



## East York's logo will remain on street signs

Area residents 'have continued to maintain pride in their local identity,' says city councillor

By **TINA ADAMOPOULOS**

The Observer

East Yorkers and councillors alike are happy that the East York logo will not disappear as a proud symbol along city streets.

Council has decided that the symbol of the identity of the former municipality will remain on new and decommissioned street signs.

In October, city council approved two motions to allow former municipalities to display their logos on street signs. Councillor Janet Davis's motion pertained to East York, while Councillor Mary Fragedakis's motion asked for logos to appear in all former municipalities, should they wish.

This came after the East York Historical Society and the East York Foundation presented the idea of revisiting the logo with local councillors.

"I'm a very proud Torontonian, but first and foremost, I'll always be a proud East Yorker," said Justin Van Dette, 38, treasurer of the Parkview Hills Community Association. "Council made the right decision."

This wasn't Councillor Davis's first attempt to preserve the East York logo. She had successfully returned it to the Civic Centre sign in her early days as councillor. She tried to get the logos back onto signs shortly after, but was unsuccessful until now.

"East York residents have continued to maintain pride in their local identity, and having a small logo on a street sign simply says, 'We are proud of where we live and the community spirit that remains here,'" Davis said in an interview with the *East York Observer*.

Since 2007, 25,000 of the 80,000 street signs

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Cellie Agunbiade/The Observer

### 'Tis the season

Workers help unload 300 Christmas trees from Quebec that were recently delivered to Davenport Garden Centre on Pape Avenue.

## Artist's year-long quest to find veteran finally ends

By **ADAM DARRAH**

The Observer

Just over a year ago, Gerre Virsunen was going up the escalator in Loblaws at Bathurst Street and St. Clair Avenue West when she saw a veteran selling poppies.

Instantly, she knew she had to paint him.

"There are certain faces you see, and immediately know are special," she said.

At the time, the Don Valley Art Club, where Virsunen is a member, was in the planning stages of its Canada 150 art show. The theme was "Creative Inspiration: Our Canada."

Feeling particularly inspired, Virsunen joined the line of shoppers waiting to purchase a poppy from the man. When her turn came, she bought her poppy and asked the veteran if she could take his picture and later use it to paint his portrait.

■ **VIRSUNEN**

The man obliged, and stepped aside. By the time Virsunen finished snapping her photos, a large line of increasingly impatient shoppers had formed behind her and she hurried off.

But she never got his name.

Fast forward to May 2017. The show was a great success, with Virsunen's painting, 'Portrait of a Patriot,' receiving an honourable mention at the art club's awards night.

Ever since, she's been searching for the veteran she met at the top of that escalator in November 2016.

"I wanted to give the portrait to him as a thank you for his service and his inspiration," Virsunen said. "To me, he represented the patriotism and the love of Canada that we all share."

After calling various legions around the

city with no success, she was ready to give up. Then, a few weeks ago, her journey finally came to an end – exactly where it began the year before.

Sandy Goldhar Hambourg and Myron Hambourg, members of the Canadian Royal Canadian Legion General Wingate Branch 256, were selling poppies at the same Loblaws where Virsunen met the subject of her portrait.

"Through the crowds of people, a lady came up to me and asked about the veteran

■ See PAINTING, page 5

**POLICE & FIRE**

**Man charged after officers injured in fight**

A man faces seven charges after two officers were injured on Nov. 21. Police were called to Dawes Road and Gower Street around 4 p.m. Police spokesperson Const. Craig Brister said a man had attacked a woman and fled. Officers searched the area and found the suspect. Officers tried to speak with him, which resulted in a fight. Injuries to the officers were non-life threatening. They were taken to hospital, treated and released. The man was also taken to the hospital for treatment. He is charged with assault, uttering death threats, possession of dangerous weapons and attempted murder.

**Editor arrested for hate crimes**

James Sears, editor of *Your Ward News*, has been charged with promoting hatred of women and the Jewish community — a first in Ontario, according to the office of the attorney general. Self-described as an “anti-Marxist” publication, the paper has been criticized for using racial slurs and promoting anti-semitic organizations.

**Knifepoint robberies arrest**

Police have charged Harvey Morris, 26, with two counts of armed robbery and failing to comply with probation after two sandwich shops, one located at Danforth and Coxwell avenues, were held up at knifepoint early on Nov. 14.

~ Anissa Calma-Brown and Eden Debebe



Cellie Agunbiade/The Observer

**Area residents are divided in terms of their opinion of the Woodbine bike lanes. One group is circulating a petition asking for the lanes to be removed. A second petition has come out in support of them.**

**Bike lanes spark love and loathing**

**Separate petitions call for dropping or keeping bicycle paths on Woodbine Avenue**

By **CELLIE AGUNBIADE**  
The Observer

It’s been over two months since the Woodbine Avenue bike lanes opened in East York, and residents remain divided on whether to keep or get rid of them, with duelling petitions fighting it out online.

“For some people, the bike lanes are necessary, while for any competent cyclist, they are not,” cyclist Andre Harris said.

“Also, these bike lanes are pressed against the sidewalk making it dangerous for its users.”

On Sept. 10, about 40 residents gathered at the corner of Woodbine and Danforth avenues to celebrate the opening of the bike lanes.

By Sept. 18, a petition to remove the lanes was created on the website Change.org. As of Nov. 24, it’s gathered 3,489 signatures.

A counter petition, ‘Don’t remove Woodbine bike lanes,’ was created on the same website. It was signed by 1,931 people and sent to Mayor John Tory.

The removal appeal is also to be sent to Tory and Beaches-East York councillor Mary-Margaret McMahon.

“If and when (both) petitions are submitted for consideration, city council will consider a number of factors when making decisions,” said city communications officer Cheryl San Juan.

Cyclist Harris, interviewed on Woodbine Avenue while using the bike lane, said, “I can understand why anyone with a kid on the back or an elderly person would need it. And sometimes you cannot ride at the same pace that drivers need you to — in these cases, the bike lanes are necessary. But I think when you take traffic as a whole, this isn’t justified.”

The lanes are not fully adapted into the road, Harris noted. At a certain point, both bike and car lanes merge with the right-turn lane, and cyclists still going north will have to turn left.

The 22-year-old cyclist says they are also risky due to potholes.

“Bike lanes are beneficial on certain streets, but I think Woodbine bike lanes weren’t thought out very well,” he said.

Rahshun Craigg, 24, says the lanes are “good for safety but I’ve never found them to be needed before, when there were no bike lanes.”

Craigg, who lived in the area five years ago, said although the lanes will only be needed during peak hours, it is good to see fewer bikers on the sidewalks.

The city has also painted parts of the bike lanes green.

“The markings are used in certain areas to help alert drivers to the presence of cyclists,” said San Juan, adding that the city conducted research and consulted residents who live near the bike lanes before creating them.

**Police seek gunmen in Rogers robbery**

By **GIORGIO LEE**  
The Observer

A Rogers store on the corner of Danforth Avenue and Playter Boulevard was robbed at gunpoint, police say.

On Nov. 21 at about 5:45 p.m., two masked men, one with a firearm, entered the store and confronted an employee.

“It was a retail robbery, two suspects, one with a gun, and no injuries were reported,” Const. Craig Brister said. “The suspects took cell phones and the employee was restrained.”

A witness, who did not want to be named, saw the two suspects enter the store. The witness walked past the front window “and saw the guy in the back put his hands up,



Giorgio Lee/The Observer

**Police investigate a holdup at a Rogers store.**

and I’m pacing back and forth because the door was locked.”

He saw “two guys empty the register out

and then they got out, unlocked the door, and started running towards the parking lot,” the witness said. “I got in the store because I thought they shot the guy, and I walked to the back and he was tied up.”

The employee was not injured.

Kostas Margetis, who has lived in the area for 37 years and recently went to the Rogers store to get a new phone, knows the employee. He was surprised the store was robbed in the middle of the day.

“I’ve had problems with my phone, and any time I had any problems, I came here,” Margetis said. “There hasn’t been a robbery here for a long time. There’s people who have stolen things, but not a robbery.”

The Toronto Police Hold Up Squad is investigating.

**WHAT’S UP IN E.Y.**

**It’s time to light up the holiday season**

East Yorkers are invited to join Councillor Mary Fragedakis in ringing in the holiday season with a Christmas tree lighting ceremony. It will take place at the East York Civic Centre on Dec. 2 at 6 p.m. Fans of Disney’s Frozen will meet and have hot chocolate with special guest Elsa. Those attending are encouraged to bring a non-perishable food item.

**Family fun in the forecast for East Yorkers**

Families can enjoy a fun and festive day out at Christmas Family Fun Day, hosted by Councillor Mary Fragedakis. Featured at the event will be artisan vendors. Children can also have their picture taken with the season’s leading star — Santa. The season is also about giving back to the community, and Toronto firefighters will be on hand to accept donations for their annual Toy Drive. The event will be held on Dec. 2 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Canadian Martyrs Elementary School, located at 520 Plains Rd. (just west of Woodbine Avenue).

**Holly Berry Fair set for Dec. 2**

St. Luke’s Anglican Church will hold its annual Holly Berry Fair on Dec. 2 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. A tea room, baking and crafts will be featured. As well, a quilt raffle will be held. The church is located at 904 Coxwell Ave.

~ Tina Adamopoulos



Jordan Barrera/The Observer

East York student Alexa Battler gets her flu shot while sitting on Michael Garron Hospital's 'Iron Throne.' The hospital created the chair to encourage staff to be vaccinated.

## Are you game? Get your shot

Game of Thrones inspires doctor/fan to create special chair for vaccinations

By JORDAN BARRERA  
The Observer

Flu season is not a game, even if you get your shot while sitting on a throne.

Inspired by the popular HBO series *Game of Thrones*, staff at Michael Garron Hospital in East York made their own iron throne to sit on while getting your flu shot.

It's part of this year's staff influenza-vaccination campaign. Jeff Powis, infectious diseases physician at Michael Garron Hospital (and *Game of Thrones* fan), suggested replicating the iconic furniture. A trip to the dollar store yielded a regular lawn chair, which was transformed into the hospital's throne.

While the prop is primarily for hospital staff, visitors have also shown an interest in it.

Expanding the campaign to include patients may be an option, Powis said.

"Sometimes making medical procedures into more of a game or making it more fun for kids can increase their adherence or their ability to tolerate certain pro-

cedures," he said.

Powis uses flu-shot data for the southern hemisphere to anticipate influenza activity for the north. He says the southern hemisphere experienced a busier flu season this year than it has in the past five years. The most prominent strain was the H3N2 virus.

According to Vinita Dubey, spokesperson for Toronto Public Health (TPH), flu activity usually begins around November or December.

Dubey recommends that children from six months to 17 years of age receive the quadrivalent vaccination. The trivalent shot, which is available to adults, contains protection against three strains of the influenza virus. The quadrivalent protects against four.

Children from two to 17 years can choose to receive the vaccination as a needle or a FluMist nasal spray, Dubey said. Even though the nasal spray, or live attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV), is not recommended in the U.S., it is still considered an effective option in Canada.

The LAIV is only available at TPH clinics and doctor's offices.

In East York, there are clinics on Danforth Avenue east of Broadview and Coxwell and Memorial Park avenues.

## Colleges focusing on recovery after strike

By ALEXA BATTLER  
The Observer

Students at Centennial College's Story Arts Centre in East York have returned to class after the longest college strike in provincial history.

On Oct. 15, negotiations between the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) and the College Employer Council (CEC) fell apart.

Key issues included the CEC's reliance on part-time faculty, which the OPSEU claims face job insecurity and unequal pay compared to contracted teachers. The union also called for faculty to have greater input in course content.

Classes stopped for nearly half a million students at Ontario's 24 colleges as 12,000 faculty began pacing picket lines. Classes resumed five weeks later on Nov. 21 after Premier Kathleen Wynne ordered back-to-work legislation.

The 36-day strike is the longest in Ontario college history.

"Our No. 1 priority is to ensure our students do not lose the semester. They've come too far to turn back now," Centennial College spokesperson Mark Toljagic wrote in an email.

"We are encouraging students to persevere and complete their studies over the extended semester, rather than withdraw from college."

At all four Centennial College campuses, the winter break has been cut by 10 days, with the semester extended by three weeks to compensate. Accounting for the fall reading week, the college nets a loss of only one week.

"Faculty need only adjust their courses to accommodate one week of lost instruction," Toljagic wrote. "We're confident that this can be done without an undue amount of stress for our students."

Barry Waite, chair of Communications and Media at the Story Arts Centre, wrote in an email that some courses at the campus are using the strike as a learning opportunity.

Journalism students are assigned stories related to the strike, and public-relations students are examining the communications strategies used by both

parties during the strike.

"The emphasis is on ensuring that student learning is prioritized, and our faculty team is working together to make the necessary adjustments to cover the week lost to the strike," Waite wrote.

The condensed semester includes several technology-based strategies for effective learning.

Activities, discussion boards, readings and (for some) classes are offered online to cover material outside class time.

Some courses are using a "flipped classroom," where material is posted online in advance for students to discuss later in class. Some teachers are also letting students film presentations that would have normally occurred in class.

"We've empowered our faculty to create individualized strategies that suit each course and program," Waite wrote.

Across other Centennial College programs, some recovery strategies include evening and weekend classes. Schools "intend to keep that to a minimum," Toljagic wrote.

The college is also increasing the availability of peer tutors and extending hours for campus and student services, including its libraries and counselling offices.

"We are confident students can complete the semester successfully with our supports in place," Toljagic wrote. "Students have already come a long way on their learning journey."



Zaid Noorsumar/The Observer

A person dressed as a Yeti was a familiar sight on the picket line outside the Story Arts Centre.

### COMMUNITY

## Amalgamated police division seeking permanent home

Three potential sites for new police headquarters

By RHIANNE CAMPBELL  
The Observer

Toronto police are asking the public for help in deciding where to put an improved police station.

Two divisions, 54 and 55, are amalgamating to become a single, modernized division. Toronto Police Service, the City of Toronto's real estate services and city planning officials recently held a community meeting at the East York Civic Centre inviting the community to share their thoughts on where the new proposed site should be.

They've created a plan with 24 recommen-

dations to modernize community safety in Toronto.

Number 16 on the list looks towards changing the structure and redesigning dated properties.

The process began with looking at 550 potential building properties and using a process of elimination has narrowed it down to only three potential sites: the East York Civic Centre, Danforth TTC Garage and the current 55 Division building.

Beaches-East York councillor Janet Davis and Toronto-Danforth councillor Mary Fragedakis attended the meeting.

Fragedakis said community involvement is a vital step in the process of choosing a new station location.

"It's really important that the public be part of the discussion around where that should

be, since they've decided to merge the two divisions," she said.

Each member of the community at the meeting was asked to sign in, supplying contact information. They were given an informational "discussion guide" that explained the pros and cons of each location and an outline of the criteria used to evaluate the properties.

Having the station at the East York Civic Centre would affect many people, but could be a great asset for police, Supt. Frank Bergen said.

The civic centre itself would not be touched, he said. "We do not affect this building at all — we build onto it. And so therefore I think that's a key thing to differentiate this particular site from the other ones."

The building would go in the northeast

parking lot.

Douglas Murdoch, who lives in the Coxwell and Danforth avenue area, said he attended the meeting because he was concerned about how the proposed site in that area could affect him.

"When you combine two divisions, it's looking like Toronto's east end is one big blob, and you have one division now to cover such a big ground and it's a very diverse neighbourhood," Murdoch said.

"You're going to get a big mix of people living in there. Toronto police need to do a good job on covering such a big area."

Officials are also asking the public to fill out a community feedback form on the website.

The project is scheduled to be completed and ready for occupancy by 2024.



## Santa's helpers make a pit stop on the Danforth

From Nov. 24-26, children got a chance to meet St. Nick at Canadian Tire's Red Door to Santa event on the Danforth. (Top left) One of the elves holds the microphone so sisters Lyra, 2 (front), and Kira, 3, can talk to the man in red. (Top right) Another of Santa's helpers quizzes attendees about their Christmas wishes. (Left) Two elves welcome children to Santa's workshop.

Anna Boyes/The Observer

### COMMUNITY

## Colourful signs promote inclusivity in east end

White supremacist posters prompted organization to create signs opposing racism

By ADAM DARRAH  
The Observer

When Rose Wells saw lawn signs with messages of inclusivity popping up around her neighbourhood, she knew it was something she had to be a part of.

"As soon as I saw it, I wanted one," said Wells, an East York resident.

For the last eight months, the colourful signs, like the one on Wells' lawn, have been popping up throughout the community.

The signs, which read "United Against Hate" and "Everyone Belongs," are the product of a grassroots organization known as the East Enders Against Racism (EEAR).

The community-based initiative emerged following the appearance of white supremacist posters in Stan Wadlow Park in November 2016.

The posters, which encouraged white community members to join the "alt-right" in an effort to curb immigration and multiculturalism in favour of promoting white supremacy

and identity, sparked conversation over social media, leading to an anti-racism rally held in the park shortly thereafter.

As more community members joined in on the dialogue, the group emerged, and now has an online presence of just over 2,000 individuals.

They regularly engage in discussions centred around understanding the impact of racism from the perspective and experiences of Indigenous people and people of colour in the community.

Through Facebook, EEAR organizes and endorses local events centred around anti-racism education and community building and works to fight hate crimes and hate speech.

Additionally, the group has penned open letters to the city on associated matters, most notably regarding the impact of the School Resource Officer program, which has recently been removed, in TDSB schools.

It also organized a book drive for local middle and high schools.

As for the signs themselves, the group's organizers say they were inspired by those that appeared across the city welcoming refugees to Toronto.

Displayed on lawns and storefronts across East York, the signs have been translated into Arabic, Bengali, Cantonese, French, Urdu



Adam Darrah/The Observer

The iconic sign by East Enders Against Racism has been popping up across the community, spreading multilingual messages of inclusivity.

and Anishinaabemowin, recognizing the diverse makeup of the community, as well as honouring First Nations.

As for her decision to display the sign on her lawn, Wells's thought process was simple. "I want people to feel the same way," she

said.

Signs are available for purchase for \$10 at Old's Cool General Store at Lumsden and Westlake avenues.

All proceeds go toward funding future EEAR events and initiatives.

## ■ COMMUNITY

# East York identity lives on in logos

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in Toronto have been replaced. A combined 600 to 800 signs would be replaced each year in Scarborough and East York at a total cost of \$3,000-\$4,000 per year.

Some remain concerned about issues of clutter and the violation of the Corporate Identity Policy—a policy put in place in 2000 on how to brand a new Toronto in terms of logos on street signs. However, as discussed in the council meeting, the City of Toronto logo will remain prominent on street signs.

“Having a corporate identity for the City of Toronto does not mean that you wipe out the identity associated with the previous municipalities,” Davis said.

In the council meeting, Davis noted how other global cities such as New York continue to acknowledge the identities of their boroughs “and not fall apart, and yet the City of Toronto can’t. I think it reflects the heritage and will of our community to continue to have their former municipality reflected and respected on their signs.”

In an interview in late September with the *East York Observer*, Councillor Stephen Holyday, of Ward 3 Etobicoke Centre said he was not opposed to the idea. However, the practicality of replacing the signs was a concern.

Holyday was one of 10 councillors to vote against Davis’s motion.

“The real thing that stood out to me is that it’s not like we will go out next week and suddenly put logos on all the street signs,” Holyday said.

“It will probably take decades for the logos to appear everywhere. People might get really upset with that.”

Holyday also mentioned clutter as a concern, especially when it comes to how far one could identify with a particular area of the city.

“I think about Etobicoke, and some people will say, ‘I’m from Long Branch’ or ‘I’m from Islington,’ because before the former municipalities, there were small boroughs



Tina Adamopoulos/The Observer

**Justin Van Dette is a strong supporter of the former municipality of East York displaying logos on street signs**

and smaller villages,” he said.

“That’s another piece of history...is somebody going to come along and say, ‘Well, I want a sticker for that as well?’”

Those concerns were covered by the 2007 Street Name Signage Program, which established standards for the accessibility and legibility of legacy street signs while also allowing for BIAs and other neighbourhoods to brand their area.

Such legacy signs may still be seen all over the city. However, some had been replaced with a cleaner, modern version.

Because East York was one of the strongest in its opposition to amalgamation, the approval of the logo motion is a victory.

Once a part of the township of York, East York became its own borough in 1967. It was once Canada’s only borough and the smallest of municipalities in Metropolitan Toronto.

Anchored by the Harris provincial government in 1996, amalgamation stitched the six municipalities — East York, North York, York, Etobicoke, Scarborough, and the City of Toronto — into one megacity in 1998.

For Van Dette, who remembers the tense atmosphere surrounding amalgamation, East York has a “small town in a big city” feel.

He said that comes from those who continue to be rooted in volunteerism and community efforts through the East York Historical Society and other recreational clubs — something

that goes beyond logos but demonstrates the great East York pride that remains.

While the subject of amalgamation remains a sensitive issue for some Torontonians, Councillor Davis said this is anything but an act of resistance.

For her, it isn’t just about nostalgia. It is a step forward that acknowledges one Toronto. It is also a geographic reminder of the former municipality that recognizes our heritage.

“This is still what we have always called a city of neighbourhoods,” she said.

“This is asserting that we still are a community that identifies as East York, both in terms of its place but also in terms of its community values.”

## Painting a portrait of a patriot

Cont'd. from page 1

that used to stand at the top of the escalator,” Goldhar Hambourgh said.

“Being new, I didn’t know everyone from the branch, so she showed me a picture of a portrait that she had painted, and without a doubt, we knew immediately that it was Jerry Rosenberg.”

Gerald “Jerry” Rosenberg served both in the Royal Canadian Navy during the Second World War and for the Israeli forces during the War of Independence in 1948. The Canadian war hero, and former president of RCL Wingate Branch 256, died Aug. 23, 2017 at Sunnybrook Hospital in Toronto.

Though she never had the chance to gift the portrait to him, Virsunen attended the branch’s monthly meeting last Sunday morning at Baycrest in North York. It was there that she presented it to Rosenberg’s former branch, much to the delight of its members — Rosenberg’s close friends and comrades.

The legion, one of the four remaining branches representing Jewish veterans in Canada, assured Virsunen that the portrait would be passed along to Rosenberg’s family, who live in Israel.

“After finding more about his background, I knew I’d done the right thing in choosing him,” Virsunen said. “I think the portrait has finally found its home, and I’m very pleased about that.”



Adam Darrach/The Observer

**East York artist Gerre Virsunen holds her portrait of Jerry Rosenberg, Canadian war hero.**

## All it takes is a tap to bring Karma! to your phone screen

Entrepreneur devises new way to share information

By ALICE CHEN  
The Observer

Tm Mahdi has started a lot of unique businesses in his time as an entrepreneur.

His latest endeavour, Karma!, is no different.

Karma! is a way for consumers to learn more about the stores and small businesses they walk by, says Mahdi (who really does spell his first name without a vowel).

The company will partner with interested clients to place Karma! stickers and signs around storefronts.

People interested in the location will then be able to tap their unlocked phones on the signs and be sent information about the store.

“The beauty behind it (is) it doesn’t require an app specifically. It just requires someone to have a smartphone and the ability to walk by a store,” Mahdi said.

He came up with the idea after re-

peatedly passing by stores he was interested in, but didn’t have time to visit or learn more about.

“I see a store that I like but I just don’t have the time for it, so I rush to the subway and by the time I come back they’re closed,” he said.

“I thought, why not find a way to come up with a better solution...everybody nowadays has a smartphone and no one likes apps, not as much.”

Mahdi was at the local artisan market and East York community event NookFEST earlier this fall promoting his product and trying to create a “habit to tap.”

Mahdi has had a lot of experience turning his ideas into reality.

He has been an entrepreneur for close to 20 years. Karma!, he said, is the “sixth or seventh” company he’s started.

“I started out literally since high school. I was a dot-comer,” he said.

Aside from starting companies, Mahdi also has been an event producer.

Karma! is expected to come to 300 stores in a number of communities, including East York, sometime in 2018.

## ■ EDITORIALS

# Good2Talk not enough

Five-week college strike leaves students without adequate counselling services

When the five-week faculty strike left half a million students out of Ontario's 24 colleges, it also left thousands without access to appropriate mental health care.

Among the 12,000 striking faculty were the psychological counsellors. Longstanding relationships with counsellors, which take time, devotion and care to craft and nurture, were abruptly cut. No faculty were allowed any contact with students for 36 days.

Several colleges, including Centennial College in East York, offered heavily reduced walk-in counselling services for students to potentially access (depending on the demand of the day). But for Centennial College, and several others, the primary fallback was Good2Talk, Ontario's free, post-secondary mental health helpline.

Good2Talk was not good enough for college students.

Good2Talk was created in 2013 as Ontario, and its students, continued to buckle under the demand for mental health services (as it still does). The free 24-hour helpline attempted to toss a bandage over the provincial shortage of preferable regular counselling services, often needed by those with chronic mental illness.

Good2Talk is a well-intentioned initiative. But the colleges did not make an informed decision when selecting this specific helpline as its backup.

Good2Talk offers services only in English and French, which is understandable for a bilingual country and questionable for a highly multicultural province.

Tens of thousands of international college students, the same students who also had to worry about finances and immigration status, were stranded in what was an undoubtedly difficult-to-articulate tapestry of emotions.

*The Book of Life*, a crowd-funded literary organization, has identified the 30 most untranslatable words from across the world. Of these, 11 are related to sadness or anxiety. For international students in new or early-learning stages of English or French, Good2Talk was not wholly accessible.

Good2Talk also does not offer text-based chat services. Not only does this make Good2Talk inaccessible for the hearing-impaired or deaf, it isolates students with phone anxiety, a specific and common subsection of social anxiety in which spoken phone calls spark intense anxious reactions.

Without text-based chat services, Good2Talk is available only through cellular phone plans. It may seem unreasonable that, in 2017, people could not have a working cell phone. But with new, free and constantly expanding opportunities for communication through the internet, it is no longer necessary to have a registered cellular device to stay connected. The assumption of blanket access or need for cellular connection actually reinforces the digital divide — the gap in services based on the availability of technology.

For international students, a cellular phone plan would likely not affordably cover calls to one's home country. While students continued to have access to school computers and public computers in libraries, there are fewer than 55,000 pay phones left in all of Canada. Phones are relatively accessible in other public places, but they often do not lend the privacy needed for someone to seek urgent mental health care in the way a text-based chat does.

An accessible service needed to be available at a time when students were most vulnerable. And yet, the colleges relied on a service that was inaccessible to an even more vulnerable segment of its students. Students deserved a variety of services, helplines, text-based chats and other connective, accessible services. They deserved much more than merely "good."

~ Alexa Battler

## ■ COLUMNS

# Disruption or innovation?

Local student uses lengthy strike to reflect, relax and make lemonade from lemons

It was 5 a.m. and as dark as midnight. I was up doing my long-anticipated two-mile run, stopping at a convenience store to figure out what my kids would take for lunch that day. It had been two days since I found out that the five-week-long college strike was coming to an end, and I had decided that morning to take the lemons the strike had given out and make a real sweet glass of lemonade.

Before the strike, all I could think about was the fact that my work ethic needed to be good enough so I could get a good recommendation to my internship of choice.

My grades needed to be good enough if I wanted to get into my university of choice.

I needed to make honour roll so that when I received my diploma, the word "honours" would be announced after my name, for my family but, more importantly, my kids to hear.

The pressure was breaking me down. I would sit to write a paper and type, delete, type, delete. I wasn't completing my assignments, because what if I did them and they weren't good enough?

By then, rumours had started circulating that the faculty might be going on strike.

However, I tried to stay focused. I didn't want a strike to come and I hadn't made any of my deadlines.

Work continued to pile up, and I wasn't completing assignments at the pace I needed to in order to catch up. I broke down in front of my teachers, saw a counsellor, and even attempted to work with learning strategies.

And then there was a strike.

I told myself that I would do school work during the strike. And I tried, at first.

But then I took a break. A five-week-long break. A break I hadn't taken for years.

Because when I wasn't focused on school, I was focused on my photography business.

If I wasn't busy with my own business, I was busy working for someone else's business, all while trying to maintain a family and a home and raise three children.

During my break, I took a trip to Montreal, where I didn't have to worry about school or work or kids. When I got back, I slept and meditated. I spent my friend's birthday weekend

in Niagara Falls. And when I got back from there, I slept and meditated some more.

And then the strike was over. It was time to make some lemonade.

At my first class back, my program co-ordinator explained that deadlines would be extended. I felt like I could breathe again.

I felt as though I had been given a second chance. But there was one specific part of his speech that resonated with me. He explained that sometimes disruption brings innovation. Yes!

This strike was a big disruption for everyone involved.

However, I took it as a break, and through my break, I was that innovation.

I learned a new way of thinking. I was given time to get back on my feet, something I probably couldn't have done until I took a step back.

And I think it worked, because, with that all being said, I just made my deadline.



Sherika Harris

# It's jingle bells all the way

Each year I fervently declare that Halloween is my favorite holiday.

Like clockwork, the first chill hits the air and I am decked out in oversized sweaters and autumn colours. My mind becomes awash with orchards, pumpkin patches and costume ideas. It seems an incontestable fact that Halloween is the be-all and end-all of holidays.

That is until the morning of Nov. 1, when "somehow" Mariah Carey is singing me into a sugar plum-induced state of whimsy. I renounce the ghouls and ghosts for the spirit of Christmas.

A way to understand my relationship with these holidays is to imagine the proverbial romantic comedy plot of a love triangle. A distraught female lead has to choose between two guys who are completely differ-

ent, but somehow both wonderful and amazing.

I am the distraught female and Halloween is the guy who inevitably is left in the, excuse the word play, cold.

Halloween didn't do anything wrong.

It's a fun time that causes butterflies in my stomach. I will always have a place for it in my heart.

But Christmas just has that something extra I need. It's not just Christmas, though.

It's the entire holiday season.

When I briefly moved to Victoria, B.C. in the fall of 2012, it was the first time I was living away from my family and I practically clung to the holidays for a sense of familiarity.

This tradition of enveloping myself in

the season has only grown stronger over the years.

Having been born and raised in the United States, American Thanksgiving has always been the start to the season.

As the school term becomes increasingly stressful around this time, the sense of joy and excitement brought on by the impending celebrations is a welcome relief.

Beyond my adoration for the feeling of the season is that for the sounds of the season.

Hearing Bing Crosby croon over the airwaves brings back memories of my grandma singing the same tunes while baking in the kitchen.

Passing train stations and hearing the cheerful sounds of families reunited for the holidays makes my heart burst. I find comfort in the voice of Judy Garland assuring me "from now on your troubles will be out of sight."

It is a special time of year.

I don't have to completely denounce Halloween, though.

Thanks to Tim Burton, the film 'The Nightmare Before Christmas' allows me to have my cake and eat it too.



Anna Boyes

# A look at the Danforth's architectural past



James Salmon Victor/City of Toronto Archives



Ben Freeman Collins / Toronto Observer

**Allen's Danforth Theatre (left) opened in 1919 and was called 'Canada's First Super-Suburban Photoplay Palace,' featuring live vaudeville acts along with silent films. The building was constructed by Jule and Jay Allen, two pioneering brothers in Canada's movie industry. In 1923, after they fell on hard times, the brothers were forced to sell the theatre. The building remained a theatre for most of its life until the late 1970s, when it began featuring live acts and was renamed the Music Hall. In 2011, it was acquired by impresario Inc. and renamed the Danforth Music Hall, as shown in recent photo (right).**

## ■ CITY PLANNING

# Former mayor calls for more controls on development

By **JOSEPH BURRELL**  
The Observer

In recalling Toronto's role on the world stage as a paragon of functional city planning, John Sewell didn't pull punches when chastising the city's current leadership in an impassioned talk to East York residents.

In his recent talk, the former Toronto mayor blamed the city's poor regulation of development as one of the main causes of discontent among residents.

"Right now the only regulations they enforce are the ones that say, 'You can't build that 50-storey condo,'" Sewell said. "Then they tell developers, 'You have to make it 49 storeys instead.'"

Sewell was promoting his most recent book, *How We Changed Toronto*, at the S. Walter Stewart library which hosted the Q&A with East York residents.

"I'm glad that I could have this talk here," Sewell said. "I grew up in the Beaches, so it's nice to speak in East York."

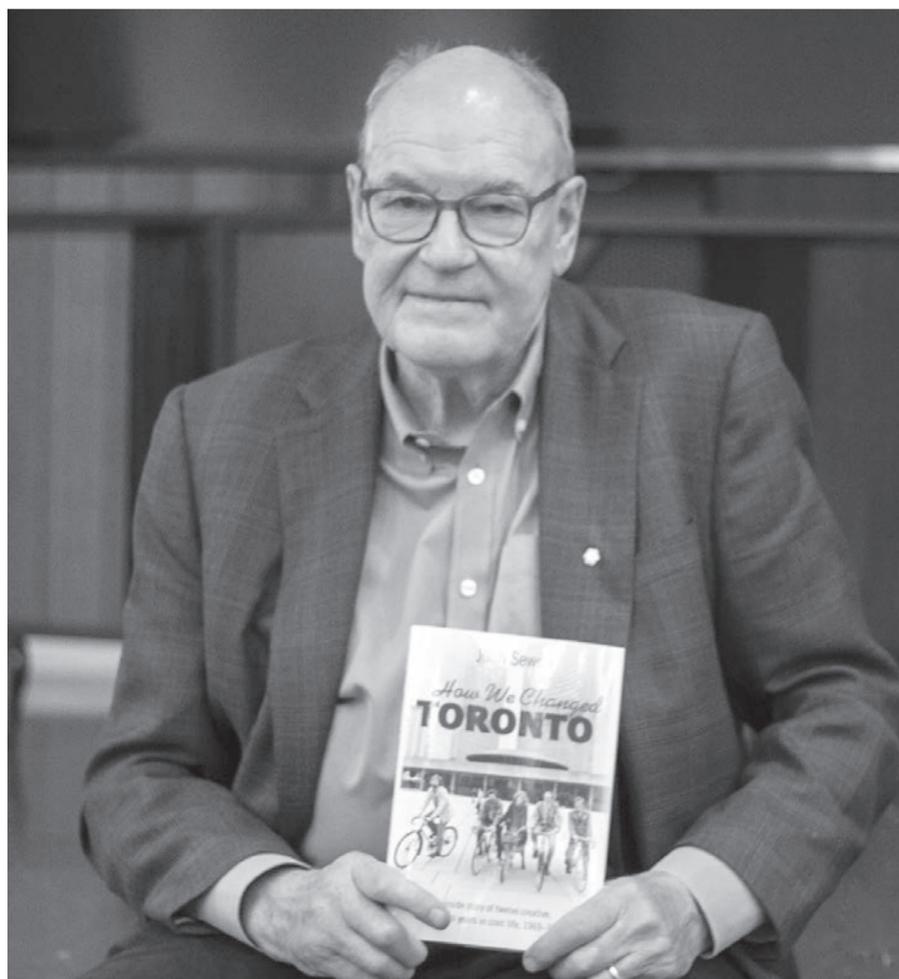
Sewell reminisced about how such talks at community centres used to be much more common. He served as Toronto mayor from 1978 to 1980, but his involvement with local politics began well before that. He graduated from law school in 1964, and became alderman of Toronto's Ward 7 in 1969. At that time, city council pushed aggressively to involve locals in policy planning.

### The city that worked

"In December of 1972 we were called 'the reform council.' It was a big change from the old guard," Sewell said. "Within 18 months, we'd set up working committees in 31 Toronto neighbourhoods to find out exactly what each neighbourhood needed."

Under this council-established framework, and led by the then new mayor David Crombie, Toronto became renowned for its utilitarian approach to municipal governance.

"We were called 'the city that worked!' That was our name among American journalists,"



Joseph Burrell/The Observer

**Former Toronto mayor John Sewell spoke recently to East York residents about life in the city and his latest book, *How We Changed Toronto*.**

Sewell said. "They had a photo of David Crombie in Time magazine. Not a bad kind of honour."

Although Sewell initially painted an idyllic picture of the city in those days, he admitted the 1970s weren't without political strife.

"I was one of the first mayors to say that the charter should protect gay rights. I got in some trouble for that," he said.

"The police chased Albert Johnson, who was black and mentally ill, into his home and shot

him. I wasn't after individual officers — all I wanted was a change in policy where that doesn't happen anymore," Sewell said. "Now we still aren't in that position within the Toronto police."

Sewell didn't try to imply the city should strive to become its former self again. He did, however, suggest returning to policies that were proven to work so that more focus could be given in areas, like policing, that have been under scrutiny for the past 40 years.

Transit is one area he'd like to see reformed. He described a cyclical relationship between housing and transit. But this cycle could be either beneficial or self-destructive.

"When you build great transit, people want to live close to it. When people want to live close to the transit then it pays for itself," Sewell said.

He said the issue with the TTC isn't the subway system itself, but rather where it operates.

### How to do it the wrong way

The University line is now extending in Vaughan. On its own, this wouldn't be cause for alarm, but pushing further north without adding east-west relief lines only funnels more riders to an aging and overburdened Bloor-Danforth line.

Additionally, the new Vaughan terminal brings service to an entirely separate municipality while Scarborough residents have been waiting for similar service for decades.

Sewell also cited housing projects through his career to demonstrate how communities could be built that would allow transit to thrive.

"I was alderman of Regent Park, so I know how to do it the wrong way," Sewell said. "But we also developed the St. Lawrence neighbourhood during my time, and it was a tremendous success."

Sewell believes that had the city taken it upon itself to create affordable housing from the northeastern core out into Scarborough then there would already be thriving communities capable of sustaining a far-reaching subway system.

"I'd have put six-storey apartments all along Eglinton," Sewell said.

The mix of apartments, houses and shops in the St. Lawrence neighbourhood, and rent-control regulations that existed when it was built, are what Sewell credits for the success of the bustling community — a community that's both pedestrian and transit-friendly.

He called this lack of regulation and initiative from the city, coupled with its intent to build pricey condos downtown and shoddy strip malls in Scarborough, the primary causes for growing discontent among residents.



Olivia Blackmore/The Observer

Jen Sant (left) plays Bobcaygeon with other musicians as The Hip fans sing along. A group of people gathered at East Lynn Park in October to pay homage to Downie, who died Oct. 17.

## East Yorkers commemorate Downie's courage

The Tragically Hip frontman died in October, but local fans keep his memory alive through a musical tribute

By OLIVIA BLACKMORE  
The Observer

It took Kathryn McLean everything in her power not to cry when she met Gord Downie in the summer of 2016 while working backstage at the Air Canada Centre during The Tragically Hip's last tour.

"He was trying and you could tell he was struggling," she said.

McLean is one of many mourning the death of Downie, frontman of "Canada's band," The Tragically Hip, who died on Oct. 17 from glioblastoma, an aggressive form of brain cancer. Their final show was in Kingston, Ont.

Fans of Downie and The Tragically Hip channelled their grief into song.

About 100 people gathered in East Lynn Park in East York on Oct. 19 to sing along to their Hip favourites and celebrate Downie's life. Carrying candles, lighters and instruments, the crowd began to sing "Bobcaygeon." When they got to the line "that night in Toronto," their voices rang out in unison.



Olivia Blackmore/The Observer

A child holds a candle at a memorial honouring Tragically Hip frontman Gord Downie. About 100 people took part in the event at East Lynn Park.

Strumming the chords of the famous Hip song on her guitar was Jen Sant, 37, who lives in East York.

"I've been playing guitar since I was 12, and The Hip has been a huge influence on me,"

she said.

Sant remembers seeing her first Tragically Hip concert at the ACC shortly after the arena opened in February 1999.

"I remember thinking that Gord Downie was

such a force on stage," she said.

"Watching footage of him is amazing, but there's nothing like being in front of him and in the same room as him when he was on stage and dancing."

Sant said that she took her brother to his first concert and The Hip was the headliner. Her brother's love of the Tragically Hip is because of her, she said.

Organizers advertised the East York event on social media and received an overwhelmingly positive response.

"I think it (was) a really great way for the community to come together and sing a song or two in the park," said Sheri Hebdon, who works for the Danforth East Community Association.

"Rather than us all privately celebrating, honouring, grieving in our homes, why don't we do something meaningful and memorable?"

DECA was also accepting donations for the Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Fund, which helps create new relationships and promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

As for Kathryn McLean, she had been playing The Hip on repeat for two days following Downie's death, and her young son had been singing along.

"He's just starting to get into it," she said. "I hope he grows up just appreciating their music and just what (Downie) stood for."

## Famed synchronized skater leading off-ice training sessions

By ZACK BODENSTEIN  
The Observer

From the ice to the yoga mat, Becky Tyler has done it all.

After many synchronized skating accomplishments — most recently her induction into the Skate Canada Western Ontario Hall of Fame — Tyler, 22, has a new passion: teaching. She's giving off-ice lessons four times a week for about 50 East York Skating Club members, aged 6-15. They'll run for the entire 2017-2018 season.

Though skating is Tyler's biggest strength, her love of teaching is a close second.

"There's no greater sense of accomplishment than hearing them get so excited about accomplishing one of their goals, no matter how little it is," she said.

Tyler attributed the on-ice success she's

had with NEXXICE Senior to the importance she placed on her off-ice training.

Susan Ord-Lawson registered her 12-year-old daughter for the program.

"I feel it's really important to have an off-ice program, which helps with strength, balance, flexibility and conditioning," Ord-Lawson said.

"It helps complement other elements, like free skate, jumps and spins."

East York is one of the few skating clubs in the city to offer this in the session's packages.

That makes it cost-effective and accessible, since the complex is right behind the arena.

"She has skating experience, a background in her studies, and she's also doing different training for off-ice areas," Ord-Lawson said.

Along with her teaching, Tyler is studying kinesiology at York University.

She's also certified in First Aid and Wat-



■ BECKY TYLER

erART Aerobics and is pursuing Pilates and Personal Training licences.

"I'm trying to get certified in as many things as I possibly can," Tyler said.

The classes are structured to include calisthenics, pilates, ballet, stretching, dietary advice, and even theatre for on-ice precision.

While the first five all seem obvious for training, Tyler's inclusion of theatre is a unique twist.

What makes it important?

"Learning how to present in front of a crowd and imagining a crowd that's not even there, so they can emulate it when they compete," Tyler said. "I wanted them to be able to get out of their comfort levels and have the experience of taking on a different persona on the ice."

It's gone over well.

"My daughter and many of the other kids really enjoy it," Ord-Lawson said.

"Becky seems very friendly with the kids; she seems to have the teaching passion, as well."