minister, the Liberal administration recommended a number of initiatives and ultimately legislation that would replace the "first-past-the-post" voting system in Canada.

In the wake of months of consultation with the public, some believe

such alternatives as proportional representation, a ranked balloting system and online voting will not be ready for the 2019 vote.

East York's Nathaniel Erskine-Smith says it may take longer. "The promise was to make 2015 the last election under first-past-the-post," the MP said, "and if it's hard to make the promise happen before 2019, we should still be committed to the promise in the long-term."

On Jan. 10, as part of the prime minister's cabinet shuffle, MP Karina Gould became minister of democratic institutions, including the electoral reform file.

Liz White, the leader of the Animal Protection Party of Canada — with headquarters on Broadview Av-



■ LIZ WHITE

enue, just outside East York's southwest corner—has her doubts about the government pledge for change.

"It's typical of big parties. When you're out you want it, and when

you're in, you don't," White said. "There is no hope in hell in a first-past-the-post system that (the Animal Protection Party) are going to elect anybody."

According to mycanadiandemocracy.ca, the Special Committee on Electoral Reform delivered a majority report for proportional representation; among other things, ERRE recommended either mixed member proportional or single transferable votes as preferred election methods.

White said that a proportional representative system would be beneficial to her party and other small and independent parties, particularly the method of single transferable vote.

"You can focus on specific geographical areas, and if you're a small

party, you don't have to run in 338 ridings," White said.

Erskine-Smith believes that having a variety of discourses in Parliament can be beneficial.

"If you have more representative voices in the house, it will ultimately lead to more progressive policies," he said.

Supporters of proportional representation of some kind, whether mixed member proportional or single transferable vote, believe it can benefit the discourse in Parliament, and give Canadian voters greater impact on national decision-making.

"The goal of electoral reform would be making our democracy more representative of Canadian voters," Erskine-Smith said.

■ COMMUNITY

Hotspot sparks funding ideas

Campaign urges people to think outside the box when it comes to plans for E.Y. cultural hotspot

By MISHAAL JAMIL
The Observer

The countdown is on to East York's designation as a "cultural hotspot," and city officials rallied members of the public at another meeting earlier this month to get organized for it.

The arts services branch of the city's Arts and Culture division will be promoting East York for its "arts, culture and community" between May and October.

It's part of a city campaign to encourage people to think outside the downtown box when it comes to culture in Toronto.

At the Jan. 12 meeting in the Main Street library branch, arts services manager Nadira Pattison led a city delegation to talk to East Yorkers with ideas for cultural events.

Their "Spark" project is a municipally funded partnership program focused on funding local organizations and artists for the six months of the hotspot event.

"This is not a grant, but a partnership to help organizations get funding," Pattison said.

"We work with you. Along the way, you talk with us, and often offer coaching and mentorship for applying for grants with Toronto Arts Council and such."

East York's designation follows similar promotions in past years of Etobicoke, North York and Scarborough.

This year, the city is looking to partner with 15-20 projects in East York — with funding between \$500 and \$5,000 available for each project.

One of the highest priorities is marketing. East York Hotspot participants will get city support through all types of media to circulate their art and events.

"Legacy" is another big part; artwork will be published on online maps, in brochures and through other digital products that the city

uses to increase tourism in Toronto.

But individual artists are also important to Spark — especially emerging artists in so-called underserved groups (at-risk youth, newcomer populations, people of varying abilities, First Nations and LGBTQ communities). Projects should also allow opportunities for local youth employment and mentorship.

Community cultural co-ordinator Andrea Raymond-Wong also had a lot to share with the participants on who will get funded and why.

"If you're running a festival and there's youth that you can employ to help in the planning of the festival or who would learn some of the administrative capacities, the marketing, and other valid employment opportunities, then you'll be prioritized for funding," Raymond-Wong said.

"Or if you are running a program, you could hire a young person who's an artist who can lead the project. Or even in terms of mentorship, there are opportunities for youth where they are learning to make beats or mural paintings."

It's a girl! EMS dispatcher helps with Uber delivery

By VARAD MEHTA
The Observer

With the assistance of an EMS dispatcher, a father delivered a baby girl in an Uber vehicle last week near a busy East York intersection.

On Jan. 18, Anita Thompson, a Toronto Emergency Medical Services dispatcher, had nearly finished her 12-hour shift when she got a call. An anxious man and his wife, who had gone into labour, were travelling in an Uber vehicle en route to a hospital.

Thompson said the father explained that the Uber driver had pulled off the road at Overlea Boulevard and Thorncliffe Park Drive, so the ambulance sent by Thompson could rendezvous and assist the parents. Thompson described the scene inside the Uber.

"By the time (the father) looked, the baby was already coming out, so I instructed him to check if the baby was breathing and to tie off the umbilical cord," Thompson said.

She added that the father and Uber driver used a shoelace to tie off the



■ ANITA THOMPSON

umbilical cord. She said when she overheard the baby girl's cry, she anticipated that the baby would be fine. The Uber driver, Zahir Ahmad, told 680 NEWS that the mother and baby seemed fine and that he was pleased that the miracle had occurred in his vehicle.

Subsequently, Thompson received a pink Stork Pin, awarded by Gord McEachen, the deputy chief of program development and service quality at Toronto EMS.

Thompson said this birth en route followed an interesting pattern.

"I've only delivered girls," she said. "This was my eighth pink Stork Pin."

Feeling 'like a kid again' at Evergreen's Winter Village



Jessica McDonald // The Observer

Skaters enjoy the free public rink at the Evergreen Brick Works. It's part of the venue's Winter Village activities.

Farmers market, 'fat' biking and free public skating rink entice East Yorkers to embrace winter

By JESSICA McDONALD
The Observer

When Mary Lewis was a child, she spent many weekend mornings on an ice rink in her backyard. Her fondest memories are ones of her, her younger sister and her father tumbling over each other to see who could race to the finish line first.

Now 39, Lewis spends weekend mornings with her own family creating new memories on the ice. The rink may not be right in her own backyard anymore, but it's close enough.

Evergreen Brick Works, located at 550 Bayview Ave., is currently holding its Winter Village. On top of a free public skating rink,

the event also includes a farmers market on Saturdays and a street food marketplace, equipped with a heated outdoor eating area.

"It's wonderful to have a place like this in the neighbourhood," Lewis said. "It's within walking distance and it's not overwhelmed by city noise, you know? It's a great escape on the weekends. It brings my family together."

The Village also offers other family-friendly activities. Each weekend, Evergreen's Children's Garden holds nature-themed workshops about the local plants and animals that call the Don Valley home. There is also fat biking, which is a form of mountain biking on thicker wheels, lessons and group rides.

"I like that it's local. I like that I can talk to the people participating and know I'm supporting my neighbours," said Lewis, who lives in East York. "What could be better? It makes me feel like I'm a kid again."

■ COMMUNITY

Students by day, air cadets by night

Members of Danforth Tech Squadron focus on leadership, citizenship

By MICHAEL LINENNEN
The Observer

From the parade square at Danforth Tech, Alina Farrukh can see the loftiest of goals.

“You get to learn about clouds and stuff that I would not learn at home or with any other program,” she said.

Farrukh, 14, says her ultimate goal is to get her pilot licence through the Royal Canadian Air Cadets and to pursue her dream to fly air force aircraft.

Every Wednesday night, the cadets of the 330 Danforth Tech Squadron participate in their weekly parade and training sessions at Danforth Collegiate and Technical Institute. These cadets are boys and girls from 12 to 18 years old.

The Royal Canadian Air Cadets was established in 1941 to train cadets to serve in the Second World War. During the war, it sent more than 2,235 cadets to serve in the military operations.

For the last 73 years, the Danforth Tech squadron has used the school’s gymnasium as the parade square. The squadron is one of the oldest running air cadet squadrons in the country. Capt. Jonathan John never lets his cadets forget their heritage.

“We remind the cadets (they’re) standing at the same parade square the airmen that never made it back home from the war once did as well,” he said.

John is the commanding officer of 330 Danforth Tech Squadron. He is on active duty in the Canadian Armed Forces as a commanding



Michael Linennen /// The Observer

Cadet Flight Sgt. Quinn Pace (centre) takes attendance before the cadets get ready for inspection.

officer for training and development, and has served for the last decade.

“The program focuses on three main aims. One of them is stimulating interest in the aviation industry, and in particular the Royal Canadian Air Force,” he said. “We also focus on physical fitness and healthy living, and the third aim we have is leadership and citizenship.”

There are currently 456 squadrons across Canada with 23,000 cadets. Since the war ended in 1945, the cadet program has not sent cadets to pursue active military duty, but to develop leadership and citizenship skills among Canadian youth.

Cadet Flight Sgt. Quinn Pace, 17, joined the air cadets program three years ago. This sum-

mer he will be getting his powered flight pilot licence through the program.

“From air cadets, what I’ve gained and expected to gain is a lot of leadership skills, lots of skills that most people don’t learn until they are much older, lots of skills on team building,” he said.

Pace’s ultimate goal is to fly in the Royal Canadian Air Force.

“I worked on airport through co-op, which I was fortunate enough to do. And I’ve been to the gliding centre, worked there,” he said. “So I am definitely doing everything I can to try to get myself into the aviation industry.”

John said cadets who join the program don’t necessarily need to be interested in aviation.

The program also develops well-rounded individuals and leaders, he said.

Cadet Flight Cpl. Madeleine Silverman-Sloan, 14, joined the program two years ago and is the drum major of the squadron’s band.

“I found that being drum major, I’ve been able to hear more tunes within the music, like I can hear the underlying pieces,” she said.

Silverman-Sloan said the air cadets program has helped her to develop her leadership skills, punctuality, time management and public speaking.

“The change that the program has on these kids in such a short time frame is remarkable,” Capt. John said. “I’ve never seen it as effective in any other youth organization or school.”



Michael Linennen /// The Observer

Danforth Tech students take part in a team-building activity created by the Royal Canadian Air Cadets.



Michael Linennen /// The Observer

Alina Farrukh pays careful attention in air cadet class. She hopes one day to get her pilot licence and fly air force aircraft.



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NEIGHBOURLY NEWS

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Wednesdays at 8:30 a.m. and Fridays at 4 p.m.
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■ EDITORIALS

A shot of reality

With so many diseases in this world, but so many vaccinations to help prevent them, why do some parents decide to keep their children unimmunized?

John Papastergiou is a pharmacist and the owner of two East York Shoppers Drug Marts.

"Immunization and vaccination have the largest impact on public health, moreso than any other therapy," he said.

Celebrities such as model and TV host Jenny McCarthy have tried to cast doubt on the effectiveness and safety of immunization. And some people — including the new president of the United States — seem susceptible to this disinformation. But not professionals like Papastergiou.

"There was a lot in the media around autism, that has subsequently been refuted," he said. "People are wary about getting vaccinated and they shouldn't be."

In 2014, Canada saw an outbreak of measles, a disease that could be prevented with vaccinations. At least in part, this is because anti-vaccination groups have successfully swayed parents to not vaccinate their children because they argue that vaccinations can lead to health issues, like impairing their child's brain development.

Not only is this mentality putting their child at risk of infections that could be deadly, but it is putting other people who may come in contact with those infected at risk as well.

Vaccinations in Canada have helped eradicate diseases like polio, and the government continues to work toward its goal of having all children under the age of two vaccinated.

According to Health Canada, it is vital that your child be immunized early in life, as they are more vulnerable and susceptible to diseases.

In 2015, Toronto Public Health (TPH) published an infographic that showed, as TPH put it, "When most people in your community are vaccinated, contagious diseases can't spread."

This is something that Papastergiou and other health professionals describe as "herd immunity."

"As more people get vaccinated, the viruses tend to become less common," he said.

TPH also said it is not only important to get immunized early, but to keep getting booster shots.

And let's be clear: flu shots are included in the immunizations that we should all be getting.

Keeping your child vaccinated and up-to-date has become easier, with Shoppers Drug Mart and other private pharmacies offering flu shots around flu season — not to mention public health clinics and Michael Garron Hospital (the former Toronto East General).

Papastergiou's stores have even begun giving a baker's dozen of other vaccinations for people who want them.

"Now we are able to give 13 additional travel vaccines," he said.

Parents, for the safety of your children: You should be vaccinated and vaccinate your children as well.

"It is not just about you," Papastergiou rightly points out. "It is about society as a whole."

~ Elizabeth Oloidi

Gimme shelter

In the bleak mid-winter, the people living on East York's streets are especially entitled to shelter — rather than having to continue to live outside, with little more than the clothes on their back to shield them from the cold.

But there are only five well-advertised shelters around East York. Only one is open 24 hours, and that one is only for youth. The others are part-time, and not all are open to men.

Bottom line: For a homeless adult male in East York, refuge is rare.

Shelters aren't meant for long-term accommodation. They're meant more as a temporary place to stay.

But the homeless who use them say they find even that limited mandate to be poorly met sometimes.

Jackson Odeon, one homeless man who frequents the East York area, says that some shelters don't always have enough room for him and others. So homeless people either have to sleep on the floor, share a twin-size bed or be denied acceptance.

"A shelter is less safe than me sleeping on the pavement at night," Odeon says. "I rather sleep on the pavement than walk over the needles on the floor."

The solution? Open more shelters around East York that provide their services 24 hours, and improve conditions to make the shelter a safe environment for all.

Easier said than done, we know.

But denying the homeless respect and safety is denying their humanity.

~ Cassidy Jacobs

■ COLUMNS

Celebrating difference

Culture is something that we're exposed to our entire lives.

Some of us are especially fortunate: We're exposed to a variety of cultures. And I'm in that happy position because I was born in Toronto but moved to the beautiful islands of Trinidad and Tobago when I was four years old.

Most typical four year olds don't have an established identity. But I recall feeling distinctly confused as to which 'culture' I should identify with.

When I moved back to Toronto, I felt even more confused as to what category I fell under.

According to a 2001 study by Statistics Canada, 55 per cent of

Canadians who reported Caribbean origin were foreign-born. Living away from Canada allowed me to not only gain a unique perspective, but opened up my horizons and gave me a new sense of respect for my culture(s).

At the time, I thought I had to fit into one specific culture — but that was not the case. When I came back to Toronto in 2006, I did not expect that I would be able to practise my culture in this brand-new environment.

So embracing my culture took a long time, because I was not sure how to express myself. I grew up as a Canadian, living in a foreign country.

Toronto is known for being Canada's central core for culture. It is an integral aspect that makes it one of the most well-loved cities in the world.

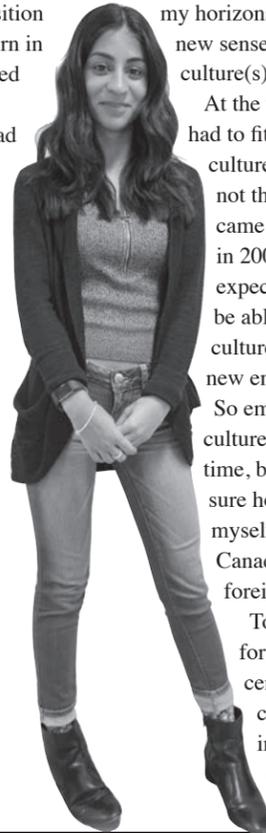
It also is what makes the citizens of Toronto so unique and beautiful. It's a cultivation of cultures that has created a space where people can come together and celebrate where they came from.

The West Indian culture is strong in the city as summer rings in staple cultural events such as Caribana. The parade runs along the Lakeshore and tourists from around the globe come to Toronto to take part in it and celebrate the music, song and dance.

East York has been recently named as one of the city's cultural "hotspots." It's no surprise, as every corner you turn, from Leaside to Pape Village to the Danforth, there is an abundance of diverse cultures bursting from every corner.

One of my fondest memories of my first time back in Canada was walking through Greektown and being so amazed at the diverse number of restaurants they had here, from Italian to Jamaican and everything in between.

Vive la difference!



Kristen Doopan

Rock-bottom no more

We all feel sad sometimes. We all face trials and tribulations. But has something ever happened to you to drive you to rock-bottom? To make you feel like there is no way out and that you will never move forward in your life?

If so, a word of encouragement from your friendly neighbourhood columnist: Fear not. I am here to tell you that even if you've hit rock-bottom, it's not the end. The reason I know this is because three years ago, I hit rock-bottom myself.

On June 21, 2013, I walked out of the doors of my old high school, Sir Robert L. Borden Business and Technical Institute in Toronto, after getting my mark on my Grade 11 English exam. Excited that I got an A+ on the exam, I ran — yes, actually ran — three blocks to get home to tell my family the good news... only to discover an eviction notice and a changed lock when I got to the front door.

To make matters worse, the same loan sharks that took our house also took my grandpar-

ents' apartment. And a few months later, my grandmother was diagnosed with stage one dementia.

A trio of tragedies.

Hurt and ashamed, I became an anti-social toward my friends and family. Acquaintances would go out to play laser tag, for instance, while I would sit on my bed and cry. It even got to a point where I contemplated suicide one night in my room because I blamed myself for what happened to my family.

Believe me when I say that rock-bottom is a scary place to be. Anyone who has reached it in their own life knows what I'm talking about.

To make things worse, for a long time, I felt I had

to deal with my problems alone. But in actuality, I didn't need to. I had family and friends that genuinely wanted to help me — and did.

And I also had the catharsis of writing to help me get through these hard times.

So even though I thought I'd never get out of those terrible doldrums, I did. I eventually enrolled in the journalism program at Centennial College in the hope of one day becoming a sports broadcaster (with a flashy suit like Don Cherry!).

It's important for everyone to know that hitting rock-bottom is not the end. Allow me to give you two pieces of advice that I learned through my own rollercoaster-ride:

Do seek help. And don't give up.



Giorgio Lee

Think your winter drive is tough?



Courtesy of the City of Toronto Archives

The Observer resumes its look back on East York history through photographs from the City of Toronto Archives. As we wrestle — for better or worse — with the winter of 2017, these two pictures illustrate just how disruptive winter conditions could be a century ago in the East York area. There is little specific information on exactly when these two photos were taken, but it appears they were snapped together on one winter day, circa 1910. We assume the Don River (at the left edge of the lefthand picture) has overflowed. But wherever the water has come from, it has clearly frozen on the railroad tracks running through the Don Valley adjacent to the waterway. These pictures depict the Canadian Pacific Railway's efforts to clear the ice, and so the tracks, with special heavy equipment.

■ GRANITE ANNIVERSARY

Woman honours legacy of 'quiet man' at Legion

Ladies auxiliary head helps observe 90th birthday of branch

By **KRYSTAL REYNOLDS**
The Observer

Cathy Andrews volunteers at the Pape Avenue branch of the Royal Canadian Legion... in part as tribute to her grandfather.

She said Wilfred Edwin Andrews was a quiet man who served as an acting lance corporal during what was then known as "The Great War" — now known as the First World War.

He served with the 169th Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force. His granddaughter, now the branch's

ladies auxiliary president, honours his memory.

"This is about community," Cathy Andrews said, "about appreciation (and) about honouring those that fought."

Last month, the Todmorden Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 10, celebrated its 90th anniversary.

Opened in 1927, the Todmorden Legion was created to aid and assist returning veterans.

Following L/Cpl. Andrews' return from two years in the First World War, which was fought between 1914 and 1918, he joined the Legion in 1928.

Cathy Andrews recalled that, during the Second World War, fought from 1939 to 1945, prisoners of war — mostly German merchant navy crew-

men — worked on small campsites in the Todmorden Mills area of the Don Valley. She said her grandfather remembered the German POWs as "nice, quiet lads who were polite."

In March of 1946, shacks and outbuildings remaining from the POW camp burned to the ground after being subjected to vandalism.

The Legion plans to donate proceeds from the 90th anniversary event toward restoring building infrastructure, to make the branch more accessible to veterans and their families.

Cathy Andrews is proud of her grandfather and his wartime service, "so that we can have this 90th anniversary in peace and harmony."



Observer file photo

The Todmorden Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 10, celebrated its 90th anniversary last month. This photo is from the Pape Avenue branch's Remembrance Day ceremony.

East York Historical Society previews Black History Month

By **SAMANTHA SEON**
The Observer

The East York Historical Society will recognize the designation of February as Black History Month this coming Tuesday, Jan. 31, at 7 p.m. in the auditorium of the S. Walter Stewart library on Memorial Park

Avenue.

Dr. William Humber of Seneca College will speak on three black-Canadian athletes whose major accomplishments have been largely forgotten. In addition, musicians Rick Pearson (guitar) and Mervyn Charles (pan) will play in honour of black history. Next week's presenters will have a

tough act to follow after the EYHS's last meeting, a well-attended and colourful talk featuring author Barbara Dickson — who spoke about her book *Bomb Girls: Trading Aprons for Ammo*. The book, set in east Toronto, depicts the women who assembled munitions during the Second World War. "This book is not to speak for these

women," Dickson told the crowd who gathered to hear her, "but to pay my respects and admiration for them."

Many buildings used during that wartime period still stand, and one of the new year's resolutions for the EYHS is to organize historical walks that will stop at some of those sites.

■ COMMUNITY



Anna Boyes /// The Observer

Councillor Mary Fragedakis (left) and Dr. Wolf Klassen participated in a fashion show to showcase Michael Garron Hospital's new green logo.

Hospital unveils its new look

Michael Garron goes green (literally) as it announces a fresh logo, vision and colour

By OLIVIA BLACKMORE
The Observer

When the staff at Michael Garron Hospital asked the residents of East York the one word they would use to describe the facility, the most popular answer was “community.”

“What surprised me so much was how consistent people are with using that word,” said Sarah Downey, hospital president and CEO.

On Jan. 12, which also happened to be the hospital's 88th birthday, Michael Garron unveiled its new vision, mission statement and colour, which is a vibrant green, logo and uniforms for staff.

They were modelled by employees and local

politicians in a fashion show.

“We've been working on a new look and feel for this hospital for over a year,” Downey said. “It gave us a wonderful opportunity to get out and talk to people about what this hospital means to them.”

The new vision of the hospital is known as ‘Create Health. Build Community.’



“This is a very exciting event, not just because of the birthday, but because of the launch of the new naming and branding around the great gift they (Michael Garron Hospital) got,” said Arthur Potts, MPP for Beaches-East York.

A little over a year ago, the hospital received a gift of \$50 million from the Garron family, as

well as a new name to commemorate their son Michael, whose dying wish was to be remembered forever.

“I think it's great,” said Dr. Geordie Fallis, who began work at Michael Garron Hospital at age 15 in the laundry room and then was a medical orderly before earning his MD.

“I think it's wonderful we got the gift from the Garrons and have the hospital named after their son, but also the idea of creating a health network for the community,” he said.

The new uniforms were a source of excitement for staff, with blue lab coats, a more comfortable design for doctor's lab coats and new nurses' scrubs making their debut.

Doctors and nurses were not the only ones to get new uniforms. Volunteer staff also received a fresh look featuring purple T-shirts and vests.

“New uniforms, new everything,” said Mary O'Sullivan, who was born and raised in Toronto and has been volunteering at the hospital for the past 40 years.

East Yorkers join march on Washington

Cont'd. from page 1

American political mainstream: “leftist, further out to the left and socialist.... There were a lot of just like ‘Trump is a poo-head.’”

Smith said the most realistic hope for an end to the Trump presidency may be Trump himself.



■ SMITH

“The best we can hope for is his opportunism and narcissism makes him make decisions that are worse at destroying the planet than would be otherwise,” Smith said.

“But it's really terrifying because he has his finger on the (nuclear) button. It's a nightmare.”

Smith said he remains hopeful that people around the world will continue to fight for human rights, women's rights, LGBTQ rights, climate change and freedom of religion.

“They all have to go together,” Smith said. “None of us can be free unless all of us are free.”



Giorgio Lee /// The Observer

Pancake break

Students Rena Jones (left) and Chelsie Ortiz Luis enjoy some free pancakes at a Wednesday event to welcome Centennial College students back to the East York campus after their Christmas break.

Premier Wynne faces the heat at town hall meeting

Cont'd. from page 1

An average annual raise is about \$40 for a two-bedroom apartment in the neighbourhood, Kolia said. He raised his voice and glared at the premier while he spoke, accusing her of addressing the issues very late.

“I have been asking the premier for the last eight months to have a meeting with the neighbourhood,” Kolia said.

Wynne, who attended the tenants' meeting with members of the premier's security team, denied suggestions that she has been ignoring her own riding. She told the

crowd that she was aware of the overcrowding problem in the neighbourhood's high-rises.

“We have a situation where there are three or four times as many people living in the community as the buildings were meant to hold,” Wynne said. She said that is partly because some units house extended family members who have moved to Toronto.

Wynne said the issue around the elevators is the age of the elevators, the availability of parts, and the labour. She said elevator repair is one of the trades that Ontario is struggling to meet the demand for.

“We need to partner with labour

unions to figure out if there's a way so we can work to increase the labour availability,” Wynne said.

A resident of one building on Thorncliffe Park Drive said one of the elevators in the building has been down for about three years. Jon Burnside, the city councillor for Ward 26 /Don Valley West, who was also in attendance, said there's a problem with overlapping jurisdictions when it comes to elevators — that the province has responsibility for safety, while the city has responsibility for maintenance.

“If you are trapped in an elevator, or two out of four elevators are not working, that is a safety issue,”

Burnside said, but “it's really been treated as a maintenance issue.”

The councillor said the city and the province are trying to reconcile that issue and are also discussing how to resolve the labour issue around elevators. He agreed that the length of time it takes to fix an elevator is totally unacceptable.

Wynne acknowledged that trying to get the landlords to self-regulate is a challenge. Some landlords did attend the meeting, but didn't speak. Instead, they had a representative address the crowd on their behalf.

When Darrel Chang, the spokesman for the landlord's association,

came to the microphone, the tenants started chanting and one woman shouted at him. The audience demanded that the landlords speak for themselves. But instead, Chang told them that his members work closely with the politicians, tenants' associations and the residents themselves to try to sort out these issues.

He said when it comes to refurbishing elevators, it takes about two-and-a-half to three years to get a new bank of four elevators working, not to mention the capital cost.

“Most of the buildings are planning to replace them and not just renew them,” Chang said, “but it is going to take time.”