

Rat Creek Press

Alberta Avenue • Delton • Eastwood • Elmwood Park • Parkdale-Cromdale • Spruce Avenue • Westwood



Dance in the streets during Kaleido

Kaleido brings art to the streets in a menagerie of fun



This year's Kaleido is a hybrid of last year and previous years. | Epic Photography

- TALEA MEDYNSKI -

Much like last year's touring Kaleido, this year's event will also be mobile from Sept. 10-12, but will stay at different locations for longer periods of time.

"Kaleido is another hybrid from 2020," says Christy Morin, artistic director of Kaleido. "It's a hybrid from the established festival and from last year's tour. It will be a menagerie experience with music, theatre, and some dance. The menageries are the stages we'll be bringing through."

Performers will tour on floats, but they will stop for three hours at different locations, making it easier for people to catch performances.

"Bring your own lawn chair and blanket," Morin advises. "Dress for the weather. There won't be as many fire pits as previous years."

Plus, there will be "satellite locations", meaning permanent locations for people to stop. Jazz Alley will offer jazz performances in the alley of 118 Avenue and 93-94 Street.

"The Carrot will be running its usual

singer/songwriter performances throughout the day during the weekend," says Morin, and adds that The Carrot Coffeehouse will also have a visual art gallery.

Or, stop by the Zen Garden in the park by St. Faith's Anglican Church on 117 Ave and 93 St. Do some yoga or listen to orchestral music. "It's more relaxed and a place for people to stop and enjoy themselves," says Morin.

The weekend will start with the Aurora Lantern Parade, which will make its way to Delton Community League. Artists and community members make the lanterns. "We encourage people to bring their lanterns," says Morin, explaining there will be food trucks at the event, and fireworks at 120 Ave and 89 St.

Some mainstays are being brought back, but are now spread out more due to the pandemic. For example, the Aboriginal Takwakin Village will be at Bent Arrow Healing Society at 11648 85 Street. Another visual art gallery will be at Borden Park. "The art will be

large pieces in large easels," says Morin. "It's a transitory art gallery. It starts Sept. 1 and goes until the end of Kaleido."

Be prepared for music, art, and dancing. Some artists include William Prince, DJ Kwake, Beth Levia, Captain Tractor, and performances from Kore Dance Studio.

And pancake breakfasts are back. On Saturday, Spruce Avenue Community League is hosting a breakfast, plus bluegrass music. Alberta Avenue Community League is hosting Sunday's breakfast, accompanied by soul music.

Because the mask mandate for events has been lifted, some people will wear masks and others won't. "We just really want people to respect each other's space," says Morin.

And keep an eye out for the puppets. Arts on the Ave suffered a loss from the death of Dick Au, an active volunteer and friend. "We're creating a giant puppet in his image."

Organizers still need volunteers such as drivers, carpenters, food preparation workers, cleanup crew, and bartenders.

Morin says organizing an event like Kaleido is challenging at the best of times, but the pandemic makes it "really tough, really challenging." She adds, "Our community has a soul in the arts and we feel like we can start expressing ourselves again. We encourage people to come out and enjoy the festival, enjoy the Avenue."

Look at the schedule on kaleidofest.ca, or stop at The Carrot Coffeehouse to pick up a program. The schedule will be available the first week of September.

Talea is the Rat Creek Press editor. She loves sharing the stories of our diverse neighbourhoods.

DANCING IN THE STREET, KALEIDO ON TOUR 2021

Sept. 10-12, various locations
www.kaleidofest.ca



arts on the ave

Kaleido
2021 ON TOUR

Showcase: **SEPTEMBER 10-12**
ALBERTA AVENUE DISTRICT

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

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[Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/kaleidofest) [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/kaleidofest) [Twitter](https://www.twitter.com/kaleidofest) @KaleidoFestival | KaleidoFest.ca

Textbooks, pencils, and variants

Parents and students are concerned about in-person learning this fall

- MYA COLWELL -

As the summer draws to a close, students and parents are getting ready for the back-to-school rush, but COVID-19 is still very much a concern for many families.

"My daughter [who is in] Grade 4 will continue online for the first half of the coming school year," says community parent Tammie Beson. "We have resumed some group activities to get her socializing again but I'm not in a hurry to stick her back in a classroom, especially if the reporting and isolation requirements are lifted."

"What's stopping desperate parents who need to work from sending their sick child to school?" Beson continues. "Our government has already had to back-track on so many decisions that were made in haste. What's the hurry? Provide resources and money to those who need it and take it slow."

Rebecca Lippiatt is also concerned. "I feel worried and frustrated," she says. "My children are all vaccinated, and anecdotally, so are most of their peers, but with Delta [having] an R0 of 5-9 (nearly three times the original strain) I am not convinced any of us are safe. I am most concerned though for the children who are under 12 and cannot be vaccinated."

While the provincial government has extended some restrictions, these health measures only last until Sept. 27. The extended restrictions include mandatory masking on public transportation, taxis, and ride-shares; 10-day isolation after a positive COVID-19 test or COVID-19 symptoms; and testing for those with symptoms.

In the fall, Alberta classes will not be required by the provincial government to wear masks, but individuals must still isolate if they test positive for COVID-19 or develop symptoms. Entire classes will not be required to isolate.

Communication between Alberta Health Services (AHS) and schools will also become more limited. "AHS Public Health will not inform school authorities or administrators of individual cases of COVID-19 within their school setting," says a Guidance document from the provincial government, and students and staff

are not required to alert the school if they test positive for COVID.

Schools can decide for themselves if masking, cohorting, and social distancing practices will be put in place. Edmonton Public Schools has implemented mandatory masking for all students and staff, and Edmonton Catholic Schools requires masking for students Grades 4 to 12, although only in areas where social distancing is not possible like hallways.

In-person schooling is also worrisome for university students. Alexander Dowsey, an Alberta Ave resident who attends the University of Alberta, will be attending in person for the fall term because so far, his classes are not being offered online.

He explains he works with a lot of vulnerable people in his neighbourhood. "I don't want to unwittingly become a carrier of COVID from campus back to [Alberta Ave]."

With the fourth wave already upon us with the rapid spread of the Delta variant, Dowsey says, "We have this perfect storm of a deadly virus that is easily transmissible, [and] government policies that aren't taking that virus seriously."

"All it would take was one student who can't afford to miss a class or makes the wrong judgement call... and suddenly you have an outbreak on your hands," says Dowsey.

"If I as a student am looking at this and [saying] we are definitely going to have an outbreak before [Sept. 27, when more health restrictions are lifted] and it's going to get bad, then it's kind of mind boggling that the people who are in charge, like the Chief Medical Officer are going, "No... It's fine, it's fine."

Due to the concerns of students and staff, the U of A has implemented health measures for the fall including regular rapid COVID-19 testing for unvaccinated individuals and mandatory mask mandates while indoors. The university encourages all individuals to become vaccinated.

Mya is a student working toward a career in journalism and communications. Writing is one of her passions, besides baking and playing trombone.



Edmonton Public Schools has implemented mandatory masking for all students and staff, and Edmonton Catholic Schools requires masking for students Grades 4 to 12, although only in areas where social distancing is not possible like hallways.

Rebecca Lippiatt is concerned for the safety of her children as the Delta variant continues to spread. | Rebecca Lippiatt

DON'T MISS THESE ONLINE ARTICLES

Local residents get Naloxone training

Increase in overdoses prompted the community to action
Published Aug. 4

Introduce kids to music early

Gear up for community musical fun with these local opportunities
Published Aug. 9

Ceremony can help heal suffering

Bent Arrow hosts a conference to share stories and heal through ceremony
Published Aug. 11

Olympic triumphs for Canadian Women

What the success of female Olympians means to local athletes
Published Aug. 19

New art lights up the community

Let's heal the divide encourages conversation and change
Published Aug. 26

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A 30-foot-wide neon sign is the latest artwork to grace Alberta Avenue. | Mya Colwell

RAT CREEK PRESS ASSOC. 9210 118 AVE, EDMONTON, AB T5G 0N2 T: 780.479.6285

ABOUT US

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GOALS

Build Community, Encourage Communication, Increase Capacity.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Mariam Masud, George Crawford, Joe Wong, Victoria Stevens, Steven Townsend, Gail Kessler, Mike Enders
The board may be contacted at board@ratcreek.org.

PRODUCTION STAFF

PUBLISHER Karen Mykietka info@ratcreek.org
EDITOR Talea Medynski editor@ratcreek.org
DESIGNER Brenda Fortin design@ratcreek.org
ADVERTISING ads@ratcreek.org

CONTRIBUTORS

Our writers vary from trained journalists to community residents with varying backgrounds. We strive to be a place where individuals can learn new skills and acquire experience—whether in writing, editing, photography, or illustration. We welcome letters, unsolicited submissions, and story ideas.

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CIRCULATION

Serving 12,500 community members.

DELIVERY

The paper is delivered by Canada Post to all houses, apartments, and businesses in the seven neighbourhoods listed above including those with no unaddressed mail notices. For the most part, delivery begins on the last Wednesday of the month.

A light-hearted touch of Tibet

Celebrate Tibetan culture at this annual festival

- **CONSTANCE BRISSENDEN** -

Few of us will ever get to travel to Tibet, but we can all enjoy its culture at the 29th annual Tibetan Bazaar from Sept. 18-19 at Alberta Avenue Community Centre.

The Tibetan Bazaar was founded to present Tibetan culture, food, and experiences. Presenters from the Gaden Samten Ling Tibetan Buddhist Society want to share experiences in the most authentic way possible here in Canada. Money raised is used to fund operational costs for Gaden Samten Ling Tibetan Buddhist Meditation Centre, a local non-profit organization.

“Our organization wants to bring the hospitality and uniqueness of Tibetan culture alive through authentic food, cultural presentations, and arts to the city of Edmonton. Under the guidance of Kushok Lobsang Dhamchoe, our spiritual director, our organization has been putting this on for nearly three decades,” says Jeremy Landon, a volunteer and spokesperson.

Planning this year was different with the uncertainty of public health restrictions. A core of strong volunteers helped make the planning as seamless as possible.

Participants will have a variety of things to do including browsing vendors, tasting savory Tibetan food, listening to live cultural and contemporary music and performances, listening to live Dharma talks, winning door prizes, and much more.

Volunteer organizers have also created an online Tibetan Bazaar that will consist of Dharma videos, Facebook online vendors, and a live broadcast from the in-person event. Guests will have the option of watching taped videos of teachings from the live event at www.tibetan-bazaar.ca.

The Tibetan Bazaar is a staple within the Alberta Avenue community. About 1,000 people attend over the weekend. During the last few years, the organization has extended

ing attractive cultural items, Dharma books, paintings, handcrafted art, food, clothing, and much more.

For many of us, a delicious enticement has

fillings are cooked by volunteer professional chefs this year due to COVID-19 issues. Spicy tomato potatoes and savoury dal, as well as Tibetan-style chai and butter tea are also a must-try.

“The Tibetan Bazaar is like a home away from home for seeing old friends and acquaintances in a place of friendship and kindness that warms the heart. The delicious food, authentic vendors, and entertainment add a warm glow to the experience,” says Landon.

The overall atmosphere is one of warmth and pleasantness. “Our organization aims to run the Tibetan Bazaar, which is 100 per cent volunteer-driven, as an event to showcase Tibetan culture. But we also have light-hearted fun during our time together. Our hope is that we all take pride in diverse cultures, yet remember our sameness and common human family.”

Constance’s writing and editing career spans more than 40 years. She lives in Parkdale-Cromdale.



Enjoy Tibetan culture, food, and educational opportunities at Tibetan Bazaar. | Supplied

its online reach to international members through courses and teachings.

The vendors are a selection of artisans sell-

ing the food offerings of authentic Tibetan fare. Mouth-watering yak and vegetarian momos and steamed dumplings made with

TIBETAN BAZAAR
 Sept. 18-19, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
 Alberta Avenue Community Centre (9210 118 Ave)
 \$5 entrance fee, plus option to upgrade to include online content for an additional \$5.
www.tibetan-bazaar.ca



JOIN OUR VIRTUAL ALL CANDIDATE MEETINGS

Mayoral
 Monday, Sept. 13
 7:30 pm to 9:30 pm

Ward O-day'min
 Wednesday, Sept. 15
 7 pm to 9 pm

Ward Métis
 Thursday, Sept. 16
 7 pm to 9 pm

All meetings will be broadcasted on the RCP Facebook at Facebook.com/RatCreekPress



Get ready for the federal election

A little about your candidates for Edmonton Griesbach

- MYA COLWELL -

The federal election coming up on Sept. 20 has taken many people by surprise, but it will allow voters to have their voice heard.

Dr. Elizabeth Smythe, a professor of political science at Concordia University, says the election is happening early because the Trudeau government, who currently have a minority, hope to win a majority government.

Smythe explains the Liberal government likely have internal polling data that outlines a projected win, or they are hoping that their party will be on stronger footing than the Conservatives, who have a new leader in Erin O'Toole. O'Toole has less popular approval than Prime Minister Justin Trudeau or NDP leader Jagmeet Singh.

Although a law brought in under former prime minister Stephen Harper's government says elections normally take place every four years, elections can occur earlier. Smythe says it was interesting that the governor general dissolved the parliament because typically you need to lose a confidence vote for that to happen.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, prime ministers such as Jean Chrétien more commonly called elections when they believed they had a good chance at winning one, "but with the coming of this sort of four-year cycle, we expected, I would say, to see less of that," says Smythe. And it doesn't help that Trudeau has "really had trouble articulating why we need to have an election now."

Having the election in the middle of a pandemic has been met with backlash from the leaders of several of the parties, including Singh and O'Toole. "[Having the election now] could be construed by some as being reckless," says Smythe.

With such a short time to campaign, parties have a difficult path ahead in getting their ideas across to voters. "Even here in Alberta, not all the parties have nominated candidates for all 34 seats."

And there isn't a guaranteed outcome for the Liberals. "It could backfire," says Smythe. "It's a bit of a calculated risk... There was a momentum for the Liberals earlier in the spring, some of the goodwill coming out of their getting all the vaccinations rolling out, and that seems to have evaporated. We're back to [election] numbers that look very much like 2019 when [the Liberals] were denied a majority, so this election is really going to come down to the wire."

Until the election, voters can familiarize themselves with their candidates.

The candidates for the Edmonton Griesbach riding are Habiba Mohamud with the Liberal Party, Kerry Diotte with the Conservatives, Blake Desjarlais with the NDP, Thomas Matty with the People's Party of Canada (PPC), and Mary Joyce with the Marxist-Leninist Party.

Kerry Diotte, Conservative



Kerry Diotte, Conservative, is the incumbent for Edmonton Griesbach. | Supplied

"Kerry Diotte is campaigning for a third term as Edmonton Griesbach Conservative member of Parliament," says Diotte in a campaign statement. "On the local level, Diotte says he's especially proud of having helped scores of people at his constituency office since 2015 on matters relating to old-age pensions, immigration, unemployment, and many other federal fronts."

He's proud of his ongoing efforts to secure more funding and resources for police and community safety. Diotte says that during his campaigning, he's discovered more people find Conservative leader Erin O'Toole's platform appealing, which includes job creation, budgeting, health care, and mental health.

Habiba Mohamud, Liberal Party



Habiba Mohamud is the Liberal Party candidate for Edmonton Griesbach. | Supplied

"Dr. Habiba is a community advocate who was born in rural Kenya," says a statement from Mohamud's campaign. "She spent the last 12 years in public service working for the Government of Alberta [and] the success of her work earned her the Premier's Public Service Award."

Some of her priorities include education, senior advocacy, building a sustainable energy economy, and supporting vulnerable populations.

"Edmonton Griesbach needs a representative who understands our priorities, will take bold action to strengthen our middle class, protect people's health, protect our environment, and build a fairer and more equal Canada. Habiba will be that voice, and she'll never stop working hard to build a better future for our community."

Blake Desjarlais, NDP

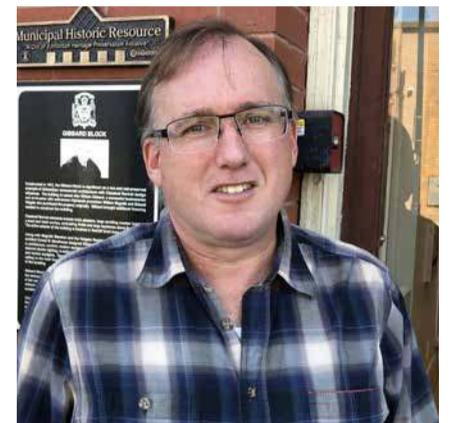


Blake Desjarlais is the NDP candidate for Edmonton Griesbach. | Supplied

"Blake is a Métis/Cree two-spirit man born in amiskwaciy-wáskahikan (Edmonton, Alberta) and raised in the Fishing Lake Métis Settlement—300 km northeast of Edmonton," says Desjarlais in a statement obtained from his campaign manager. "He serves as the Director of Public & National Affairs for the Metis Settlements General Council. Blake has worked hard to advance meaningful reconciliation and has helped lead negotiations on a Memorandum of Understanding between the Metis Settlements General Council and the Canadian government. He has also advocated for the rights of Indigenous people around the world and represented Métis people at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)."

Desjarlais' goals include "[Making] life more affordable by reducing costs on prescription drugs, childcare, housing and more; [taking] the profit out of long-term care, and making sure seniors get the care they need; [closing] the loopholes and [increasing] enforcement so the richest one per cent pay their fair share; [securing] more, good-paying jobs and [fighting] the climate crisis."

Thomas Matty, People's Party of Canada



Thomas Matty is the People's Party of Canada candidate for Edmonton Griesbach. | Supplied

"Tom has diverse life experience as an academic, athlete, teacher, and entrepreneur," says a statement obtained from Matty's campaign. "With most recent experience working within the family law system as a social entrepreneur (Canada's first and only McKenzie Friend), assisting self-representing litigants in person in a court of law. Tom is a family man who is dedicated to making Canada achieve [its] potential for us and our descendants."

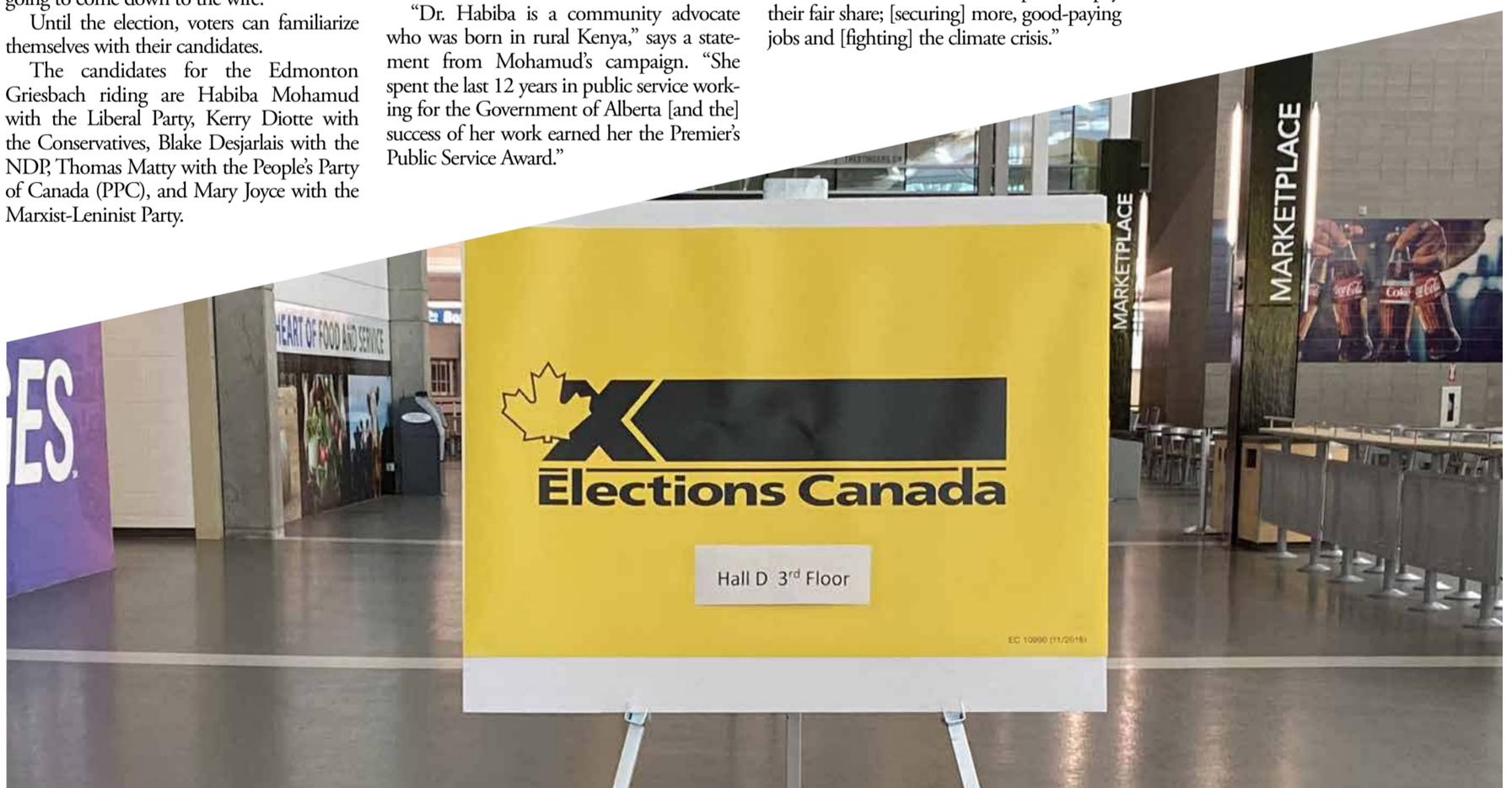
Mary Joyce, Marxist-Leninist Party

Mary Joyce could not be reached for comment at this time.

Election day takes place on Sept. 20, and advance voting can be done at Edmonton Griesbach's Elections Canada Office at Edmonton EXPO Centre, suite 301 before Sept. 14 at 6 p.m. Visit elections.ca to find out where you can vote and how to register.

You can also vote in advance at your assigned polling station from Sept. 10 to 13. Vote-by-mail services are also available.

Mya is a student working toward a career in journalism and communications. Writing is one of her passions, besides baking and playing trombone.



We, the people, build community

Community leagues invite residents to participate and join



EVERYONE IS WELCOME

COMMUNITY LEAGUE DAY

- KAREN MYKIETKA -

Brian Borschowa started volunteering at the Alberta Avenue food pantry a number of months ago and now he's a regular volunteer with the Community Hub Nights as well as a volunteer driver for the WECAN Food Basket pick ups. He's thankful he got involved in the league. "I got to meet different people, make connections, and got to know the community better."

Ali Hammington, league president, is grateful for Borschowa and others like him who've stepped up to share their time and skills with the community. She says, "Everyone in our community has something to offer. When we come together to encourage and support each other, amazing things can happen: new friends, new opportunities, and a safer and better-connected neighbourhood."

The past year-and-a-half has been difficult for many. Join together with your neighbours in your community for sharing, support, and social connection. The third Saturday in September is Community League Day to celebrate leagues and encourage more people to get involved.

Seven leagues in the district are putting on a variety of events and activities throughout September. They encourage you to not only

participate but also become a member. Many of the leagues have free memberships or will provide one at no cost if you cannot afford the fee. Check with your league for membership benefits, but popular benefits are community rink access and community time at Commonwealth Rec Centre.



LEARN MORE ABOUT LEAGUE HISTORY

Every neighbourhood or area in Edmonton has a community league. The first leagues formed in 1917 in an effort to counter the political force of the Chamber of Commerce, business tycoons, and developers. They soon realized they had a stronger voice and more power working together, so they formed the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues (EFCL) in 1921. EFCL marked its 100th anniversary with a community league plaza in William Hawrelak Park in 2021. [Edmonton's Urban Villages, Ron Kuban]

A community league is a volunteer-run, not-for-profit organization formed to meet the unique needs and interests of residents within a defined geographic area. [efcl.org] Parkdale, established in 1921, is the oldest league in the district followed by Alberta Avenue (1922), Eastwood (1923), and Cromdale (1925). It was two plus decades before the other neighbourhoods were established with community leagues: Elmwood Park (1946), Westwood and Spruce Avenue (1951), and Delton (1961). In 1986, Cromdale amalgamated with Parkdale.

ALBERTA AVENUE 9210 118 AVE

Whether you want to check it out for the first time or renew your membership, Alberta Avenue has lots of opportunities to get connected. Stop by their membership barbecue event on Thursday, Sept. 16 between 5-8 p.m. or their Campfire Pub Night on Friday, Sept. 24 from 7-11 p.m. Membership is "pay if you can".

They have dedicated their facility to community use every Thursday evening from 5-8 p.m. Community Hub Night includes things like a book library, sports, games, films, cooking, workshops, and more. Community members are encouraged to come lead or participate in activities that interest them or just hang out and visit with neighbours. In addition, Norwood Family Centre is bringing pre-school Storytime Adventures programming on Tuesday mornings starting Sept. 21. The league is also working with local seniors to host seniors' drop-in groups and/or programs.

DELTON 12325 88 ST

The Delton Hall closed before COVID-19 for some major renovations. Now it's time for the big reveal! Check out the grand re-opening of their newly renovated hall on Sunday, Sept. 19 from 1-4 p.m. when they kick things off with a block party and membership drive. Enjoy food, live music, games, and family activities. Then stay tuned for their next event, a Halloween party on Oct. 30.

EASTWOOD 11803 86 ST

Eastwood is partnering with Arts on the Ave and other interested leagues for activities celebrating Community League Day, which is the 100th anniversary of EFCL.

Meditation class is starting up after the September long weekend. Join in on Mondays at 6:30 p.m. The E-Town Vocal Music Society is starting their acapella singing sessions again on Thursday evenings. It

includes an adult group and a youth pop-music ensemble. The winter season starts Sept. 23. More info: etownvms.com. League memberships are free! And they rent out their hall or rink space. Go to eastwoodcommunity.org, contact info@eastwoodhub.org, or call 780.477.2354.

AGM on Wednesday, Sept. 29 at 7 p.m. at Eastwood Hall. Consider joining the board! They have a small cozy meeting space available for rent. Check out the amenities on elmwoodparkcommunity.org or email epcl.info@shaw.ca.

awareness event for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls at the end of September.

Join the league's Facebook eNewsletter or follow them on Facebook as they run a variety of free or low cost community programs. Something new to check out is a free two month introduction to Capoeira, a Brazilian martial arts form. Tuesdays and Thursdays at 6-7 p.m. for five-seven year olds and 7-8 p.m. for eight-16 year olds. Sign up at CreArtEdmonton.com.

SPRUCE AVENUE 10240 115 AVE

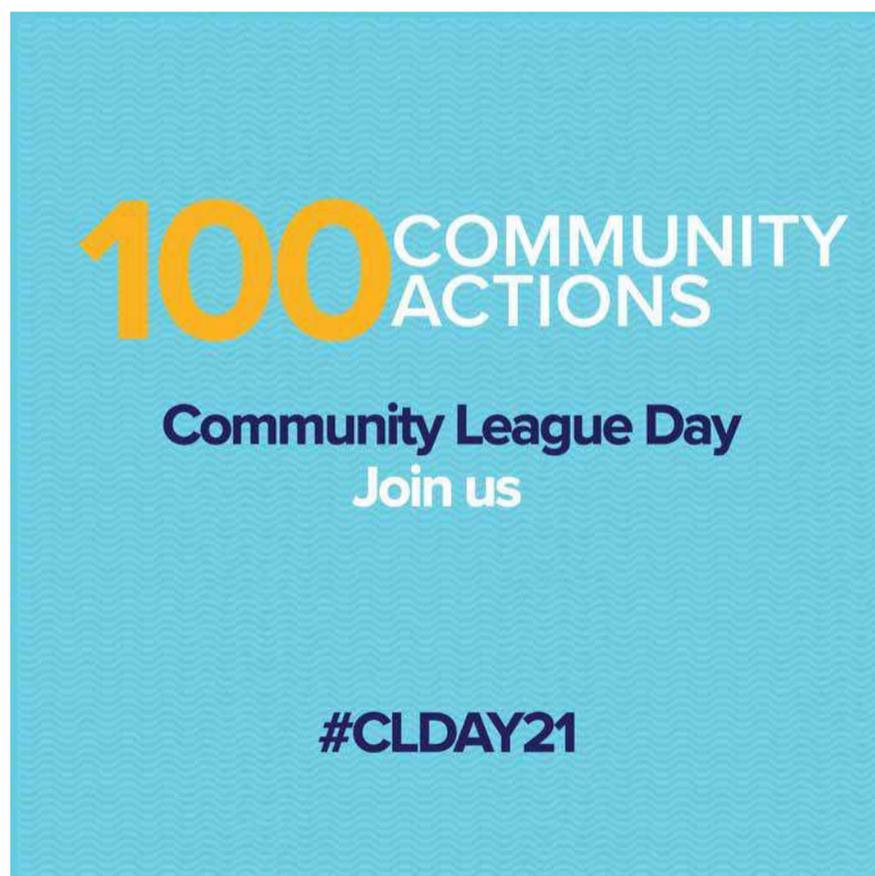
Spruce Avenue presents their annual Harvest Festival on Saturday, Sept. 11 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. The day's highlights include: 10 a.m. pancake breakfast, 12 p.m. Indigenous dancers, 2 p.m. historic walks, 4-6 p.m. barbecue fundraiser, 5 p.m. Sticks & Stones percussion performance. The barbecue fundraiser is in support of the Community Garden Project. Help them make the project a reality.

Memberships are currently free. Get one in person at the Harvest Festival or request it online at spruceavenuecommunity.com. Hall rentals can be booked at hall@spruceavenuecommunity.com. Next monthly board meeting is Sept. 21, 2021 at 7 p.m.

WESTWOOD 12139 105 ST

As per tradition, Westwood will again host a Community Bin event on Saturday, Sept. 18. Drop off your large unwanted items until the bin is full. There will also be a pancake breakfast that day. Check Facebook and westwoodCL.ca for event details. The league has teamed up with The Gùd Box to give you the opportunity to receive boxes of fresh, healthy, and affordable produce up to twice a month. Order link is on the website.

A busy woman of many jobs, Karen spends too much time in front of a computer. In the past 20 years, she has lived in Eastwood, Alberta Avenue and now Parkdale, meeting awesome people everywhere she goes.



ELMWOOD PARK 12505 75 ST

For their League Day on Saturday, Sept. 18 the community will be treated to a full-blown carnival and barbecue with roving entertainment, game stations, treats, and crafts. It's free for everyone and free memberships will be available. Stop by between noon-3 p.m.

Elmwood Park invites you to their

PARKDALE CROMDALE 11335 85 ST

Parkdale Cromdale is hosting an End of Summer Celebration on Friday, Sept. 3 from 6:30 to 10:30 p.m. with live music, drinks, and a free barbecue in their outdoor patio/ rink space. Their popular Harvest Dinner League Day event is back on Saturday, Sept. 18 as a culturally diverse culinary journey. Also watch for an art installation and

OPINION

Government funded childcare is crucial

Canada-wide programs will turn childcare deserts into an oasis

- MYA COLWELL -

It's no secret that Canada's early childhood education and care (ECEC) is patchy. There are varying degrees of quality and limited accessibility to ECEC facilities. Yet, parents are still left paying outrageous costs.

On average, Edmonton parents pay over \$1,000 a month for infant care, about \$950 a month for toddlers, and around \$925 every month for preschool-aged children, according to a report (www.policyalternatives.ca/TheAlarm) by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Families are forced to balance quality, accessibility, and of course, cost, so that their children can receive a basic need: care and education.

Public K-12 schooling and universities already receive government funding, and yet ECEC programs have been continuously overlooked, despite the huge potential to impact the wellbeing and future success of children.

These are issues that the federal government plans to address through the \$10-a-day childcare plan announced in April. The program aims to provide universal, high-quality care, and reduce childcare costs down to \$10 a day by 2026 — a reduction that is sorely needed. Right now, negotiations for the childcare plan have been postponed because the Alberta government did not come to an agreement with the federal government before the September election was announced.

So far, seven provinces and three territories have been able to reach an agreement with the federal government.

The plan's goal will allow parents to choose a childcare centre because it best fits the needs of their children, not because it is the only care they can afford or the only avail-

able ECEC facility in their neighbourhood.

In 2008, only 13 years ago, UNICEF ranked Canada last out of 25 developed countries regarding its ECEC policies. Today, Canada still lags behind other rich, developed countries in childcare practices, simply because childcare is unaffordable for many families.

In 2008, only 13 years ago, UNICEF ranked Canada last out of 25 developed countries regarding its ECEC policies. Today, Canada still lags behind other rich, developed countries in childcare practices, simply because childcare is unaffordable for many families.

Canada's childcare climate is full of "deserts," according to a report by Susan Prentice and Linda A. White, which occur when families have unequal access to childcare based on income or location. This means many families, especially racialized or low-income families, are being left behind because childcare is simply unaffordable, or because there aren't enough available slots in childcare centres in their area.

According to the same report, as of 2016, there were 4.9 million children between the ages of 0 and 12 in Canada, and only 1.35 million licensed childcare facilities. This only left enough space for 27 per cent of those children and led to almost 70 per cent of childcare facilities having a waiting list.

The federal government plans to grow the number of childcare spaces that are open across the country in order to meet the needs of Canadians. This would provide every family with equal opportunities for educating their children and investing in their futures.

The benefits to publicly funded ECEC don't stop at reduced costs and more available childcare slots. Early education programs have been shown to improve the educational aspirations of children, heighten their capacity to learn, and help them perform better on assessments, like reading comprehension. Quality ECEC programs also level the playing field and reduce social inequities for children, regardless of background or economic situation (see cpha.ca/sites/default/files/assets/policy/ecec_e.pdf).



Publicly funded Canadian childcare is not only important, but essential. | Pixabay

"There is no time more critical to children's brain development — and therefore their futures — than the earliest years of life," said UNICEF executive director Henrietta Fore. "We need governments to help provide parents with the support they need to create a nurturing environment for their young children."

Another reason affordable childcare is so essential is because it levels the playing field for women in the workforce. Since it is often women who stay at home with their children, they receive fewer chances to advance in their careers, unequal pay, and often have gaps in their employment history because of childcare. Universal Canadian childcare that is affordable and accessible would allow more women to enter the workforce, both inside and outside of the childcare industry. The 2021 Canadian Budget states that women would be able to reach their economic potential and contribute to Canada's GDP by an estimated 1.2 per cent.

The proposed plan will also ensure child-

hood educators receive consistent and effective ECEC training to improve childcare quality. Higher levels of education would also increase the wages of childcare educators above the notoriously low \$19.20 an hour average.

It's high time that Canada invests in quality ECEC for its children. This is an opportunity that other well-off countries (Sweden, Norway, and Germany) have already embraced. The plan can only improve the futures of children, the lives of women, and even Canada's financial situation. Childcare is essential and Alberta shouldn't let this opportunity pass by.

Mya is a student working toward a career in journalism and communications. Writing is one of her passions, besides baking and playing trombone.

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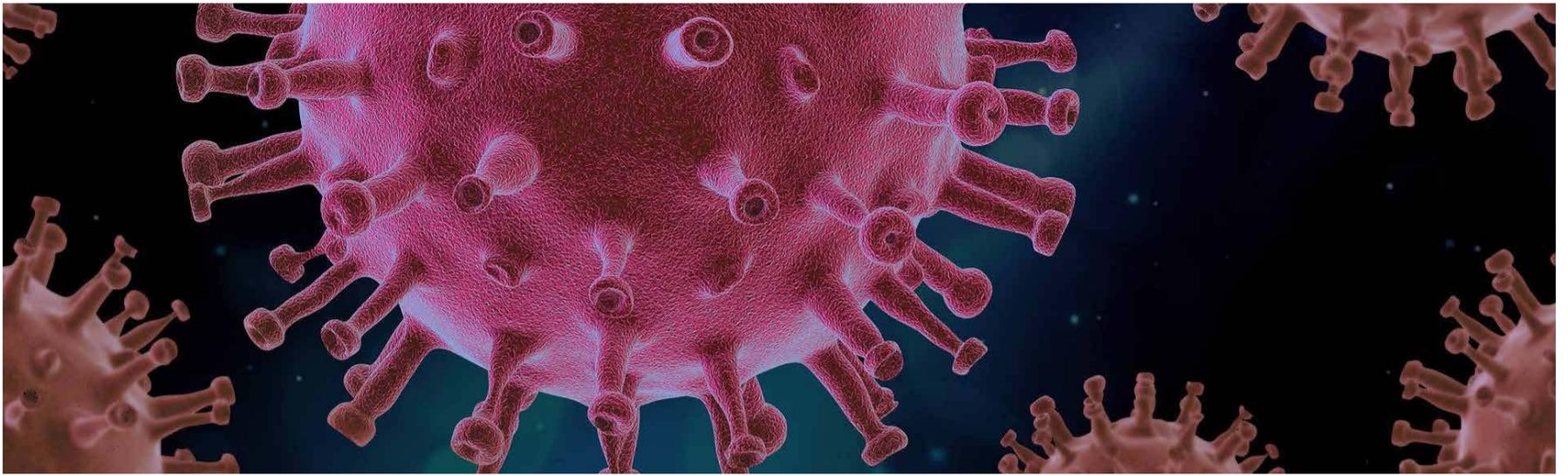


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The pandemic is still a threat

Vigilance is crucial in keeping the public healthy



The highly contagious Delta variant is dominating the fourth wave of the pandemic. | Pixabay

- STEPHEN STRAND -

It's safe to say that people are tired of the pandemic and the restrictions, but that doesn't mean that we can ease up in our efforts to contain the virus. The Alberta government's premature response in lifting restrictions has been a good lesson.

On July 29, the provincial government removed the mask mandate for almost all indoor settings except public transit and continuing care facilities, made the isolation period for close contacts recommended but not mandatory, no longer required testing for asymptomatic people (including close contacts of positive cases), reduced the number of hotel rooms set aside for isolation, and stopped contact tracers from notifying close contacts of people with COVID-19. They also removed all public health restrictions, which include removing capacity limits on indoor and outdoor gatherings.

On Aug. 16, they planned to remove the mask mandate for public transit as well as the requirement to self-isolate after testing positive. It's as though the government believed the threat of COVID-19 was gone, leaving the public's safety up to the public.

Because of the uptick in cases, the government decided that the remaining restrictions would stay in place until Sept. 27. But, experts are predicting that we are on the verge of a fourth wave, even with the current restrictions.

But COVID-19 is still an ever-present threat due to the highly contagious Delta variant. Large outbreaks continue to crop up around the world. In fact, three times in the first week of August, Florida surpassed its own reported daily cases. They do not have a mask mandate and have had their restrictions lifted, and we are seeing the outcome of those decisions. Over the course of a week, they had over 150,000 new cases.

On Aug. 12, there were 582 new active cases in Alberta. Less than a week before the restrictions were to be removed, Alberta was in the midst of an upward trending case count. Because of the uptick in cases, the government decided that the remaining restrictions would stay in place until Sept. 27. But, experts are predicting that we are on the verge of a fourth wave, even with the current restrictions.

Recently, I have taken some work in film in Calgary. I have done some daily work on shows produced by the CBC, HBO, and MGM Studios, and I have accepted a longer contract on a show produced by Disney.

Each studio requires their employees to get tested prior to their first day of work. The test is not only paid for by the production

company, but the employee also gets paid for a half-day to take the test. The employee must also participate in an online COVID-19 safety course prior to their first day. Once the person has started work, COVID-19 testing happens at least once a week. You get tested more if you are on set and are in close proximity to actors who are required to take off their masks. Everyone must wear masks unless they are required to remove it for their job, or if you are in the designated doffing zone. All these areas are set up with proper physical distancing and safety parameters. There is a COVID-19 screener app that employees complete before arriving to work each morning. And when you get to work, a member of the health and safety team scans the QR code the screener app provides once you've answered the questions.

Anyone who tests positive must self-isolate and provide the names of everyone they are in close contact with, and the production company will contact those who are on the show with them. All close contacts are also required to self-isolate for 14 days and must test negative before returning to work. Those who are required to self-isolate will still receive

a portion of their paycheque every week. Right before Alberta went into the Open for Summer Plan on July 1, the production companies sent out a memorandum to all staff stating that, although the Alberta government is lifting restrictions, everyone who wishes to continue working for them must follow the strict safety protocols set forth by their health and safety teams while at work.

Production companies may be in the entertainment business, but they are a business nonetheless. Positive cases create delays and cost them money. Because of this, they are doing whatever they can to keep people safe. Even if it's all about the money, I feel the safest from COVID-19 while I am at work, surrounded by people who are tested regularly, wearing masks, and following strict protocols.

Disney is currently doing a significantly better job of keeping people safe than the current provincial government. They are also doing a better job providing support for people who miss work due to COVID-19.

How embarrassing is it that a corporation is taking people's health more seriously than our own government?

Stephen works in broadcasting and writes for fun.

Production companies may be in the entertainment business, but they are a business nonetheless. Positive cases create delays and cost them money. Because of this, they are doing whatever they can to keep people safe.



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Author takes a journey of discovery

Omar Mouallem crafts a compelling personal story

- RUSTI L LEHAY -

Even more than a historical trapeze through the Muslim faith, *Praying to the West: How Muslims Shaped the Americas* by local author Omar Mouallem is a cultural and political exploration. Mouallem bares his journey of discovery, along with his transitions from rebellious agnosticism to reluctant faith, all on the page.

Memoirs or personal stories can sometimes have too much navel-gazing, but not this one. From somersaulting between the prayer rugs with his cousins in a High Prairie, Alberta mosque to the far reaches of Inuvik, Turtle Island, Mouallem explores mosques found across Canada, the United States, Mexico, and further.

Part memoir, part historical study and cultural critique, this is personal writing that digs deep into what shaped the author. The perceived world around him creates a piece of literature with a broad-spectrum appeal. Mouallem's intention with the book is to "demystify and normalize the Muslim presence in the west." Along his journey, he also uncovers and portrays different perspectives and the fascinating role Islam has played in politics and even industrialization.

In the book, Mouallem writes about how the cousins somersaulted and fooled around until one of the uncles would lift his eyes from meditation to glower at their rambunctious antics. Mouallem grew to appreciate the poetry of movement in the prayer sequences, seeking to imitate and "syncretize

each movement" from hand over the belly, the kneeling, standing, prostrating, repeating... "each pose of Islamic prayer is a stanza unto itself."

Islam translated means "submission to the will of God." The problem of that is the same as with the Christian Bible: who is doing or leading the interpretations? This is shown in the debate between the author and Haaq, a young Trinidadian man who, after some prison time, launched a mission to reform gang youth with scripture. The author and Haaq hold different views and the reader is privy to the difficult questions they debate.

Much later in the book, in a Mexican Muslim community before the Midnight Sun Mosque discovery, Mouallem observes a father/son relationship that mirrors his own relationship with his father. Both sons were stubborn, exhibiting religious differences. Mouallem's father may have been tough on him but discipline was never meted out for religious differences, only when an incident resulted "from a failure of judgment and character."

Mouallem consistently tours the reader through the history of the mosques and Islam faith across the Americas, demonstrating for the reader the placement and origins of the Muslim peoples and faith in the Americas, one mosque at a time.

Mouallem says it best: "Wherever there is a Muslim community, there is a difference of opinion, practice and beliefs. While Islam has

the power to heal wounds and bring people together; it can also do the opposite." The same can be said of Christianity. If everyone interpreted the will of God as John Lennon did, and lived as if love was the only law that mattered, one might see the world differently and believe holy wars can indeed disappear.

One of the big, many "aha" moments in this book takes place on Turtle Island, in the final chapter. El-Farouk, a queer Muslim, shares how no one can know what Islam looks like "because spirituality has no set form. Those who disagree stagnate a religion by looking to the past rather than the future..."

As an author, Mouallem enlightens the reader on the true meaning and message of Islam. "There's no hatred that can't be healed, no anger that can't be reconciled, no act that can't be forgiven when you submit to something bigger than yourselves."

That is a future many readers can and need to embrace from family disputes right to international conflicts. The book is available at all major book retailers, including Glass Bookshop and Audreys in Edmonton, as well as Indigo and Amazon.ca. The suggested retail price is \$34.99. More info: simonandschuster.ca/books/Praying-to-the-West.

Rusti has been writing professionally since 1999. Her favourite word activities are coaching writers and offering online writing stay-treats.



Omar Mouallem is a local author and filmmaker who lives near Alberta Avenue. | Aaron Pedersen

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Telling stories is inherently human

Brad Woods offered stories and education during local workshop



Brad Woods is a storyteller who plied his trade at Arts on the Ave's Tell Good Stories. | Rusti L Leahy

- RUSTI L LEHAY -

As soon as toddlers master full sentences, they often regale any listening ear. Brad Woods, from Guelph, Ontario, likely told stories while still in diapers. "I love listening to stories. The more you listen, the more you want to tell good stories." He jokes it is the "opposite of a vicious cycle; it's a constructive cycle."

Stopping in Edmonton to perform near The Carrot Coffeehouse on Aug. 5 for Arts on the Ave's event Tell Good Stories, his daughter appeared as a key player in one story.

Woods and his wife engaged in the classic Canadian summer pastime of a road trip from Ontario to B.C., where his daughter is currently interning on a farm. You might call it a word trip. He has been offering readings and storytelling across Canada.

On the return leg of their excursion,

Woods needed to hightail it out of Edmonton to offer a storytelling workshop in Winnipeg on Aug. 8. He took his time, though, with his audience. After each story, he posed thought-provoking questions sparking interesting conversations.

His passion for oral traditions shines through each performance. "I record some film and writing, but I'm 99 per cent focused on oral traditions." He doesn't believe in dwindling attention spans. "We choose a short or bad attention span." He is absolutely right that performers must be excited about their own stories in order to build excitement in an audience.

If you look at the stories movies tell, three themes Woods referred to appear repeatedly: truth, time, and happiness.

As Jonathan Gottschall, author of *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human* writes, "We are, as a species, addicted to stories. Even when the body goes to sleep,

the mind stays up all night, telling itself stories."

Woods says, "Telling stories makes us human. There are six elements to a story." Then he immediately told a story that included all six elements: an interesting or exotic location, a crisis, a solution, a beast of the air or water, a storm or an act of God, and music.

His advice to begin your own storytelling tradition is to think about where you are in the story and leave space for others to imagine themselves. "Stories allow people to belong." They also allow for individual interpretations.

A story about his daughter has meant different things to audiences. One example is how parents have to let go in stages as a child takes on bigger age-appropriate challenges further and further from home. In the story, his daughter wants to believe in mermaids, and travels to ever greater bodies of water uttering the repeating refrain to onlookers,

"If mermaids don't exist, I don't want to go home." After telling that story at one event, he heard a grief counsellor used it in her practice. The audience agreed it could help people grieving, be a parenting story, or an emotional management story. For Woods, it was a moment of warmth for him and his daughter.

After sharing the seven types of stories (tragedy, a quest, comedy, voyage, rebirth, return, and rags to riches), he left the audience with some final thoughts. Even though "time is a non-renewable resource, it is impossible to waste time. The most mundane experiences can hold lessons." That is where we find our stories that are gifts people can hold forever.

Rusti has been writing professionally since 1999. Her favourite word activities are coaching writers and offering online writing stay-treats.

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Real estate remains essential

The pandemic changed how people view their homes

- TALEA MEDYNSKI -

The pandemic has ushered in many surprise turns, but real estate in the *Rat Creek Press* neighbourhoods has held steady.

“We did change the way we did things, but we kept working as we’re essential workers,” says Roxanne Litwyn, a real estate agent with Stirling Real Estate. Litwyn also lives in the Alberta Avenue neighbourhood. “It didn’t affect the prices. Lots of questionnaires, pre-qualifying before [people] even stepped into the house.”

Because most health restrictions have been lifted, real estate agents can now hold open houses again.

Litwyn adds, “I didn’t find last year slowed down at all.”

Michelle Patterson Nipp, a real estate agent for MaxWell Challenge Realty, also lives in Alberta Avenue. She agrees with Litwyn. “I think, generally speaking, [real estate has] been pretty steady. Year to year it has increased, but month to month has a slight decrease.” She adds that not all of the fluctuation is due to the pandemic; some of it is seasonal. “People are looking in the spring. The Edmonton market is completely different than anywhere else in the province.”

Patterson Nipp says that at the beginning of the pandemic, sales decreased “because people weren’t sure if sales would go through. Now, it’s busy.”

What the pandemic did change is how people view their homes. Patterson Nipp says that people are making big changes. “Before the pandemic, people hadn’t spent as much time at home. It changed from people spending most of their time away

from home to spending most of their time at home.” Because so many people ended up working remotely, what they needed for space and functionality in a home changed. Specifically, many buyers now want a home that has space for a home office. If they have

children, they may want space for online schooling. “These changes have added to the influx of people looking for homes. People moving from a two bedroom condo may want a four bedroom home.”

Properties in our neighbourhoods are

still affordable compared to the rest of Edmonton. Because housing in these areas is so diverse, there’s no average price. Housing prices can range from \$133,000 to \$417,000. Litwyn says that in the last 30 days, the average length of time housing in the area was for sale was 36 days.

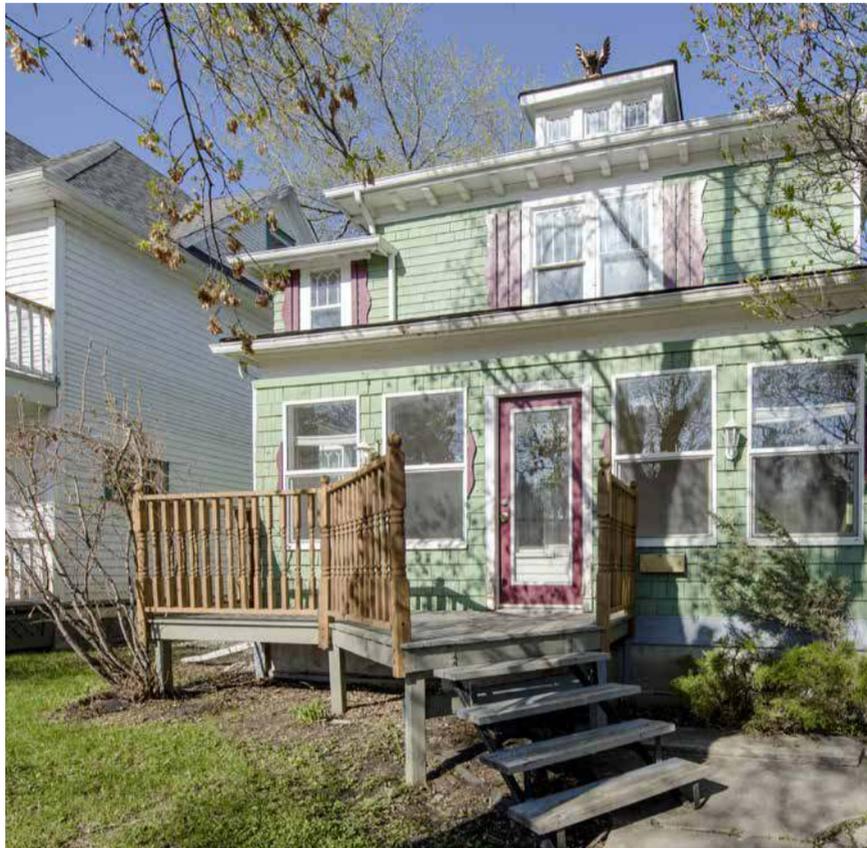
“That’s why people love this area—it’s so diverse. We don’t have standard housing here.” The buyers are as diverse as the properties. “Buyers are all over the place,” says Litwyn.

Alberta Ave and Parkdale are popular neighbourhoods buyers want to live in. Litwyn adds, “I would say the entire area is becoming popular.” The fact that there’s plenty of community activities and arts is drawing more people to the area. Plus, “we know everybody,” she says.

Patterson Nipp points out an up and coming area is the Blatchford development, which was the former municipal airport. “It’s appealing for families who want to live centrally and in a newer home.” She says homes in central Edmonton tend to be older and come with work to update them, but the Blatchford development has new homes and the appeal of living centrally and with nearby amenities. The homes are attached in a townhome style, but there’s still plenty of space.

But overall, it depends on what the buyer wants.

Patterson Nipp adds, “It’s not the people [that have changed], it’s the lifestyle. It’s the basic needs in life.”



Properties vary widely in our area, like this home for sale in Alberta Avenue. | Michelle Patterson Nipp

Talea is the Rat Creek Press editor. She loves sharing the stories of our diverse neighbourhoods.

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Reimagining Edmonton's old homes

Promoting heritage through an impressionist lens

- GRACE TAYLOR TUNSKI -

Experience Edmonton's rich history in an entirely new way at the YEG Old Houses Exhibition running from Aug. 7 to Sept. 25 at McLuhan House Artist Studio. The event features paintings from local Hong Kong-Canadian artist Aeris Osborne. Each painting shines a spotlight on an old house from around the city, including an Alberta Avenue craftsman style house and McCauley's Queen Anne house.

Osborne, who moved to Canada in 2007, started painting while waiting for her permanent residence status. The self-taught artist fell in love with Edmonton's old homes during walks around the city, and jumped at the chance to feature them during her time as the artist-in-residence at McLuhan House.

"Coming from all the high rise apartments and skyscrapers [in Hong Kong], I loved walking in the older neighbourhoods. The old neighbourhoods give you a taste of Edmonton as a city and show you what the city was built on," Osborne says. "You know, new houses, they're easy to build. But the heritage and generations attached to each house, that's really something to cherish."

Osborne uses her bright impressionist style to enhance characteristics of each house.

Her bold brush strokes pair seamlessly with vibrant summer colours and explosive garden scenes to pull you into an Edmonton that feels warm and familiar. "The house speaks to me, which allows me to speak with the canvas and paint it," Osborne says.

"Alberta Avenue has a lot of interesting houses, and I love the neighbourhood. When I was walking and taking photos, this one just spoke to me. It's an old house that has been kept in very good shape. The colours, the navy blue by the gable contrasted with the white siding, it drew my attention. This is the only house [in the series] that was a semi-bungalow and when I saw it, I just loved it."

Osborne says she hopes that by emphasizing architecture in her pieces, she can give insight to the significance of the heritage that comes with each distinctive building style.

"The [Alberta Avenue] house is closer to the craftsman style. It's more of a cozy, neat, kind of smaller house. It's less about the size and more about the craftsmanship," Osborne says.

"It's a large category, if you research these [craftsman style] houses, there's a wide range of how they can look. It's really different from Dutch colonial or Spanish houses, the ones that you can recognize on sight. Craftsman is really more American. They used more

timber and built something more practical."

From the cozy and practical Alberta Avenue house to the very much large-and-in-charge Magrath Mansion, Osborne has captured each home in a warm and verdant snapshot of summer that is sure to leave you craving a stroll around Edmonton's historic neighbourhoods.

Look at photos of each home @yegoldhouses on Instagram and follow Osborne to stay up to date on new pieces @art_by_aeris on Instagram and @artbyaeris on Facebook.

Grace is a high school student who has loved writing ever since she could hold a pencil. She has lived near the Alberta Avenue area her whole life and loves promoting the local community.

AUG. 7 - SEPT. 25
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Artist Aeris Osborne beside her painting of an old home on Alberta Avenue. Osborne is celebrating her first solo art exhibition. | Grace Tunski



Left: A reimagining of the Alberta Avenue craftsman style house, decked out with a lush garden and a warm, pink sky. | Grace Tunski



Right: Paintings line the walls of McLuhan House Artist Studio. The vibrant colours cast a warm summer atmosphere over the entire studio. | Grace Tunski



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Fighting for equal opportunities

Advocating to end discrimination for those with disabilities

- MYA COLWELL -

Mirella L. Sacco, a McDougall/Sprucewood resident, is a lifelong disability advocate, and she has dedicated much of her adult years to improving the lives of those with disabilities.

Sacco was born with spina bifida, and she is well aware of the challenges that those with disabilities face.

During the pandemic, Sacco started the Mirella L. Sacco Support Fund for Adults with Disabilities. "I've always really wanted to do something like that," says Sacco, "and it was just the right time."

Adults living with disabilities are often unable to get the medical equipment and supplies they need, says Sacco, and the fund was created to provide access to supplies and equipment not covered through other disability programs.

Sacco created the endowment fund in partnership with the Edmonton Community Foundation. Money is still being raised for the fund, but when the benchmark amount is raised through donations and fundraisers, it will become available for adults with disabilities to use.

In addition to disability advocacy, Sacco loves to cook. "I'm Italian," says Sacco. "I'll go to what is supposed to be an Italian restaurant and they just miss the mark!" Sacco has written four e-book cookbooks to share authentic Italian recipes with others, but it was a journey, she says. The absence of written recipes and concrete measurements made it difficult to put the meals she grew up with on paper.

"It was always a glass of this, a spoon of that, a handful of this," Sacco explains,

"so that took many years to do that first Italian cookbook." Sacco also loves music and comedy. "Everybody in music and comedy has been incredibly kind to me," she notes.

Sacco is very involved in the community, and she is currently working on a petition to increase the hours of operation for the disabled adult transportation service. "I try to get involved whenever I can and try to engage politicians," says Sacco. "If I feel that there is something that's wrong, I will reach out to MLAs or city council, depending on the level of government that's involved."

"I've had a lot of opportunities to learn," says Sacco, and she is committed to passing on her knowledge to others. "I just think it's important for people in general to engage, to become enlightened [through learning,] and then we all become empowered."

She hopes to help others become self-advocates and fight for what they need and what they believe in.

Plus, Sacco runs a blog at mirellamuses.wordpress.com that allows individuals to tell their stories in their own words.

Sacco's main goal through her disability advocacy is to stop people with disabilities from being judged. "Don't judge a book by its cover... you can have two people with the same disability and their experiences will be completely different because it depends on family, it depends on friends, it depends on the level of disability; there are many, many factors involved. Everybody's experience is going to be different."

And above all, Sacco wants those with disabilities to be seen. "I think that it's important that people understand that we're human



Mirella L. Sacco is a disability advocate working to create equal opportunities for people with disabilities. | Mirella L. Sacco

beings," says Sacco with emotion. Her greatest hope through her disability advocacy is "that people with disabilities won't be judged. That there won't be any discrimination. That we will be seen."

Mya is a student working toward a career in journalism and communications. Writing is one of her passions, besides baking and playing trombone.

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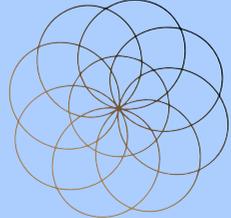
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Gear up for classic cars

Check out a local Valiant rental business in the Alberta Ave community

- MYA COLWELL -

River Sky has started the engine and gotten her own Valiant rental business up and running.

As the owner of seven Plymouth Valiants—every model from 1963 to 1966—Sky is keenly aware of people’s interest in classic cars. “I can’t go anywhere without people honking, waving, smiling,” says Sky. “I go to fill up with gas and I give myself an extra 15 minutes or more because I know it’s going to take [longer]. People are going to be coming and talking to me and I don’t want to be rude.”

Sky decided to start renting her Valiants for weddings, date nights, and even girls’ nights out, after she realized how interested the community was in going for a ride in a classic car and taking photos with it. She offers her driving and professional photography services as part of the event packages and can tailor the packages to fit the needs of clients.

The options are limitless. Sky says she can take individuals out for photoshoots, drive them to dinner, take them back to a club, or stop along the way to get ice cream.

Sky has always been a lover of classic cars, especially Valiants. “My very first car was a 1963 Plymouth Valiant and I bought it for a whole \$100,” explains Sky. “I drove that car for the better part of my formative years in high school... Even though some people had fancier, faster cars—nobody cared. Everybody absolutely loved my little car.”

“Ever since then,” continues Sky, “I’ve always had such a keen interest in classic cars.” When she came across a 1964 Plymouth Valiant years later, she jumped at the opportunity to get back into a classic car.

“They’re such unique looking cars,” says Sky. “They have the pushbutton typewriter style gearshift on the dash and... a little sliding parking lever on the early ones [the ’60 and ’64 models...] and it was always a point of fascination for me.”

Sky started learning how to restore her Valiants after she realized how expensive it was bringing the cars into the shop. She hired a mechanic to teach her how to rebuild an

engine, and she uses service manuals, books, and even Facebook groups and YouTube videos to learn more about restoring the cars. “As soon as you get over the fear of getting your hands in there and working on things, the better it is,” she explains. “I love being a part of that car from every nut, every bolt, to then taking that out and letting other people enjoy [the car] as well.” Now, she does everything including mechanical work, welding,

and autobody repair.

While the restoration process can take up to eight years with classic cars like Valiants, Sky isn’t hung up on perfection. “I make sure that the cars are mechanically sound. That’s my first and foremost, to make sure that the cars are safe to be on the road. And from there I start working on the cosmetic part of it,” she says. “And to me there’s no point in spending thousands and thousands of dollars re-chroming a piece of chrome that nobody’s going to see... I’m an imperfect person and I don’t care if my cars are perfect and have a little blemish, a little fault here and there.”

So far, Sky has driven a couple in her 1965 convertible on their wedding day. They had been looking for a classic car for almost a year-and-a-half. “There aren’t many people that are willing to loan out their vehicles for photo shoots, for film, for weddings,” Sky explains, and she is happy to bridge that gap.

Sky is also passionate about empowering women through her business. “I want to start teaching and inspiring other women to get involved in stuff like this,” she says. “You can do it. It’s not just a guys’ domain. If you really want to know how to do it, you can.”

Two of Sky’s Valiants, the four door 1964 sedan and the 1965 convertible, are currently available for date night packages, weddings, and more.

Check out [valgalmotors](#) on Instagram for more information.

Mya is a student working toward a career in journalism and communications. Writing is one of her passions, besides baking and playing trombone.



River Sky with her 1964 four door Valiant sedan. | Mya Colwell

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Advocating for local businesses

Jay Ball is ready to help businesses and the community

- STEPHEN STRAND -

Alberta Avenue is home to a variety of businesses not found anywhere else in Edmonton, and the Alberta Avenue Business Association (AABA) engages with the business and community groups to promote the area as a shopping destination. At the helm of AABA is Jay Ball.

On May 1, Ball took over as the executive director of AABA.

"I have a pretty diverse background in community engagement in all of the different positions I have been in," says Ball, who explains he's familiar with the area because his grandmother lives there. "I also did believe that it's important to brand the Avenue in a little different way than it's been branded in the past. That was the original reason that I went after [the job]," Ball explains. "It's a community that really needs a push in the right direction."

His vision for Alberta Avenue is evolving, but he explains, "First and foremost, it's really not my vision that needs to be laid out and executed." The board of directors and community stakeholders also need to be involved in the process. "Alberta Avenue needs to be a safe place. It needs to be a place that businesses can grow and prosper. It needs to be a place that people can call home. And that's the beginning," Ball says it's the board that has the vision. "Things have evolved over the last 90 days, from what I originally thought we could do with the Avenue until now."

For the first 60 days, Ball took the time to get to know the community.

"Who are the community leaders? What are they trying to accomplish? How do I fit into all of this? Just like any job, you got to get to know all of the players." After that, he began to dive right into the issues facing the community.

"This is an Avenue and corridor that doesn't just need attention on the business community," Ball says. "It needs a listening ear to the community in general. Particularly the vulnerable community. And people at risk, people in need." Ball adds that a healthy business community doesn't stand on its own, it is supported by the community at large. "It's all interconnected."

Ball is also working

with the City's bylaw department to communicate with owners of vacant buildings to try and help develop and give new life to the buildings, such as the Avenue Theatre. But it has proven to be a mountain of a task even to get them to return his phone calls. "The level of apathy and disinterest from some businesses along the Avenue, vacant land

owners, vacant building owners, I find quite frustrating," Ball says. But he says that is something he feels he can figure out.

He says predatory businesses that take advantage of the vulnerable must stop, although he doesn't know the solution yet. "We have convenience stores selling bear spray, knives, and pipes. We have large business owners on the Avenue owning multiple low-rent houses, just a block or two off the Avenue, that contribute to the drug

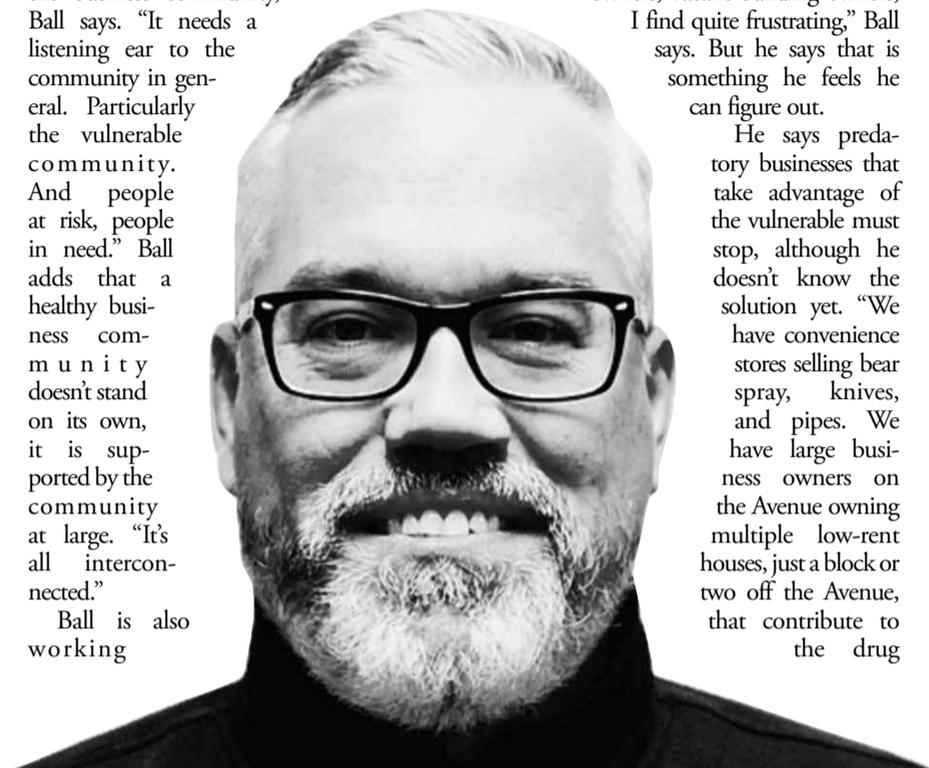
culture. We have a business that owns an apartment block right on the Avenue that they just don't take care of. Three weeks ago this apartment block was cited with 61 citations from AHS. So, yeah, it's a big deal," Bell explains. "We have to, as a community, find a way to stand up and say, 'This isn't acceptable anymore.'"

While he hasn't been part of the community for as long as many of the business owners and community members, Ball says he feels he can bring a fresh approach to the community. "I hate seeing problems and not being able to act on them. So, I have to find ways to make progress in a couple different areas."

Ball's role as the executive director is to be an advocate on behalf of businesses. He also helps market the main street and bring people to the community. In this role, Ball also leads the board through long-term strategic planning for revitalization and renewal.

"I have been in leadership positions in non-profit groups, or community-orientated groups, or sports groups for about 25 years," explains Ball. Those positions involved building a brand and creating experiences, which he is doing for Alberta Avenue.

"We are not selling food. We are not selling the products in storage. We are selling the unique experience of coming to a historic place, a historic corridor. It's full of character with great shop owners, with great experiences."



Jay Ball has been executive director of AABA since May 1. | Supplied

Stephen works in broadcasting and writes for fun.

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Local alleyways to get a makeover

The Green Alley Initiative will beautify five local alleys

- SERENA ARCHAMBAULT -

Five alleys in the Alberta Ave community can expect a makeover through a new pilot project called the Green Alley Initiative, likely to be completed by next spring.

Taken from examples of similar projects in Quebec, the initiative aims to increase the walkability, safety, and vibrancy of alleys that have often been neglected, underutilized, or unsafe.

Maggie Glasgow, an Alberta Avenue resident and the initiative organizer, proposed the idea. Some of her family members in Quebec had taken on their own project as part of Montreal's ongoing, government-funded Green Alleys of Montreal.

"The alley behind my brother's place [in Montreal] is full of kids, parents, and neighbours playing, chatting, and getting to know one another. The Ruelles Vertes program, supported by the City of Montreal, has changed the way the concrete urban space is used—from only vehicular traffic to vibrant, activated green spaces that bring communities together. We hope to see similar outcomes in our own inner-city alleys, starting with the five pilot alleys, and expanding over four years for a total of 25 to 30 Green Alleys," says Glasgow.

Currently, the initiative is working with community groups like Arts on the Ave and the CEASE Centre to End All Sexual Exploitation. Many community members noticed the alleys behind their properties have become a choice spot for illegal activity like prostitution, often bringing aggressive johns to the area, and creating an unsafe environment for children in their own backyards. Organizers and community members hope that this grassroots initiative can deter misuse of back alleys and help bring back alley neighbours together in a common shared space.

The alleys the team wants to revitalize include 112 Ave to 113 Ave between 94 and 95 St; 114 to 115 Ave between 94 and 95 St; the northside of 118 Ave (the avenue that runs east-west) between 94 and 95 St; 119 Ave to 120 Ave between 86 and 87 Streets; and 119 to 120 Aves between 88 and 89 St.

The Green Alleys team, a passionate group of neighbours and local leaders, conducted walks to the proposed alleys. Glasgow says neighbours were surprised to see a group of people in the alley and showed a lot of interest in the project and its potential to decrease thefts and other problems in back alleys.

"People were pretty enthusiastic about get-

ting to know one another and working on a project together," she adds.

For Glasgow, this confirmed that back alley spaces in Alberta Avenue are not living up to their full potential.

In one location, the team saw litter, overgrowth, and even evidence of an encampment.

Glasgow says, "The alleys take on an

[urban] heat island effect." Excessive use of concrete and other heat absorbent material can cause alleys to be hotter and more unpleasant than main streets and thoroughfares for those whose properties are located adjacent to the alley.

Organizers are seeking sponsorship with the help of the University of Alberta's Engineering Connects program.

"The Engineering Connects students have already started creating a list of potential sponsors and organizations that might be interested in helping with this pilot project. They have also been busy creating an interactive map showing the locations of the Green Alleys that will house the before and after photos of each site."

She adds, "We would like the alleys to have bright colours throughout, with garage murals, fence paintings, bright structures (bird houses, windmills, flags, etc), and painted concrete [with easy games]. We would like to see more biodiversity in the alleys as well, which could include gardens, raised beds, and trees. We would also like to see the back alleys repaved and with more city and residential lighting as our winters are dark."

In their efforts to get the project moving and learn more about their alleys, neighbours on Glasgow's street have already banded together to conduct garbage clean ups and plan to do so again throughout the fall. The Green Alley Initiative team is currently working on their website as well as a safety survey they want community members to complete. The website link will be updated and included on ratcreek.org when the team's website is complete.

Community members can make their alleys safer and more welcoming by following some of Edmonton Police Service's tips. These include installing lights with motion sensors, getting to know your neighbours, photographing and recording serial numbers and models of property, and planting perennials in back alleys to bring beauty and shade to the area. They also encourage homeowners to post their address on their garage if it faces the back alley. This will help save time in police finding a home if there's an emergency and will remind would-be thieves that the property belongs to someone else.

For more information, see EPS' tips on garage security through edmontonpolice.ca (search for garage and backyard security).

Or, see examples of green alleys in Montreal and an interactive map here: bbqboy.net/the-best-green-alleys-on-the-plateau-mont-royal-2020/.

Serena graduated in 2021 with a Sociology major and Economic minor from the University of Alberta. She enjoys working on the ground with community organizations and dabbles in art on the side whenever she finds the time.



This is one of the alleys that will be part of the Green Alley Initiative. | Supplied

"The Ruelles Vertes program, supported by the City of Montreal, has changed the way the concrete urban space is used—from only vehicular traffic to vibrant, activated green spaces that bring communities together. We hope to see similar outcomes in our own inner-city alleys."



Green Alley Initiative members toured the five alleys they plan to transform by next spring. | Supplied



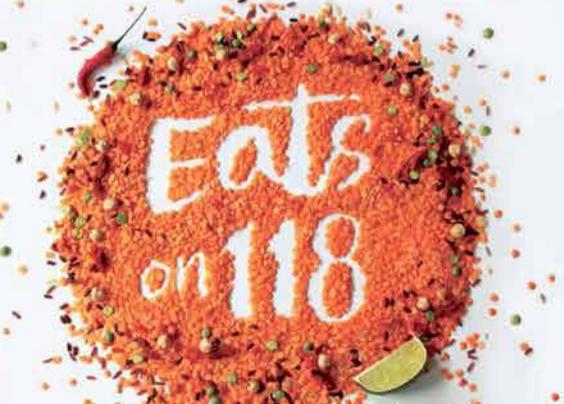
Montreal has a government-funded Green Alleys of Montreal. This is one of those alleys. | Stephen Glasgow



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