

# Rat Creek Press

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



BY THE COMMUNITY - FOR THE COMMUNITY

SEPTEMBER 2022

## Kaleido is ablaze with colour

The festival returns to the Avenue this September



Music and dancing are integral parts of Kaleido Family Arts Festival. | Epic Photography

### TALEA MEDYNSKI

After a few years of a modified Kaleido Family Arts Festival, it's back on 118 Avenue from Sept. 16-18.

The theme, "hearts in living colour", complements the festival returning home to 118 Avenue.

"We've had lots of talks with lots of sponsors," says Sauvé MacBean, festival manager of Kaleido Family Arts Festival. "The tour was the answer to the COVID question. COVID-19 is at the point where we're able to follow guidelines and restrictions and still hold the festival."

Christy Morin, the artistic director, says, "We're almost calling it a reboot or rebuild of Kaleido." She explains this year embraces bringing back festival favourites that people were missing.

The Front Porch performances, where musicians perform from local residents' front porches, will continue. "We're asking people to sit down and attend them." Locations will be advertised online at [kaleidofest.ca](http://kaleidofest.ca).

Then there's the return of the Aboriginal Takwakin Village. Activities include a sash-weaving demonstration and the opportunity to sample bannock cooked on a fire.

"The main stage will be in full swing with diverse cultural community groups in dance, music, and other performances," says MacBean.

This year, the parking lot on 118 Avenue and 93 Street will focus on Ukraine and its culture. Says Morin, "Fundraising will go towards new Ukrainians in Edmonton making their home here and in our region. Our community back in the '50s was built by Ukrainians."

Friday launches the weekend with the lantern parade. Morin describes Saturday as "always our strong component of art, community, and ritual."

"Everything focuses on the main stage on Saturday in the evening. Bring lawn-chairs and a blanket," Morin suggests.

The main stage will be north of the Alberta Avenue playground. "We're trying it as a pilot. We've talked about it for about

10 years. It might work better for spreading out the crowd," says Morin.

Sunday focuses on community, and organizers are re-introducing the antique car show and the Junk in Your Trunk garage sale.

Edmontonians can also look forward to a return of street performers, art, and art installations.

A new feature is a community art gallery spread throughout the area. "Take a piece of art, put in a piece of art," Morin explains.

Danielle Duguay, an Elmwood Park community member, will launch craft kits at the festival. "The idea was birthed by watching the Kaleido menagerie in her community last year," says Morin.

And Kaleido has partnered with MacEwan University to host musician Jacques Schwarz-Bart.

"He has graciously decided to collaborate with Kaleido performers," explains MacBean. "He plays jazz and African music that is fun to dance and groove to."

Morin adds, "Arts on the Ave is built on partnerships." And while festivalgoers

will enjoy Schwarz-Bart's music, MacEwan students will also benefit at the university. "There's so much to learn and share."

While attending the festival is free, donations are appreciated. Festivalgoers can also purchase tickets for a 50/50 draw.

"Every toonie or \$5 bill makes a difference. The festival costs a lot of money to put on," says Morin.

And because the pandemic is ongoing, Morin advises that some festivalgoers may choose to wear masks.

Look at the schedule on [kaleidofest.ca](http://kaleidofest.ca), or stop at The Carrot Coffeehouse to pick up a program.

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

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# Showcasing an ancient culture

## The popular Tibetan Bazaar celebrates 30 years

### CONSTANCE BRISSENDEN

Festivals make our community go 'round, and the Tibetan Bazaar is a perfect example. Held on Sept. 24-25 at the Alberta Avenue Community Hall, it's a popular, accessible event that draws upwards of 1,000 people over the weekend.

The annual event offers the chance to try tasty Tibetan-inspired fare; buy colourful, handcrafted arts, crafts, and clothing; and purchase Dharma (Buddhist teaching) talks and books. Listen to live cultural and contemporary music and performances, or even win a cherished door prize.

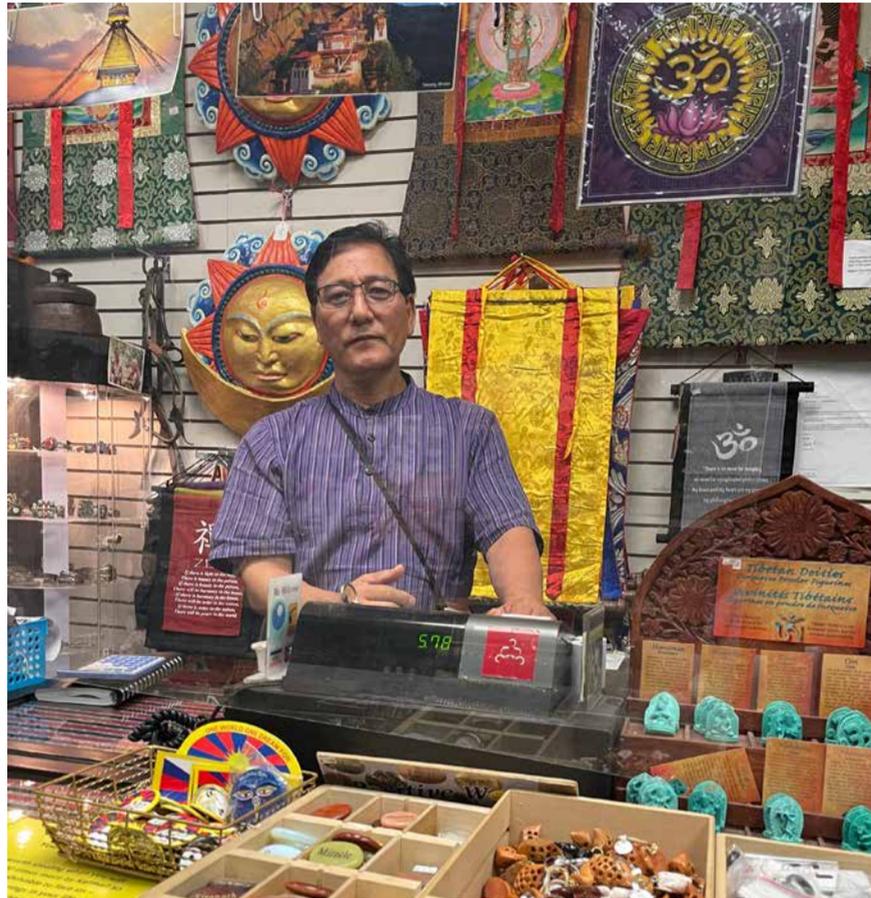
Practicing Tibetan Buddhism is not a requirement to attend. All ages enjoy the flavours of authentic Tibetan fare. Steamed dumplings known as momos come with tasty yak and vegetarian fillings. The tantalizing scents of spicy tomato potatoes and savory dal make these dishes irresistible. Try Tibetan-style chai and butter tea along with your snacks.

Now in its thirtieth year, the Tibetan Bazaar helps us understand this ancient culture, reflecting the more than 900 Tibetans living in Alberta.

The event is an effort to preserve and present culture, food, philosophy, and experiences. Presenters from the Gaden Samten Ling Tibetan Buddhist Society will be on hand to share experiences. The bazaar helps fund operational costs for Gaden Samten Ling Tibetan Buddhist Meditation Centre, a local non-profit organization.

Volunteers like Andrew Patton, the spokesperson for the event, organize and run the bazaar.

Patton explains, "We want to educate



Tashi Phuntsok brings colourful displays and a happy feeling to the Tibetan Bazaar. | Tashi Phuntsok

our community on who we are, and to help people know what we offer. Tibetan Buddhism helps people find happiness in their lives. We are grateful to the support of our community over the past 30 years."

Hosting the event in person after being online for two years is exciting,

adds Patton.

Adds five-year volunteer Jeremy Landon, "One unique aspect of the Tibetan Bazaar is that it is the largest Himalayan cultural event in Alberta."

Here in Edmonton, Landon and others learn meditation from spiritual

director Kushok Lobsang Dhamchoe. "Our teacher, Kusho, as he likes to be called, is a personal student of the Dalai Lama," says Landon. "Since he arrived in Edmonton in the early 2000s, he has taught meditation to Westerners like myself." Dhamchoe will be attending the Tibetan Bazaar.

Gifts from "the roof of the world" will be sold. Cultural leader Tashi Phuntsok has been a vendor for more than a decade. Based in Calgary, he owns Tibetan Trom, a delightfully crowded shop. He will bring a tantalizing selection of clothing, jewelry, textiles, prayer beads, Buddha statues, and hand-painted images.

In addition to his cultural commitment, Phuntsok feels an emotional connection to the annual event. "I feel happy when I'm there," he says. "Many people tell me that they feel peaceful and joyful at the bazaar. This is our goal, to share the essence of our culture, which is joyful compassion."

Adds Patton, "The Tibetan Bazaar showcases the wonders of Tibetan culture which has maintained nonviolence and the understanding of interdependence as the foundations of its society."

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

### TIBETAN BAZAAR

Alberta Avenue Community Hall (9210 118 Avenue)

Sept. 24-25, 10 am-5 pm

Entrance fee of \$5

[tibetan-bazaar.ca](http://tibetan-bazaar.ca)



Meditation teacher Kushok Lobsang Dhamchoe will share knowledge at the Tibetan Bazaar. | Gaden Samten Ling Tibetan Buddhist Society

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#### ABOUT US

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Build Community, Encourage Communication, Increase Capacity.

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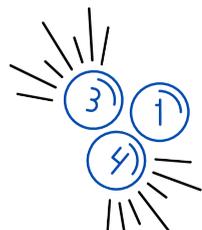
The paper is delivered by Canada Post to all houses, apartments, and businesses in the seven neighbourhoods listed above including those with no unaddressed mail notices. For the most part, delivery begins on the last Wednesday of the month.

Edmonton Northgate Lions are hosting a Half Marathon Bingo!

When: Saturday Oct. 8  
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# Love, fear, and the pandemic

The past few years changed how we interact with one another

## AYDAN DUNNIGAN-VICKRUCK

Living in the inner city, my wife Patricia and I see our share of peculiar occurrences. We chose to live here in large part because it keeps life real. Drug use and sex trafficking and “bicycle recycling” are all part of the tapestry. Homelessness and panhandling are everyday reminders of social inequities. We don’t have the option of looking the other way and pretending that these realities don’t exist.

Until recently, we have not been easily put off by this street-level lifestyle. But the pandemic has changed all this. Social services have diminished and needs have increased. Tent cities are multiplying and drug use is proliferating. And, equally surprising and disturbing, my sympathies toward such situations are changing.

About a month ago, I went out back to move my car. Fortunately, I checked first. A 30-something fellow, chest bare, was lying in the lane, his head under the vehicle parked behind me. He had a wrench in one hand and a crack pipe in the other. I called out to him but he didn’t respond. The only sign of life was his spasmodic twitching. I phoned 911 immediately. The operator asked me to roll him over onto his back to check to see if he was breathing. He was already lying on his back so I was able to answer yes from a distance. A few moments later, an ambulance arrived and the paramedics were instantly engaging respectfully with the gentleman and helping him into the ambulance.

What stayed with me long after was the striking contrast between my attitude and that of the paramedics. When the 911 operator asked me to roll the man over to check his breathing, I was repulsed by the thought. I was an inner city social worker for over 20 years (I just recently retired),

and I was always ready to roll up my sleeves and help. Something has changed.

What is the difference? Blame COVID-19.

Over the past few years, the mindset has been drilled into all of us to see others as germ-carrying threats. I have certainly bought into this approach. Most of my family and friends have had COVID-19 and their experience has not been pleasant. Wearing

**What concerns me is that I have put fear ahead of love and have put hygiene precautions ahead of helping someone in desperate need.**

precautions ahead of helping someone in desperate need. I could have quickly gone into the house and grabbed some gloves and a mask if that was my concern. But in truth, I didn’t want to go near the gentleman and get personally involved. The fear of germs repulsed me.

Society has changed. When I shared this story with others, everyone sympathized with my reaction and shared my

how the pandemic has changed the way we treat people. In my last two years as a social worker, during heightened COVID-19 protocols, we were restricted from visiting our clients. Although this severely hampered our involvement with our clients, we accepted it as part of the presumed temporary battle against the virus. But then all the protocols were relaxed and we were still prohibited from visiting with our clients. The rationale: if social distancing was good enough for two years, it would be good enough for the future. This pattern was repeated throughout the social services where supports shut down during COVID-19 were not reinstated after the protocols were lifted. In the meantime, the rising numbers of people in distress without adequate resources are a testament to the fact that these supports are needed. People need people.

**We need to temper our dehumanizing fear with a good portion of humanizing love.**

The time has come to do an attitude adjustment. We need to temper our dehumanizing fear with a good portion of humanizing love. We can’t let self-care preclude caring for others, whether in a moment of crisis or in day-to-day contact. We need to give and receive the gentle affirmation that comes from a hug or a hand held as much as the firm intervention for someone who has fallen off the curb and needs help righting themselves.

*Aydan is a blogger, tango dancer, outdoor enthusiast and co-parent with Patricia to eight children and 16 grandchildren. He’s also a resident of the ‘hood and loving it.*



The pandemic has created a lot of fear. | Aydan Dunnigan-Vickruck

a mask, getting vaccinations, and doing home checks have seemed to be minor inconveniences to avoid the virus. And we continue to take reasonable precautions to ensure that it stays that way.

What concerns me is that I have put fear ahead of love and have put hygiene

surprise that the 911 operator would even suggest I get hands on. The preoccupation with the virus has led us to ignore or overlook other social concerns. We are much more calculating and circumspect about with whom we engage and how.

Here’s a service delivery example of

# Creating connections for seniors

Check out Seniors Saturday at Alberta Avenue Community League

## STEPHEN STRAND

This Oct. 1, celebrate Seniors Saturday at Alberta Avenue Community League.

Seniors Saturday is the same day as the International Day of Older Persons. This is SAGE Seniors Association’s inaugural event, and they will be hosting five events at five different venues, including at the league.

“It’s going to be five different workshops held at a variety of different community spaces and hosts around the city,” says Amber Alexander, events coordinator with SAGE Seniors Association. “All free of charge for seniors, caregivers, professionals, and it’s basically to connect seniors with resources that pertain to those subjects.”

The association is hoping that Seniors Saturday will help seniors create connections within their community. “That is the one thing that we were missing from our virtual forums, and although we will be hosting another two-day, full day virtual forum in November, we really miss that in-person connection and that neighbourhood connection,” explains Alexander. And that connection is where the idea for Seniors Saturday came from.

“We really wanted to do something, and create an event that we can continue,” says Alexander.

During Seniors Saturday, there will

**The association is hoping that Seniors Saturday will help seniors create connections within their community.**

be two-hour long sessions at each venue, which will include hour-long presentations on various topics that affect seniors. “We are partnering with community leaders, and they are going to be presenting on a number of subjects,” says Alexander. “So, everything from living well with frailty to information regarding public transportation and access points or changes that are going to be incoming.”

Alexander says, “It will be a one hour workshop [at the league] and then a meet and greet your neighbours session following.”

The sessions will also include information on how to create legacy boxes, financial literacy, guardianship and trustee information, and information about elder abuse. It will be a range of subjects, such as health, wellness, and housing, and how it pertains to seniors and caregivers.

SAGE Seniors Association is an advocacy group for seniors, caregivers, and professionals. They provide a wide variety of services, many of which are free of charge.

“We have a thriving class program, where seniors can come to our centre and take part in everything from Zumba to ESL lessons to coffee houses, book clubs, garden clubs,” Alexander says. The association also does a lot of work in communities, as well as having health services and social work departments.



Seniors Saturday will include a workshop at Alberta Avenue Community League. | Pixabay

“So, folks who are needing an advocate of people can attend.

for their life, whether it be struggling with everything from guardianship or trusteeship issues, to hoarding issues. We connect people with folks that can help them. And we serve predominantly marginalized seniors.”

At the time of writing this article, no speaker has been confirmed for the session being held at the league, but keep an eye out on the SAGE website for more information.

There will be a 50 per cent capacity limit at each venue, so a limited number

**The sessions will also include information on how to create legacy boxes, financial literacy, guardianship and trustee information, and information about elder abuse.**

Pre-register to prevent capacity issues on the day of the event, although organizers will do their best to accommodate anyone who shows up. “Which is also why we are kind of booking a lower number, so that if people do drop in, we can hopefully make space for them as well.”

For more information, visit [www.mysage.ca/events](http://www.mysage.ca/events).

*Stephen works in broadcasting and writes for fun.*

# Passionate about creating change

Meet the new executive director for the Alberta Avenue Business Association

## MIKE ENDERS

Just over eight years ago, Erick Estrada moved to Edmonton not knowing a word of English and enrolled in NAIT to learn the language. He met his wife, bought a house in the Alberta Avenue community, and joined his community league, eventually becoming the treasurer.

Now, Estrada is the new executive director for the Alberta Avenue Business Association (AABA). He has a bachelor's degree in business administration and management, also through NAIT.

Since starting the position in mid July, Estrada has been tasked with attracting good businesses to the area and seeing them thrive. There are over 200 businesses in Alberta Avenue, not just on 118 Avenue but also on 95 Street.

Estrada says one challenge is getting back on track after COVID-19 and helping businesses to recover by providing whatever resources AABA can offer.

"The district is not just about businesses. It is also about the community," says Estrada.

Owners support the community by not laying off their workers, and Estrada does not think this is being recognized enough. Some businesses have been operating a long time. For example, The Duck Taphouse and Grill has been running since 1996, while Plaza Bowling Co. next door is a family business that has been operating since 1959.

Estrada says he wants to help businesses as much as he can, and one way is by helping them navigate grant applications from the City so that they can continue to grow and thrive. He looks forward



Erick Estrada is the new executive director of AABA. | Mike Enders

to the next time AABA throws a mixer for business owners to collaborate and talk to strengthen the community and continue to be a support for each other. "We really want to see the value for our businesses as well!"

In order to get to a better position for businesses in the area, Estrada acknowledges a need to address current issues

such as crime and abandoned or neglected businesses. "I am very passionate about making change in the area and I think there is so much potential for the area, and working really well together with community, police, fire fighters (etc.), to ensure good changes can happen here."

He adds, "It is hard for businesses who pay a tax levy while those who have the

cash can sit on an empty building and do nothing about it, and it shows they do not care about the business community."

**"I am very passionate about making change in the area and I think there is so much potential for the area, and working really well together to ensure good changes can happen here."**

**Erick Estrada,  
AABA executive director**

There are businesses allegedly running criminal activity in the district too. The association is working with property owners to get these businesses out of the area, but it is a long process involving the police and the City. Having a police liaison, AABA works with the Edmonton Police Service to advocate for businesses. "Businesses care about the street and Alberta Avenue, but sometimes the support is not available to keep the streets safe and clean." Estrada says this is another challenge in attracting anyone from the outside of the district to explore Alberta Avenue and its businesses. He looks forward to the challenge.

*Mike is a director-at-large on the Rat Creek Press board and also loves to volunteer in the area, especially in his community of Parkdale. When he has time, Mike loves to go for long mountain bike rides and meet up with friends or family.*

## Spruce Avenue Harvest Festival

Spruce Ave Dances in the Street

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solar project, mural and community garden unveiling  
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# A day to connect with others

Community League Day brings neighbours and leagues together

**TALEA MEDYNSKI**

See your neighbours and connect with your local league by attending Community League Day. Although the event is officially on Sept. 17, not all leagues are holding it on that day.

All events take place at their respective league grounds.

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

## Alberta Avenue Community League

For Alberta Avenue Community League, Community League Day is going to be part of a special event.

“We are going to coincide our 100th anniversary homecoming event with Community League Day, but will be having it on Sept. 10 at 3 pm in the community garden (weather permitting),” says Valda Roberts, league president. She adds, “Planning is underway, but there will be entertainment, cake, and a huge welcome to all past and present community members.”

## Delton Community League

Jan Henderson, president of Delton Community League, says community members can look forward to a day full of activities on Sept. 24 from 11 am to 3 pm. “We’ve got food, crafts, games, bike decorating,” she says, naming some of the activities planned. A classic car show, a petting zoo, and live music will also take place for a few hours.

## Eastwood Community League

At Eastwood, planning is still underway, and the event is expected to be on Sept. 17.

Bronwen Thompson, the league’s facility coordinator, says, “We’re hoping to have music and refreshments, potentially in the



Left: Spruce Avenue Community League has a few different activities planned. | Supplied  
Right: Elmwood Park community members celebrated a past year’s Community League Day. | Kate Wilson

area around the rink but this will depend on the timing of [the rink’s] construction. Otherwise, the events will be centred around the hall.”

Visit [eastwoodcommunity.org](http://eastwoodcommunity.org) for more information.

## Elmwood Park Community League

For Elmwood Park Community League, organizers are planning something a little different, with the event taking place at night.

Morgan Wolf, league president, says, “[It will be a] family-friendly movie under our party tent with free popcorn and candy.”

The event takes place on Sept. 17, with refreshments available at 7:30 pm and the movie starting at 7:45 pm.

## Parkdale-Cromdale Community League

This year, Parkdale-Cromdale Community League has a full day planned on Sept. 17 starting at 1 pm and ending at 11 pm. Activities include berry picking at

Kinnaird Ravine, jam and pie making, a pie contest, the harvest dinner, and an outdoor dance with live music.

Sarah DeLano, the league’s programming director, says, “[We’re] emphasizing local food and harvests, resiliency and togetherness, with activities for all ages from hands-on to spectator roles, depending on what you’re into. This is a bit of a homage to some of the activities we missed during the different waves of pandemic restrictions.” DeLano adds, “We will unveil the new murals in Kinnaird Ravine with CreArt as well.”

## Spruce Avenue Community League

And for Spruce Avenue Community League, organizers have a number of activities planned for Sept. 17.

Ashley Ayume, the league’s vice president and programs director, says the event is called Spruce Avenue Dances in the Street. It runs from 2 to 9 pm at the hall. “[It’s the] last chance at the splash park and with

some fun activities for kids. Popcorn, cotton candy, and drinks (while supplies last). We will unveil the solar project, mural, and community garden. Supper will be served along with (non-alcoholic) mojitos and margaritas (while supplies last), all free. We will finish the evening off with music and salsa dancing in the streets!” A band named Manny V. Y Su Esquina Latina will be playing at the event. “They will play from 6 to 8 pm with some salsa dance instruction,” Ayume adds.

## Westwood Community League

And on Sept. 17, Westwood Community League will hold a pancake breakfast and a Big Bin Event. The day begins with breakfast, running from 9 to 10:30 am, and the bin is open until it’s full. And from 12:30 to 2 pm, a family-friendly painting event is being held at the hall. Tickets are \$5 for children aged 5-12, and \$10 for people 13 years old and over. RSVP on Eventbrite or email [engage@westwoodcl.ca](mailto:engage@westwoodcl.ca).

# An afternoon with the Woolies

The Wandering Woolies meet weekly to craft and chat

**MYA COLWELL**

If you enjoy crafting, fibre arts, or working on your art projects with others, Wandering Woolies may be the group for you. Wandering Woolies is a crafts group that meets every week to work on knitting projects, crocheting, and more, while giving neighbours the chance to chat and connect.

The group, which started more than 10

years ago, used to meet all over the city and stop in at different cafes and venues, which is where the “wandering” comes in. The group now meets virtually on Wednesdays, and at Eastwood Community League on Saturdays from 2 to 4 pm, although you don’t have to be an Eastwood resident to join. Drop ins are welcome to attend.

A group of about 12 to 18 regulars meet weekly to work on their individual proj-

ects and get inspired by the arts and crafts of others.

Other projects outside of fibre arts are also welcome, and I brought along brightly coloured markers and a few mandalas to colour. The hum of lively conversation and the simple but satisfying joy of colouring in the mandalas made for a relaxing afternoon.

“Anything that anybody is doing with their hands, they’re welcome to come join

the group,” says Tina, an organizer and group member. “We’ve had colourers, we’ve had people who draw, diamond art, thread painting — various things.”

The group is more than just a space where people gather to work on their artwork and crafting projects, says Janet, a member of the Woolies. It’s also a sort of support group where members talk about their personal lives and help each other with whatever they’re facing.

“There’s a lot of people encouraging [others] and helping them to learn new skills,” adds Tina. “We don’t teach people how to knit or crochet, but if you come with the basics, we can certainly help you figure out a pattern or show you a stitch.”

The Woolies also give members the courage to try new techniques and mediums. “It’s because of being in this group that I ended up wanting to knit, and then actually trying more complicated projects because I never thought I could do something that fancy,” says Tracy, another group member.

Passing along inspiration and crafting techniques is an important part of the group, but it’s the camaraderie and company of fellow crafts enthusiasts that keeps members coming back week after week.

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



The Wandering Woolies meet at Eastwood Community League on Saturdays. | Mya Colwell

# Celebrating Indigenous culture

National Day for Truth and Reconciliation opens doors to understanding



Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society is participating in the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. | Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society

## CONSTANCE BRISSENDEN

Sept. 30 is the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. It's a day for all to think deeply on the meaning of these two words and show solidarity by wearing an orange shirt.

This special day was established in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action #80: "We call upon the federal government, in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, to establish, as a statutory holiday, a National Day for Truth and Reconciliation to honour Survivors, their families, and communities, and ensure that public commemoration of the history and legacy of residential schools remains a vital component of the reconciliation process."

For my partner, Cree author Larry Loyie (1933-2016), sharing truth wasn't natural at first. He was a survivor of St. Bernard Mission residential school in Grouard, Alberta, one of the more than 140 such schools in Canada.

In the late 1980s, Loyie started writing about his six school years. He recalled the funny moments and read them in a creative writing class at Carnegie Learning Centre in Vancouver.

A student commented, "Larry, it must have been good in that school." It was then that Loyie knew he wasn't telling the whole truth. He made a vow. He would always tell the truth, no matter how painful it was.

Honouring survivors like Loyie on National Truth and Reconciliation Day recognizes what they went through, and what they relive again and again.

In July, thousands of survivors listened to what Pope Francis had to say. Many saw him in person. They carried their school experiences within, never to be forgotten. Some found healing; others did not. Some were later criticized for their words or actions. Either way, the week of the Pope's visit was draining for all.

The Pope, at 86 years old, appeared to make a breakthrough on the plane as he returned to Rome. He talked of genocide and admitted that it did happen here in Canada.

In the *Principles of Reconciliation*, Section 1 of the Calls to Action, reconciliation is described as "a process of healing relationships that require public truth sharing, apology, and commemoration that acknowledge and redress past harms."

Loyie wrestled with the word "reconciliation." He never understood what was expected of him, as Indigenous and as a survivor. How could he reconcile with the

people who hurt him and more than 150,000 other children? Instead, he chose to heal from his anger through his writing.

He believed that education was the pathway to understanding what Indigenous people have gone

through. An organization like Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society, based in our community, gave him hope.

Senior manager Lloyd Yellowbird of Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society says he understands the conflict that survivors like Loyie share over truth and recon-

ciliation. He understands their emotional pain. His grandmother and mother both attended residential school. "They never cried in front of us," he shares. "They did their crying in private."

Bent Arrow, says Yellowbird, is happy to participate in the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. "It's an opportunity for us to educate and move forward, educating others about our past, our present, and our future goals," he says.

Orange Shirt Day is celebrated at the same time, in recognition of all the children who attended residential school. "The Elders try to find common ground for healing," says Yellowbird. "They recognize that it's not just for our generation, but for our children and future generations."

On Sept. 30, everyone is invited to tune in and enjoy Bent Arrow's perceptive response and exuberant celebration of Indigenous culture on Facebook. Visit [facebook.com/BentArrowYEG](https://facebook.com/BentArrowYEG) to stay updated.

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

**"It's an opportunity for us to educate and move forward, educating others about our past, our present, and our future goals."**

**Lloyd Yellowbird,  
Bent Arrow Traditional Healing  
Society senior manager**

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# Know the apps your kids use

## Tips to increase online safety for teens

**RUSTI L LEHAY**

The older you become, the more you recognize intelligence in your parents. Thus the saying, “Teens, leave home while you still know everything.”

Current tech challenges parents to stay one step ahead, as teens and social media can be a dangerous combination. Const. Bryan Alm, school resource officer for Archbishop O’Leary High School, advises parents to be “educated on how various apps work so that their kids aren’t meeting strangers on apps like Instagram and Snapchat.”

Alm has been with Archbishop O’Leary for four years. “Encourage your kids only to add contacts they know. There are fake people misrepresenting who they are.” Parents, be advised that most people on those apps don’t use their real names. “Sit down with the kids once a month. Go through each contact one by one. If they don’t personally know the people, delete them.”

This might seem harsh, but the kids establish prestige by having the most followers on social media, so parents, “Expect some pushback.” Encourage youth to have a private account. Though people can still follow them, the unknowns can’t directly message your teen unless the teen accepts the message request. Adults can bamboozle youth, as they often “misrep-

resent who they are.” Alm also advises adults and youth alike against “meeting anyone off the Internet.”

A vital precaution is to enforce and “encourage set times to use their phones, disallow devices in the bedroom because they miss out on sleep. Plus it builds addictive behaviour.”

Cyberbullying is a real challenge. Currently, anti-bullying resources at Archbishop O’Leary carry out more conversations about in-person bullying. For the former, parents should be

aware that if their teen is in a group chat they could be singled out for saying something on the app they would never say in person or in front of a parent or teacher. “The next day, the teen can imagine all the kids are talking about him or her.”

Monitoring your teen’s interactions on the apps can help catch suspicious behaviour early on. Advising kids to report the abuse is Alm’s preference. Though, “it is more

realistic to unpack underlying issues because they probably won’t snitch.”

Some youth can avoid bullying or stop it in its tracks through snappy comebacks. If they can’t do that verbally, saying their retorts internally can help undo some of the damage.

If you can get your teen to talk about online abuse or bullying, access the resource officers and school counsellors for mediation or visit [alberta.ca/bullying-prevention-resources.aspx](http://alberta.ca/bullying-prevention-resources.aspx).

Finally, about sexting or sharing nude pictures and images. A number of years ago, it would take a series of steps to send a naked image of yourself to someone else. Borrow the camera, then set up for the photo, download the image, get dressed, put it on a memory stick reader, then transfer onto a computer, and send it. Those steps provided a number of intersections to stop and realize this is a bad idea, one that might cause regret. People can now snap and send an image within 15 seconds of the original thought. This action can cause unwanted consequences down the road.

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

**Encourage youth to only add contacts they know and to have a private account.**



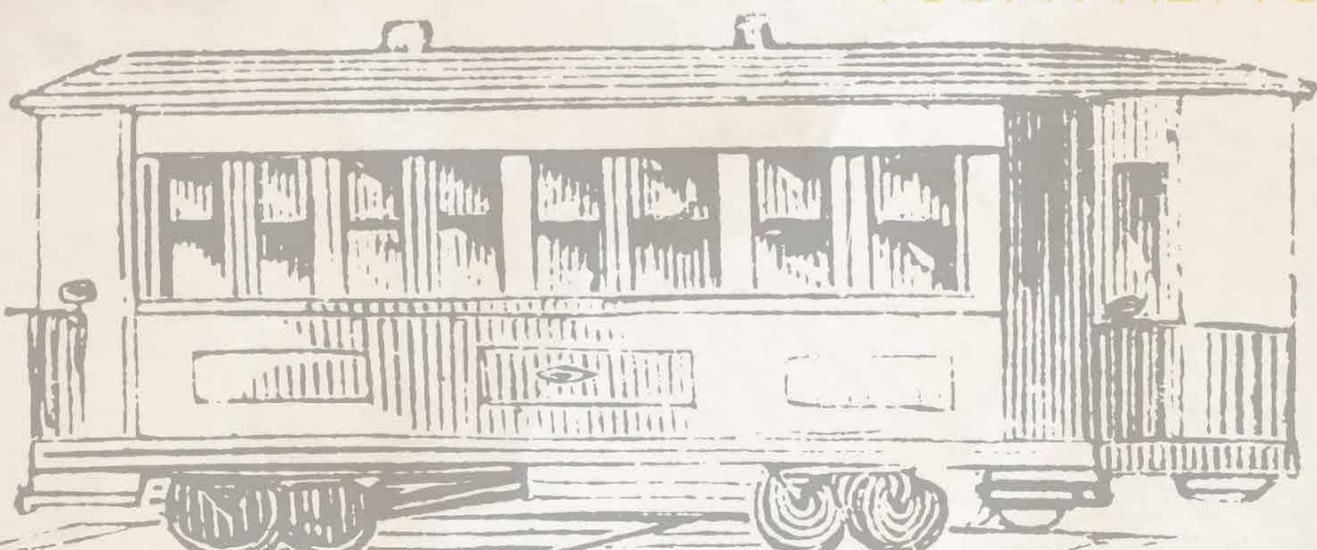
Ensuring your kids navigate social media safely can be a challenge. | Unsplash

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# Creativity and resourcefulness

Two distinct gardens shaped by the passions of their gardeners

- CHRISTINA IGNACIO-DEINES -

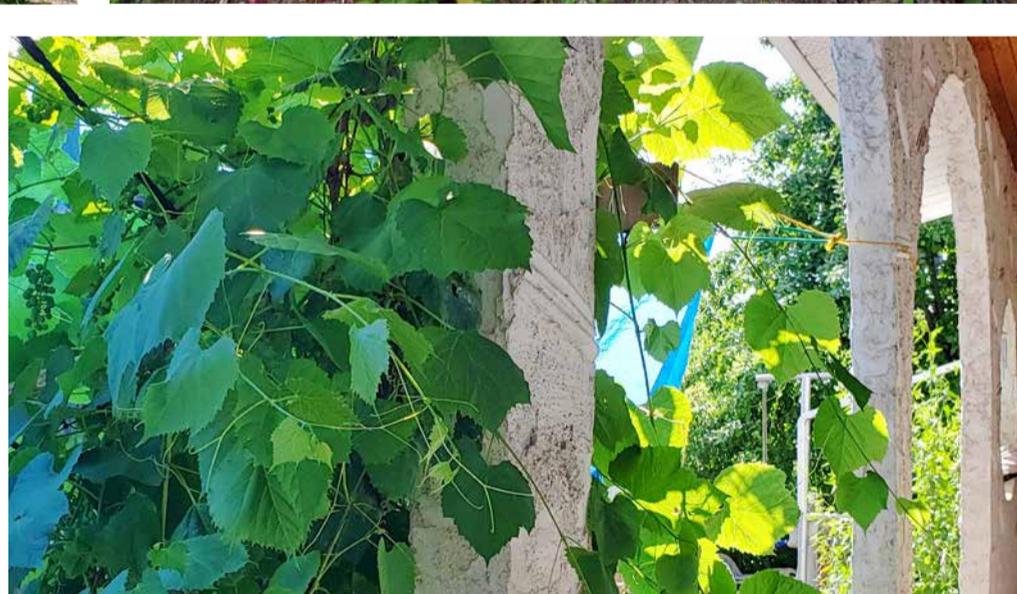
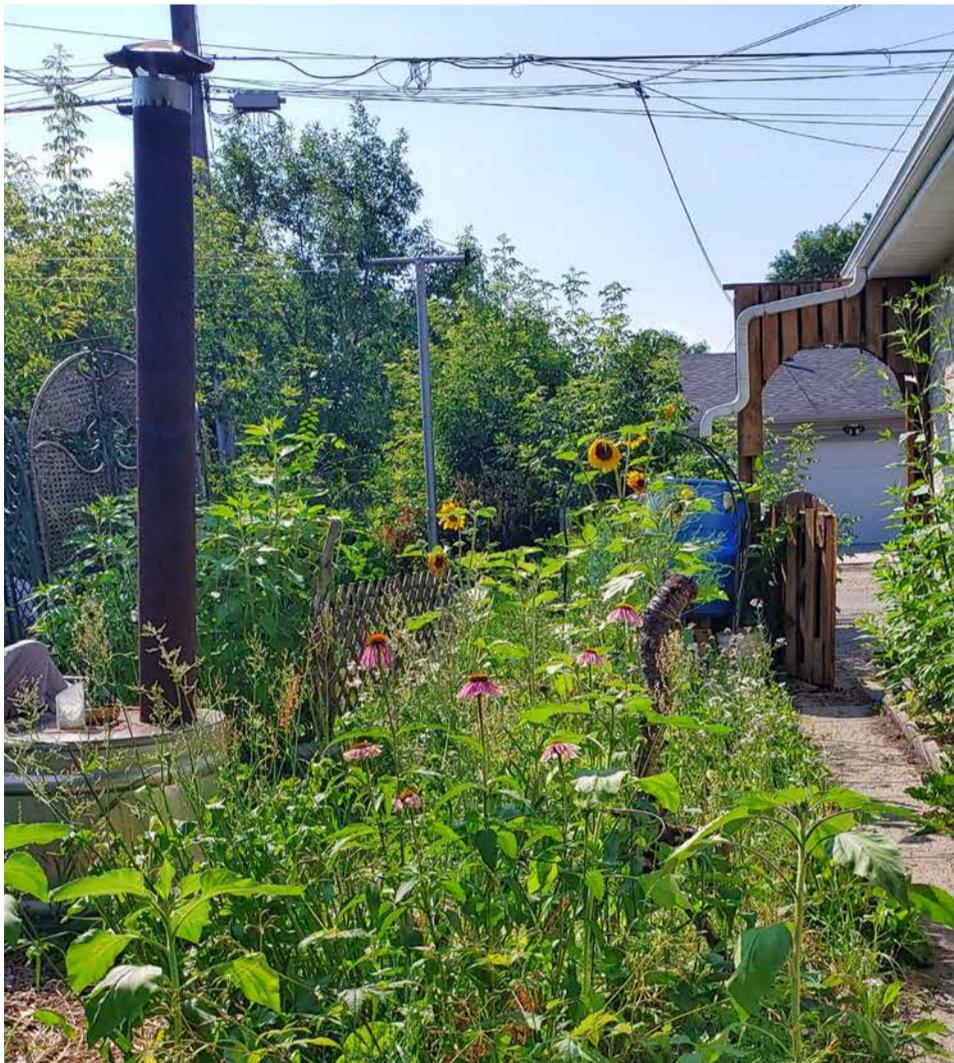
Welcome to the *Rat Creek Press* Home & Garden Tours column. Here we highlight the beautiful spaces we are creating in north central Edmonton, and talk about the different ways we find value in and around this area, from the perspective of our living spaces.

We aim to showcase different types of spaces, including single family homes, townhouses, apartments, garden suites, and small space and balcony gardens. We also would like to create a diverse picture of our residents and their families, including

families with and without kids, couples and singles, all kinds of cultural backgrounds, 2SLGBTQIA+, young people, seniors, and more.

This is a year-round column. If you're interested in sharing your home, or if you have or know of a garden with fall/winter features, please contact us. All submissions are welcome and encouraged! Submission email: [christina@ratcreek.org](mailto:christina@ratcreek.org).

*Christina is an award-winning designer and artist, and has lived in Alberta Avenue since 2007. Her work is about connection and belonging, turning life's great moments into empathic, beautiful spaces.*



## ARINNA GRITTANI

Arinna Grittani is the owner of Earth Legacy Inc., a sustainable landscape design and landscaping company that provides residential services based on permaculture principles. A passionate advocate for sustainability, Grittani is transforming her lawn into an urban food forest. She has it riotously planted with a wide variety of native and pollinator-friendly plants and flowers, fruit trees, medicinals, and edibles. When blight struck her pear tree earlier this year, Grittani ensured she'd still have a harvest by prioritizing biodiversity. Find Grittani at [earthlegacy.net](http://earthlegacy.net).

*Neighbourhood:* Eastwood

*Age of home:* 1950s, with a '70s addition.

*How long have you lived in your home?* Seven years, and gardening for five to six years.

*Three words:* food forest, native, ecological.

*A perfect day in your garden:* Relaxing in the flowers with the bees buzzing and a few nibbles of fruits and berries.

*Favourite time of year in the garden:* Summer and fall. The plants are all in full bloom and constantly changing.

*What are you loving about your garden right now?* The salvia covered in bees, my native flowers proliferating, and the bellflower finally getting choked out by the rhubarb.

*What is a challenge you're experiencing?* Quackgrass, bellflower.

*How does your garden inspire you?* Flowers always bring me joy.

*Where do you see your garden in five years?* Even better. Pears, plums and apricots producing, and full flower beds.

*What's the best gardening advice you've ever received?* Sheet mulch.

*Best compliment?* There's so many people who walk by and interact with my garden. When they see me they often compliment me on my garden or ask questions. The kids play in it all the time.

*What would you like to see more of here?* Perennial sharing, tours, fruit sharing.

*What is your favourite local resource?* Apache Seeds, Edmonton Native Plant Society.

*A few words of advice?* Start now, take on what you can manage and grow from there. Use hardy, drought tolerant species. Incorporate natives and edibles!

**Top left:** View of the front garden. | Arinna Grittani

**Top right:** The rear garden, with sunflowers, vegetables, medicinal plants, berries, and a wood-fired tub. | Christina Ignacio-Deines

**Bottom right:** Grapes grow along the entrance. | Christina Ignacio-Deines

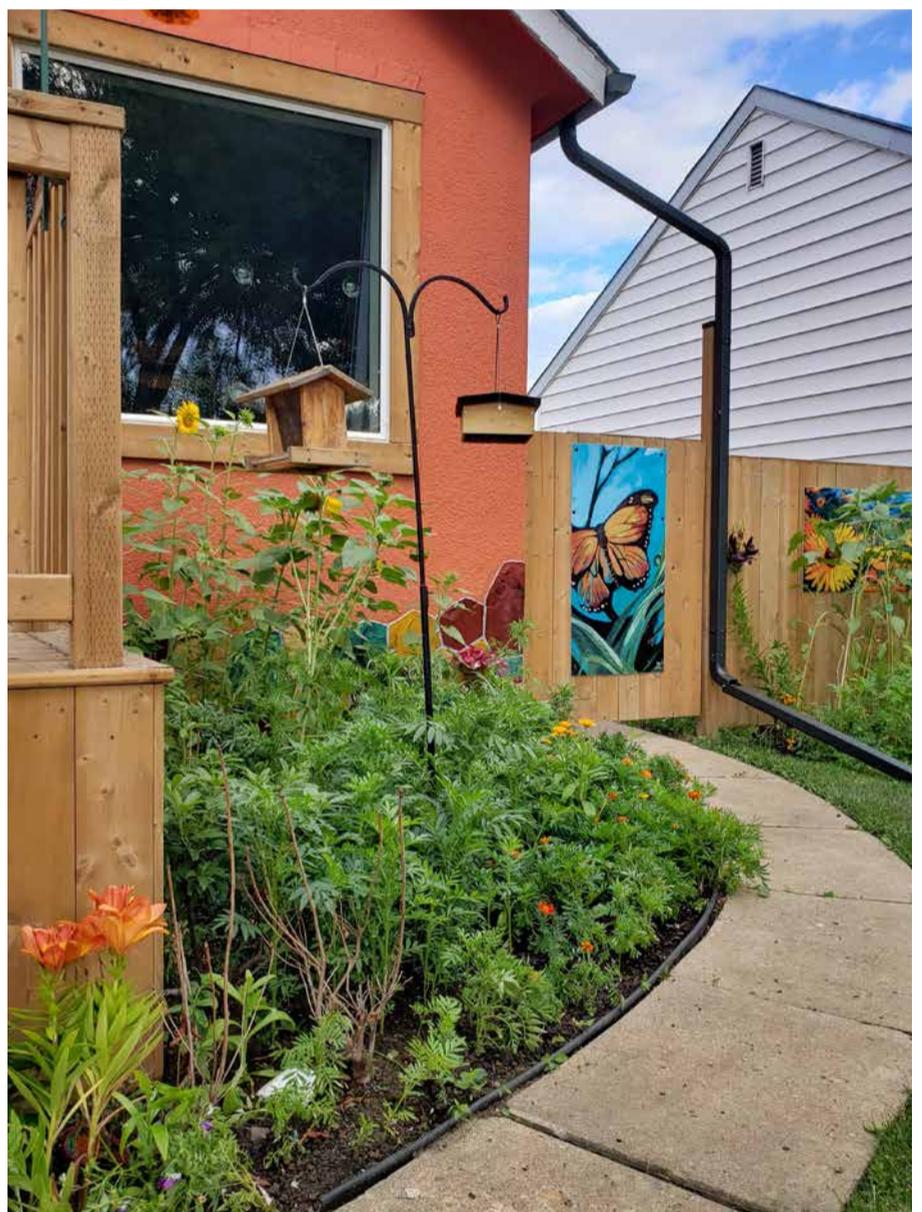
**Top right:** The hearth is underplanted with fiery hued tulips (Sky's mom's favourite flower) and marigolds, suggesting fire.

**Top left:** Sky restores vintage cars and these sunflowers create soft separation in her garden and are loved by bees.

**Bottom left:** A vignette of lilies, seen from the front steps.

**Bottom right:** A curved path leads to the rear garden, with two Lorraine Shulba garden art prints installed on the fence.

| Christina Ignacio-Deines



## RIVER SKY

River Sky's vibrant garden is informed by her photographer's eye, with plants and paths leading the eye upwards to her colourful home and further into the rear garden. She revived her formerly all-grey home's facade by painting it coral-orange, picking out the stonework with a historically-inspired red, yellow, and green colour scheme, which she uncovered during the restoration process.

Masses of flowers, plants, and fruit bushes grow at varying heights, accented by art and decorative elements, showcasing her talent with colour and composition. Her garden features weather-proof art by artist Lorraine Shulba and wood sculpture by Larry's Unique Birdhouses.

River restores, rents, and chauffeurs vintage cars for weddings, photo shoots, and special occasions. Find her on Instagram @valgalmotors.

*Neighbourhood:* Alberta Avenue

*Age of home:* 1942 (80 years).

*How long have you lived in your home?* Two and a half years (tending the garden for one year).

*Three words:* Ginger bread house.

*A perfect day in your garden:* Relaxing in the backyard watching the birds and bees enjoy my green space.

*Favourite time of year in your garden:* Early fall. I love the fall colours. I'm hoping to have a wall covered with Virginia creeper so I can have the beautiful fall colours for much longer.

*What are you loving about your garden right now?* How it's all coming together. The colours and different art projects that give the eye plenty to behold.

*What are some challenges you're experiencing?* Experimenting with different plants to see what will grow in the full sunlight or partial shade.

*How does your garden inspire you?* It's full of history. A renovation prior to me buying the place stripped all the character out of the home. I've made it my mission to restore that character and history to the home.

*Where do you see your garden in five years?* Becoming more of an English garden with well established flowers and artwork hidden throughout.

*Best thing you've learned while living here?* The willingness of neighbours to share growing tips and the sense of community that I have not found anywhere else in the city.

*What's the best gardening advice you've ever received?* Keep it simple and don't stress if things aren't perfect. It takes time to create beauty and trial and error to achieve perfection.

*Best compliment?* That my home is very warm and welcoming.

*What would you like to see or experience more of in this area related to gardening?* A group sharing plants, neighbourhood garden tours, and some classes.

*Favourite local resource?* I use local Facebook groups for tips a lot. I would love to attend or host classes in gardening.

*A few words of advice?* Don't be afraid to stray from accepted norms. Embrace colour, and incorporate vintage art into your home and garden as it adds so much to the character of the home. Break free from the soulless cookie cutter, architectural standard of grey and white.

*Did you work with a contractor or local business to design your garden?* My interior decorator is Shantam Interiors (shantaminteriors.com). Stan Renovations (780.951.7110) painted my house, reroofed my garage, and installed new eavestrough, soffit, and fascia. I also hired an interior decorator to help ensure my colour choices worked together.

# Beautifying neighbourhood alleys

A brief look at the alley beautification and safety project

MYA COLWELL

Green Alleys is an ongoing pilot project in Eastwood and Alberta Avenue that is beautifying neighbourhood alleyways and improving safety in those spaces.

It is an Arts on the Ave (AOTA) initiative with input from many different community partners.

The goal was to create an initiative that would encompass education and beautification, rebuild streets, and focus on placemaking, says Christy Morin, the executive director of AOTA.

With safety concerns mounting in Alberta Avenue, especially for women, it became important to start the initiative.

“I had experienced some aggressive john activity, which was really frightening,” says Maggie Glasgow, an Alberta Avenue resident and one of Green Alleys’ project leads. “And then a number of other women in the neighbourhood had started to talk about the same thing, so it wasn’t just an isolated event. [We started] thinking of ways to make our space, our community, safer for women particularly, and girls.”

The first initiative of the project was called “Make That Call,” a fridge magnet that AOTA distributed to community members. The magnet listed phone numbers residents could call when they had a specific safety concern. The goal was to increase efficiency when



AJA Loudon painted this mural on Gaetan Benoit and Katrine Deniset’s garage in Eastwood. | Rebecca Lippiatt

residents contacted emergency services, so more crime could be reported.

“Everything in the world of safety is driven by stats,” says Morin. “So often, people wouldn’t make the call because they’re like, ‘Ah, that was just a guy screaming at me while I was walking home.’ But it is actually really important that they do call and that we have that recorded as a concern and a need for support.”

As Green Alleys continued to expand, Glasgow suggested modeling the project after a similar initiative she had seen in Montreal, to make back alley spaces more useable for community members — places where performances could take place and children could play.

“Right now, the back alleys are... kind of neglected spaces and they’re used for more nefarious kinds of activities,” says Glasgow. “There’s a lot of johns, sex work, drug activity back there, and [the alleys are] otherwise just neglected.”

“Nobody felt really safe,” adds Glasgow.

To make back alleys more accessible for community members, Green Alleys organized some garbage clean-ups and shrub and tree trimming in those spaces.

Additionally, a number of garages have been painted with murals. AJA Loudon, a local Edmonton artist, created a mural on Gaetan Benoit and Katrine Deniset’s garage door.

AOTA and several community partners installed self-watering raised flower beds designed by Jonathan Luckhurst in several of the alleys, and Glasgow says that organizers hope to plant native plants that attract pollinators in the flowerbeds. Project organizers also plan to install other raised and ground flower beds in alley spaces.

“It’s been a real labour of love from the neighbours, from the organizations, to come together and find ways to fight crime and grime and do it in an unconventional way,” says Morin.

The initiative is currently focused on five residential alleys in Eastwood and Alberta Avenue, but organizers hope that the project can act as a template for other neighbourhoods interested in starting their own green alleys.

“We’re hoping that [Green Alleys] will... eventually be all across the city, but we really want to focus on central neighbourhoods to begin with, [like] central McDougall and McCauley

and Chinatown and other areas,” says Glasgow. She also hopes that the project will revitalize several commercial alleys as part of the initiative soon.

Green Alleys is partnering with different organizations to make the initiative

**The initiative is currently focused on five residential alleys in Eastwood and Alberta Avenue, but organizers hope that the project can act as a template for other neighbourhoods interested in starting their own green alleys.**

a reality. Many organizations, including the TULA Project, Green Violin, the University of Alberta, DIALOG, several departments at the City of Edmonton, Otto Food & Drink, and REACH Edmonton are also involved.

“I definitely think we’re just at the cusp of what the Green Alleys initiative is going to continue doing, and bringing awareness, education, and then action to our communities,” says Morin.

“There’s been so much interest from people across the district and it’s so exciting to hear that interest,” adds Glasgow. “We’re really trying our hardest to really get this program going and to make it work because we know that there is the need for it and excitement for it.”

If you’re interested in volunteering with Green Alleys or looking for more information about the initiative, contact organizers at [GreenAlleys@artsontheave.org](mailto:GreenAlleys@artsontheave.org).

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



Jonathan Luckhurst designed these self-watering flower beds that were installed in several alley spaces. | Rebecca Lippiatt

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# Boosts to city transit safety

## Initiatives and programs designed to improve transit safety

MYA COLWELL

Reports of hate, violence, and crime at transit centres and on transit have led the City of Edmonton to create and implement new safety strategies.

“I have been taking the LRT since late April and have felt uncomfortable in some situations, especially if I am the only person in a car, which has happened quite a few times on the NAIT line,” says Maggie Glasgow, an Alberta Avenue resident. “I have also very often had johns flash their lights at me while waiting at the bus stops — before COVID. It makes me so angry.”

When the City implemented a greater police presence on transit in May 2022, Glasgow felt safer and started using the train more often.

“I won’t take transit at all anymore if I’m alone. Too many close calls with aggressive folks, most being some variety of intoxicated,” says Alberta Avenue resident, Melanie Greenfield.

In response to transit safety concerns, city council approved the enhanced Transit Safety and Security Plan in February 2022. “In this plan, the City, the Edmonton Police Service, and Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society recommended a safety approach to prevent crime and connect people experiencing homelessness, and who use the transit system for shelter, to housing options, mental health and addictions support,” says Sarah Feldman, director of the City’s workforce strategies, business development, and Edmonton Transit Service (ETS).

Additionally, the Community Outreach Transit Team (COTT) is a pilot program implemented in September 2021 to increase safety and support. It provides additional



This fall, look for a safety campaign. | City of Edmonton

support to Edmontonians who use the transit system and need a referral to community resources like mental health care, financial assistance, housing, social services, health services, or other supports.

The team involves workers from Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society and transit peace officers.

“[The] focus is to help the public, individuals in need that [are at] transit stations, [get] connected to services they need,” says Lloyd Yellowbird, the senior manager at Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society. “If you look at the overall structure of the City’s services, one of the areas that there was a sort of a void in was providing services to people, like homeless people, that like to hang out at transit centres. So we get them connected to inner city services.”

“COTT’s daily engagements can include both proactive and reactive activi-

ties. COTT members proactively patrol the transit system, connecting with individuals, building relationships, and asking if they need support,” adds Feldman. “COTT also responds to calls from ETS control centre staff and other peace officers.”

The initiative was modelled after a similar program in Calgary, and so far, it has been successful. Feldman notes that COTT has interacted with more than 2,400 individuals, both to provide help and to share information about the initiative. Additionally, they have had 250 interactions where they referred individuals to other agencies and services for help.

“We’ve had a lot of success stories where we’ve connected people to family, to services,” says Yellowbird, “and just getting them back on their feet. So we’ve done a lot of really good stuff.”

City council approved extra funding for

**The Community Outreach Transit Team has interacted with more than 2,400 individuals to provide help and share information about the initiative. They have also had 250 interactions where they referred individuals to other agencies and services for help.**

COTT in February, and that funding will be used to expand the initiative and add five more teams. Currently, there are only two COTT teams who work alternate shifts between 8 am and 10 pm on weekdays; however, transit runs from about 5 am to 2 am the next day. Feldman notes that the extra funding will help address the seven-hour service gap during the week and likely allow for service on the weekends.

Other transit safety projects are also in the works. In the fall, the City is implementing a campaign to “reduce gender-based violence and harassment in public spaces on transit property and in transit vehicles,” says Feldman. The campaign will be followed by a survey.

Transit users can also report harassment and other suspicious behaviour to ETS by texting or calling Transit Watch at 780-442-4900. “ETS staff monitor this text line around the clock and do their best to respond as quickly as they can,” says Feldman.

*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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# The Spoke teaches bike safety

## Bike Edmonton's program lets youth build their own bike and learn safety skills

MYA COLWELL

Biking is a great, sustainable way to get around Edmonton. Bike Edmonton, a non-profit organization, created The Spoke program to pass mechanical skills and urban cycling skills on to Edmonton youth between the ages of 12 to 17, and give them the confidence to ride safely throughout the city.

By the end of the program, youth will have built their own bike. They also receive safety equipment, including a bell, light, lock, and helmet.

"They also [gain] a ton of skills in the process, whether it be teamwork, communication, also the mechanical skills of building and maintaining bicycles, which is something that can be really valuable to kids. It gives them a lot of confidence that they can do this," says Andi Eng, the acting president of Bike Edmonton. "It also can act as that catalyst into other things... whether it be mechanical engineering or mechanics in general."

The program fills in the knowledge void that exists about fixing and building bikes. "Let's be honest, how many of us become adults and actually have those skills?" asks Eng. "How many of us ride bikes and know how

to fix them?" It also teaches kids how to cycle safely through a city that has gaps in its cycling infrastructure, ride on the road, cycle through gravel, and navigate through construction sites.

The Spoke runs out of Bike Edmonton's downtown location, just behind MacEwan University. Volunteers primarily run it, but there are also several professional bike mechanics and shop staff who oversee the program.

Bike Edmonton is committed to keeping bikes out of landfills and upcycling old bikes. When participants build their bikes in The Spoke, some parts will be upcycled from old bikes.

"Obviously we're not going to send them out with a recycled chain. So the chain will be new," says Eng. "[But] if the part can be refurbished, it will be refurbished and reused on the bike. If it's something that needs to be new, whether it be cables [or] bearings — those things that wear out will always be new."

The program uses a fee structure and an application process to determine whether or not interested youth have to pay a fee to access the program.

**Many families can't afford after school programming for their children, and Andi Eng wants to ensure that kids can access The Spoke and learn, regardless of their economic situation.**

**Bike Edmonton is committed to keeping bikes out of landfills and upcycling old bikes.**



Bike Edmonton runs The Spoke to teach Edmonton youth mechanical and urban cycling skills. | Supplied

"We do really want to focus on kids that don't necessarily have the resources to participate in something like this. So [the program] is prioritized for youth who are economically challenged. And we also prioritize youth who don't have... the same privileges

as some other youth," says Eng. Eng adds that many families can't afford after school programming for their children, and she wants to ensure that kids can access The Spoke and learn, regardless of their economic situation.

"We definitely want to make sure that we're prioritizing kids who can benefit on multiple levels from something like this," says Eng.

Today, Bike Edmonton has several dedicated volunteers who discovered their love of bikes and mechanics through The Spoke and now frequently volunteer for the organization.

"They see Bike Edmonton as that safe space for them to be themselves and to have that output of being able to work with [their] hands," says Eng.

**Today, Bike Edmonton has several dedicated volunteers who discovered their love of bikes and mechanics through The Spoke and now frequently volunteer for the organization.**

While Eng isn't certain The Spoke will be back in September, the program will definitely be up and running again in 2023.

For more information about the program, visit [bikeedmonton.ca/the-spoke](http://bikeedmonton.ca/the-spoke).

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



Left: Youth build their very own bike in The Spoke. | Supplied  
Right: Participants in The Spoke pose for a photo. | Supplied



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# The complexities of encampments

The challenges that encampments pose to communities and houseless individuals

MYA COLWELL

During the pandemic, the number of individuals experiencing homelessness in Edmonton doubled, and currently, about 2,800 individuals are homeless in Edmonton. This has also resulted in an increase in encampments (a group of temporary shelters or tents), with approximately 800 people living in encampments in the city.

“The homeless-serving sector has faced a challenging combination of increased demand, a lack of adequate housing, and changing public health restrictions,” says Brent Wittmeier, a senior marketing strategist for the City of Edmonton. “All levels of government have stepped in to increase services, but the challenges around homelessness remain significant.”

Encampments create challenges for both houseless individuals and for community members. Individuals living in encampments face exposure to the elements, challenges accessing nutritious food, and limited access to running water or sanitation facilities.

Community members may face insecurity, feelings of unsafety, increased waste in their neighbourhoods, and the risk of fires, to name a few common concerns.

However, individuals living in encampments may be reluctant to leave encampments behind for shelters due to a number of issues. Safety can be an issue at shelters. Violence, overdoses, and other traumatic events can be a daily occurrence, and there is no guarantee that homeless individuals will be permanently housed after leaving their encampment for a shelter.

As well, leaving an encampment may also mean leaving behind a sense of community and belonging — a support network.

Due to increasing challenges houseless individuals and communities continue to face, the City has expanded their homelessness response beyond providing annual funding for organizations like Boyle Street Community Services, supporting Homeward Trust, and helping prevent drug poisonings.

“Because of the challenges this year, City Council has increased City Operations and Park Rangers’ capacity during the summer months to address the growing number of encampments.



A homeless encampment in Kinnaird Ravine. | Mya Colwell

Social Development is also reallocating existing funding to add additional outreach and housing workers for the remainder of the year,” says Wittmeier.

**During the pandemic, the number of individuals experiencing homelessness in Edmonton doubled. Currently about 2,800 individuals are homeless in Edmonton.**

The City contracted M.A.P.S. Alberta to engage with homeless individuals living in encampments to understand their lived experiences, says Wittmeier, and the data collected will be used to adapt the City’s encampment response and to create human-centred designs for public spaces.

The City is also engaging with community members, local businesses, and frontline staff who work in encampment response to better understand the situation. “The City is always seeking to improve its response to encampments to better balance community safety and well-being needs while also connecting more people with safe, adequate, and culturally appropriate housing,” says Wittmeier.

City social planners met with Parkdale-Cromdale community members in an engagement event on June 24 to hear the concerns of residents and gather data about the impact encampments have on their communities. The event involved a round-table discussion and a walk-through of Kinnaird Ravine and surrounding parkland to

illustrate the impact of encampments on the community.

“The social planners who attended the community event were receptive to the information we provided and they seemed genuinely motivated to make sure that the specific nature of the encampment-related problems are [communicated] to council,” says Anthony Oliver, civics director for the Parkdale-Cromdale league.

“My concern is that our circumstances will be conflated with the situation that’s experienced by other communities which may have certain things in common... but undoubtedly will be different given the difference in the parkland space and the proximity to homeowners, the history in the community, the capacity of the community,” says Oliver. “It’s quite a separate, unique situation, and that’s what I really want to get across to council, that a one-size-fits-all approach will not work [for encampment resolution].”

Many community members expressed concerns about their safety due to encampments in the neighbourhood. Kinnaird Ravine used to be an escape into nature for many com-

munity members, but several people explained that they did not feel comfortable running, walking, or passing through the ravine unaccompanied, even during the day.

In addition to general safety, the destruction of the ravine, especially cutting down trees for firewood, hygiene issues due to no washroom access, and fires starting were major concerns of the community. Drugs in encampments is also something that the community is unequipped to deal with.

Community members expressed concern that after the City shuts down an encampment, another encampment can be set up just 100 feet away. Several people suggested a zero tolerance or an immediate action approach to encampments, where City encampment response teams would disband encampments as soon as they became aware of them, regardless of their risk level.

Community members noted that sanitation and safety risks that can arise because of encampments are too great for a slow encampment response. Additionally, Oliver points out that encampments are in violation of the Parklands Bylaw, which says that “no person shall: (b) build a structure, whether permanent or temporary; or (c) set up any form of temporary abode except in an area designated by the City for this activity.”

One resident noted that they understand that homelessness is a complex issue, but letting people stay in encampments is a safety risk both for residents in the community and for homeless individuals.

More affordable housing is widely regarded as the best solution for homelessness and encampments; however, a lack of resources makes this difficult. While work is being done to address homelessness and encampments in the city, it is slow going. The complicated nature of the situation and varying viewpoints on encampment response make it difficult for immediate change and action.

**More affordable housing is widely regarded as the best solution for homelessness and encampments; however, a lack of resources makes this difficult. While work is being done to address homelessness and encampments in the city, it is slow going.**

*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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# Free book-gifting program for kids

Edmonton Public Library strives to improve early literacy in children

MYA COLWELL

This March, the Edmonton Public Library (EPL) started a new initiative called Ready. Set. Read!

The free program, a partnership with Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, gives one book a month to children enrolled in the program until they turn five years old.

"It's a way for [families] to... start building a home library for their kids," explains Elaine Jones, EPL's youth services manager.

Currently, families in 13 Edmonton

neighbourhoods are eligible to enroll in the initiative. Residents in Cromdale, Eastwood, Elmwood Park, and Parkdale are eligible for the program. And after July 11, EPL is expanding the program into seven additional neighbourhoods, including Delton.

"In a perfect world, we would offer [eligibility] to everyone in Edmonton because we believe in it so strongly," says Jones, "but we really had to... focus and so we were trying to get it into communities where we knew [the need] might be a little greater."

"We recognize that some families, they have real barriers to building up their own home collection of books and also even getting to the library and using our free resources," continues Jones. "We decided that it was important to do what we can give back to the community in this way, and so we established Ready. Set. Read!"

EPL consulted with community partners, especially schools, to determine which neighbourhoods would be best served by the program. Data about library card use and the average number of book purchases in a home was also used.

Currently, about 230 families are signed up for the program, and EPL hopes to get 1,500 signed up in total.

A wide range of different books are available for children, and children will always be given books that are developmentally age appropriate. A few books on the 2022 list include *Hugo and the Impossible Thing*, *Albert's Quiet Quest, A Story for Small Bear*, and *The Very Hungry Caterpillar Eats Breakfast: A Counting Book*.

Encouraging early literacy in children is crucial, explains Jones, since a strong literary foundation will promote strong learning later in life. "For example, preschoolers who are read to at least three times a week, and who know their alphabet when they enter kindergarten, have

better reading skills even in the tenth grade," says Jones.

"It is just really, really important because we know that those first five years are so critical," continues Jones. "That's when the kids' brains are developing and so much [of those years] is laying the groundwork for their formal education. So as much as we can enrich that time period, the better."

Jones says she hopes that people will become more comfortable with the public library through this program, and access more of EPL's free resources. When more families are signed up for Ready. Set. Read!, EPL plans to hold in-person programs that cater to those families.

"At EPL, we're always trying to reduce those barriers of access [to the library]," says Jones. "We aren't saying that this [program] replaces access to the public library. We think [Ready. Set. Read! is] an important piece to help build that comfort and familiarity with language and literacy and books and how they're used in the home."

"We're really trying to maximize our efforts and concentrate them to really make an impact in these neighbourhoods," says Jones.

Register for the program online at [imaginationlibrary.com/ca/affiliate/ABEdmontonPublicLibrary/](http://imaginationlibrary.com/ca/affiliate/ABEdmontonPublicLibrary/) or fill out a physical registration form at your local EPL branch. For more information about the program, visit [www.epl.ca/ready-set-read/](http://www.epl.ca/ready-set-read/).

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



**"We're really trying to maximize our efforts and concentrate them to really make an impact in these neighbourhoods."**

**Elaine Jones,**  
youth services manager  
at Edmonton Public Library

EPL's new program Ready. Set. Read! was developed to encourage early literacy and help families build their home libraries. | Pixabay

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### @ Parkdale Cromdale Community League

# 2022

## COMMUNITY LEAGUE DAY

**17 SEPT**  
BBQ, live music, dancing & more 2pm - 10pm

## HALLOWEEN PUB NIGHT

Costume contest & live music  
Drinks for purchase  
7pm - 11pm

# 29 OCT

## CARIBBEAN PUB NIGHT

friends, food, fun  
7pm - 11pm

# 19 NOV

## HOLIDAY GATHERING

Stay tuned for more details

# 17 DEC

Check our website for more information  
[parkdalecromdale.org](http://parkdalecromdale.org)  
Find us on Facebook & Instagram  
email us at [info@parkdalecromdale.org](mailto:info@parkdalecromdale.org)

## CONGRATULATIONS

Parkdale-Cromdale Community League

2<sup>nd</sup>

### Second Place Finish in 2022

### Front Yards in Bloom - Public Spaces

PCCL wishes to thank Front Garden Coordinator Tamie Perryment and all of the volunteers for their efforts and dedication!

# A space for the voices of survivors

## Human trafficking survivors offer insights to project advisory circle

- MARILYN GRAY -  
REACH EDMONTON

Human trafficking is often thought of as an international problem, but the unpleasant truth is it happens here.

Safer Way Out is a project that aims to develop a coordinated community response that is driven by the needs of victims of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

The project focuses on the areas of Red Deer, Edmonton, and northern Alberta.

In order to ensure the voices of victims are central, the project's advisory circle creates a space for the voices of survivors to be amplified, while guiding the initiative's aims.

"The advisory circle has the potential to help develop more supports for survivors while creating opportunities for survivors to offer recommendations as people with lived experience," says April Eve Wiberg, a survivor who is part of the advisory circle.

"I add a survivor's voice and lens to the work being done," says Wiberg. "My lens is coming from an Indigenous survivor's perspective, as a survivor of commercialized sexual exploitation."

The circle meets four times per year to further discussion and offer recommendations and guidance.

Wiberg has been a grassroots advocate for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) and all exploited Indigenous people for 15 years, and founded the first MMIWG awareness walk in Alberta.

But sharing her own personal story as a survivor took time.

"I didn't start sharing my own personal connection until three years ago. I kind of came out, if you will, as survivor of sexual exploitation but I also had a lot of support from the survivor community," she says. "I had been



April Eve Wiberg (pictured) is part of Safer Way Out's advisory circle. | Supplied

observing other survivors courageously sharing their stories and felt I wasn't being truly authentic to my community if I didn't share my personal story."

Her story began on the world stage with a piece in *Al Jazeera English* [tinyurl.com/4dk7c7un].

Prior to the story, Wiberg had anonymously shared her story with the MMIWG national inquiry, but this would be the first time she shared her story attached to her name.

"All these things led me to becoming a little more comfortable and now I'm sharing my story very publicly," she says. "I've shared it with the media, contributed to documentaries on the issue. I don't regret it for one

second. As a survivor, I suffered in shame for many years."

As she learned more about her own family history, and discovered the

**"My biggest hope is that by me coming out and sharing my story, it'll help other survivors find a community where they feel safe enough to share."**

**April Eve Wiberg**

proven connections between colonization and exploitation, her own personal story became more clear.

"My mother being in residential school impacted her ability, or inability, to be the mother she had the potential of being," she says. "Seeing how my family was disconnected as a result of colonization, our culture being stolen from us, I realized this definitely happened to me as a result of many things: poverty, addiction, racism. I'm still learning about my own story."

Wiberg hopes sharing her story with the public, as well as the Safer

Way Out advisory circle, will help service providers create better prevention initiatives, while encouraging survivors to step out of shame and live in community.

"My biggest hope is that by me coming out and sharing my story, it'll help other survivors find a community where they feel safe enough to share," says Wiberg. "Our stories are sacred and have value."

She adds that it's up to survivors whether or not they share their stories.

Wiberg says she is hopeful her story will contribute to the creation of lasting change that helps prevent anyone from experiencing what she did.

While the topic is unpleasant, ignoring it is not an option.

"We'd all like to have our noses in the sand, thinking that'll never happen to me or my loved ones, that only happens to those people," she says. "The only way we can combat this is with a collaborative effort and I hope that's what will happen with the Safer Way Out initiative."

This has to continue on because this problem isn't going away. We have to have hope and work together."

To learn more about the Safer Way Out initiative and which organizations fund it, visit SaferWayOut.ca. If you or someone you know might be a victim of human trafficking, connect with a safety network coordinator at [snc@ceasenow.org](mailto:snc@ceasenow.org).

*The REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities was established in 2010. Its ambition is to, in one generation (25 years), significantly increase community safety in our region; increase Edmontonians' perception of safety and inclusion; and engage the people of Edmonton and the region in developing a culture of safety and crime prevention.*

Elmwood Park Community League Presents:

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## Trisha Estabrooks

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOL TRUSTEE

I would like to wish everyone a great school year. With students, staff and families working together we can make it happen.

Questions? Concerns? Please get in touch.

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