

RAT CREEK PRESS

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Opportunity knocks during the pandemic

Local entrepreneurs share why they've opened new businesses



Hela (left) and Salah (right) Ajilani, the owners of the Golden Fork Restaurant, have wanted to open a restaurant for 10 years. | Rebecca Lippiatt

SHAREE ALUKO

Despite the uncertain times of the pandemic, entrepreneurs are launching new businesses.

Some of these new businesses are restaurants.

Hela and Salah Ajilani own the Golden Fork Restaurant. They immigrated to Canada 10 years ago and have been planning to open a restaurant ever since.

Salah explains, "We found the location last year exactly one month before COVID-19 started. We waited a few months, but the pandemic was still ongoing and we reached a stage where we were no longer able to pay the rent, so we decided to open on October 9."

He says they've been doing OK despite the challenges the pandemic has brought.

Virginia Potkins also realized her own dream in August last year.

"Two Brown Dogs has been a

dream of mine for quite some time. My focus is on those comfort foods that make you think of home. I specialize in gourmet perogies, brunch, freezer-to-table meals, and catering. Once things re-open, I plan on having some special events."

Potkins explains, "I was searching for a place for a while when this opportunity came up. It was the perfect size, the right price, and I wanted a location in Alberta Avenue." She adds, "The latest shut down has definitely slowed my business down. However, it has given me the opportunity to get creative and come up with new ideas and plan for when I will be able to open again. Over Christmas, I made Christmas dinners which were very well received. I also partnered with a local bar to provide charcuterie boxes to complement their cocktails to go."

Pe Metawe Games is another new addition. David Plamondon

is the co-owner of Pe Metawe Together LTD, which incorporates Pe Metawe Consulting and Pe Metawe Games. They've expanded into a retail space on 118 Avenue, but haven't officially opened it yet as they're waiting on final development permits from the City of Edmonton. As of press time, Plamondon gave a tentative opening of the beginning of February.

"The decision to open Pe Metawe Games in the middle of a pandemic was mostly driven out of opportunity rather than desire. We have been planning our expansion into retail since December 2019 with our initial goal of opening in July 2020," he says. "We were very thankful to find a location on 118 Avenue that had the appropriate space, was part of a community that we wanted to be involved in, and was within our budget. We knew that renovations would take approximately 10 weeks, so when the opportunity to sign the

lease came up we knew that we had to take the risk."

However, plans for the community gaming part of the retail space have been affected. Their community gaming space will likely be closed to the public until there are fewer COVID-19 cases and more people have been vaccinated.

"We've been very clear with our team that we want to prioritize the safety and wellbeing of our customers and our staff so while we will open up our retail space, we'll be enforcing a strict mask policy, and a very low limit of customers allowed in the store at any given time," says Plamondon.

Until they open the retail space, they will be taking special requests as well as improving their web store.

Sharee has a Masters in Business Administration and is passionate about sharing information.

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Plans for Elmwood Park are in the works

New league president is fundraising to build a new hall

TALEA MEDYNSKI

Morgan Wolf, the new president of Elmwood Park Community League, grew up in the area, travelled all over, and finally ended up back in Elmwood Park. Two years ago, she joined the league board.

“When I came on as a member-at-large, lots of stuff [community activities] was happening in the community that hadn’t happened in a long time,” Wolf says. This inspired her. “I thrive on the sense of being a part of a community.” So when the position of president was open in October, Wolf decided to put her name forward and was

selected.

“I’m someone who never says no to an opportunity,” Wolf says. She’s been a figure skating instructor and a personal trainer. She’s also been a letter carrier, a job which took her all over Canada and into the United States.

As an animal lover, Wolf fosters puppies and is on the board of Muttstock. “I started my own dog daycare business, which I sold in 2020.”

If all these jobs and experiences seem varied, it’s deliberate. “You never want to pass up an opportunity. You might miss something awesome.”

Wolf explains her biggest goal as president is to build a new hall

for the league. Several years ago, the hall burned down due to arson. The league currently has a survey circulating asking residents about the future hall, and fundraising efforts are underway to raise money.

“The community hall can really be the heart of the community. If I had my way, I would have it completed by 2022.”

The upcoming fundraising event is a Purdys Chocolatier fundraiser. Find details on <https://tinyurl.com/y5w5hrwe>.

Besides building a new hall, Wolf also wants to build community in Elmwood Park. She hopes some online events will do just that.

“We’re trying to throw a few ideas together,” she says. Depending on what people want to do, such ideas could include a murder mystery, talent show, paint night, or town hall meeting. Visit elmwoodparkcommunity.org for news of upcoming events or join Nextdoor.com to meet neighbours.

Wolf has also taken on the position of Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues (EFCL) District G representative. She explains her role as “a liaison for all the communities in a district to get in touch with EFCL. I’m that contact point.”

Wolf is the representative of 12 leagues in District G, which includes Elmwood Park,

Eastwood, Spruce Ave, Parkdale Cromdale, Delton, Westwood, and Alberta Ave community leagues.

“Anything that passes on to the EFCL is passed through me, like the rink guidelines,” explains Wolf. She says she decided to run for that position because she wanted to represent her neighbourhood. “I’ve got a soft spot for our little rough-edged neighbourhood.”

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



Morgan Wolf (right), with husband Dwayne Wolf (left). Morgan is the new president of Elmwood Park Community League as well as the EFCL District G representative. | Jennifer Ostovich

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ABOUT US

We are a non-profit community newspaper serving Alberta Avenue, Delton, Eastwood, Elmwood Park, Parkdale-Cromdale, Spruce Avenue, and Westwood. Published on Treaty 6 Territory. The opinions expressed in the paper are those of the people named as authors of the articles and do not necessarily reflect those of the board or staff.

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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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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.

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I ❤️ my RCP

Come and play in the Ave's gaming store

Pe Metawe Games hopes to get more people involved in gaming

STEPHEN STRAND

Patch Adams once said, "Being happy is the best cure for all diseases!" Happiness also allows people to open up to others and feel less alone. This is what Pe Metawe Consulting has done.

Pe Metawe means *come and play* in Cree. "We started Pe Metawe Consulting as a way to better engage community members, particularly Indigenous communities, but not exclusively," says David Plamondon, engagement specialist and team guide with Pe Metawe Consulting/Games. "Our goal originally was to work with youth and help develop life skills by developing and delivering workshops that utilize tabletop games as a way to get better engagement and, hopefully, reinforce some of the life skills that we are building out of the workshops."

Co-owners Plamondon and Jayde Gravel started Pe Metawe Consulting in April 2019 and moved into an office space on 132 Avenue in November 2019. They re-signed their lease in November. "This was right before we found the location on 118th Ave."

The goal is for all their operations to be located in the 118 Avenue location.

"None of the other neighbourhoods we looked at had that same community feel that 118th Ave had. That's really what we wanted," Plamondon says. With a higher Indigenous population living in the area, he hopes to get more Indigenous people involved with gaming.

Their consulting business began as a response to contract work Plamondon and Gravel had been doing with Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta, who opened a Treaty 8 Urban Office and asked them to help develop

and deliver youth-focused social media content.

When they first began, Plamondon and Gravel knew working with Indigenous communities and helping youth develop better life skills was at

tive to absorbing and taking in whatever the goal of the session is."

Games also help people interact with others.

"When you make the transition from, say, Little Red River

community groups to either bring Pe Metawe in to conduct the workshop or purchase the games and educator guides accompanying the games.

Not only do they hope more Indigenous people will become

it's hard to build a space that is actively and openly inclusive of Indigenous people, of people of colour, of people on the LGBTQ+ spectrum. That's the work we want to do. We want to create a space where people feel comfortable and welcome in."

Pe Metawe Games will have a small retail space, with a community gaming space and two private gaming rooms for rent. "We likely won't open the community space until, at very least, the vaccine has had a majority roll out." They are looking at adding Plexiglas dividers to allow cohorts to come in and play games. They also have virtual drop-in games people can play.

As of press time in January, they were awaiting final development permits from the City of Edmonton, but hoped to open by the beginning of February.

It's \$5 to play at the community tables, although they won't turn anyone away if people can't afford the fee.

For more information, visit: pemetawe.com/games/ or their social media pages.



David Plamondon (pictured) is the co-owner of the newly opened Pe Metawe Games. | Stephen Strand

the foundation of what they wanted to do. Plamondon's background is in human resources, while Gravel has a degree in recreation, sport and tourism. "[Gravel] was really interested in the workshop model. That's when we decided that we would develop a workshop model utilizing her experience that she developed at the U of A and then my passion for gaming and pair those off as a better way to engage those youth."

Tabletop games come into play as a way to engage people. "At the end of the day, when people are having fun, they're going to be a lot more recep-

Cree Nation, which is extremely isolated in Northern Alberta, to somewhere like Edmonton or Calgary, it can be a really big culture shock to not be part of that direct Indigenous community," Plamondon explains. Their goal is to help these individuals to develop a bit of a social base.

But when they contacted game distributors, they discovered they needed a storefront. So, Pe Metawe Consulting created Pe Metawe Gaming, which allowed them to sell the games as well.

Pe Metawe Games also develops teaching guides that accompany the games. This allows

involved with gaming, they also want to be a place where people are comfortable coming in and learning about games. They hope to build better representation for underrepresented groups in the gaming world. With the typical gamer and staff member at gaming stores being white males, it can be a little intimidating.

"It is not to say that the gaming stores in Edmonton aren't very welcoming. I've patronized probably almost all of the gaming stores in Edmonton, and I have had a good experience in all of them. I think the work they do is great," Plamondon says. "But I think

Stephen works in broadcasting and writes for fun. He can be seen walking through the neighbourhood.

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TAKE CARE & STAY SAFE WITH YOUR FAMILY.

Be sure try out Tasty Sabaya & Pizza

New restaurant is a great addition to the neighbourhood

STEPHEN STRAND

Tasty Sabaya & Pizza opened about six months ago and I was so distracted with life that I didn't notice until about Christmas that a new restaurant had opened across from Handy Bakery. I didn't get a chance to try them until part way into January. After the first bite, I regret I didn't try their food sooner.

After ordering for pickup, I went in to grab the food and was greeted by a woman popping her head out of the kitchen and then disappearing back into the kitchen. Another, very friendly woman came out of the second doorway behind the counter with my food.

My dining partner and I ordered the BCB (beef kofta, chicken kabob, and beef kabob) dish served on rice with a small salad, fries, and a garlic mayo dipping sauce (\$19.99), the maharage (\$10.99), and two mango lassies (\$2.99 each).

The beef kofta, which is ground beef mixed with onion, spices, and parsley and rolled into balls, has Middle Eastern origins, but luckily has made its way here. The kofta and both types of the kabobs were exactly what I wanted them to be: flavourful, grilled, and fresh.

The rice was spiced and had a bit of a familiar flavour that

unexpected and went well with the kabobs and the kofta. While not overly remarkable, the salad was a nice touch. The fries were a little soggy from the drive home, but were tasty dipped in the garlic sauce.

Maharage is a kidney bean dish with onions, carrots, and a rich tomato sauce. Its aroma was one of the first things I

ingredients coalesced together to create a dish that is greater than its parts.

When I ordered the dishes over the phone, I mispronounced the word maharage and the woman taking the order giggled a little and politely corrected me. When I went in to pick up the dishes, I asked again how it was pronounced and she

was a little bland, but acted as a nice scoop for the maharage, similar to the way you would dip naan into a butter chicken dish.

The portions of both dishes were quite large and we had leftover maharage and rice, which one of our cats went after when we looked away for less than a minute.

The mango lassi was good. Sweet and thick, but still refreshing. This is the second time in a year that I enjoyed a mango drink. Most of the time I wouldn't give mango a chance, but I may be convinced to give it another try.

Overall, I give them four out of five forks. I am glad they are in our neighbourhood and look forward to trying one of their other east African dishes or one of their pizzas.

Stephen works in broadcasting and writes for fun. He can be seen walking through the neighbourhood.



On the left, the BCB (beef kofta, chicken kabob, and beef kabob) was tasty and fresh, while the maharage had a flavourful blend of spices. The mango lassies were thick and refreshing. | Stephen Strand

I couldn't quite put my finger on. Cardamom? Cinnamon? Regardless, it was a pleasant amount of flavour that was

smelled as soon as I entered the restaurant. I enjoyed the maharage the most of the two dishes we ordered. The flavours of the

took the time to tell me, which I appreciated.

Both dishes came with Somali flatbread. The flatbread by itself

TASTY SABAYA & PIZZA

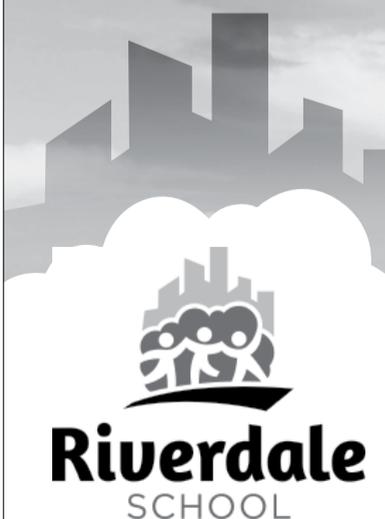
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Building to thrive in our environment

Making places feel safe so that we can thrive

GEORGE CRAWFORD

What makes you feel safe? In the neighbourhood? How about at work or at home? In November, the *Rat Creek Press* in partnership with AVID Architecture, The RAIC Centre for Architecture at Athabasca University, and Parkdale Cromdale Community League held a panel called Building to Thrive. Panelists took an engaging and candid look at the physical, emotional, and psychological barriers to feeling safe in our environments.

Cynthia Dovell, one of the panelists, summarized the theme of the panel best when she said, “The majority of us feel, even subconsciously, unsafe a lot of the time. And in order to thrive, we’ve got to feel safe first.”

The event was hosted on Zoom and facilitated by Athabasca University as part of their Global Lecture Series. Over 120 participants from around the world attended.

The panelists for the discussion

were Cynthia Dovell, Anne Stevenson, Chelsea Jersak, and Ofelia Leon. I was also one of the panelists. Dovell is the founder and principal architect at AVID

in architecture at Athabasca University, and a board member of the *Rat Creek Press*.

After a brief introduction, Lindsay

For the first question, panelists discussed their individual perspectives on what makes a space feel safe. For some, it’s privacy, where safety is maintained through limiting contacts. For others, it’s public space, where contact with neighbours and community make one feel safe.

The second question asked about barriers that prevent people from thriving. The consensus was that uncertainty around physical needs and feeling that those needs will continue to be met going forward is a barrier to thriving. Leon drove this point home in her response to the question which concluded with a call for and explanation of compassion.

Unfortunately, the panel ran over time, and we were not able to complete our final question, which was, “What are some ideas for the audience members to make their spaces feel safer?” This is a valuable jumping off point for anyone interested in making a community space where people feel safe to join and engage with each other.

We intend to interview panelists in the coming months, but until then if you are interested in Building to Thrive, visit [youtube.com/watch?v=FplhgRNUkSc&t=2082s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FplhgRNUkSc&t=2082s) for a recording of the panel.

George is the vice chair of the Rat Creek Press board. They live in Cromdale and are an active member of the Parkdale Cromdale Community League.



In November, panelists of Building to Thrive took a good look at the factors that make people feel safe or unsafe. | Image by Chrissy H from Pixabay

Architecture as well as a Parkdale resident. Stevenson is a city planner who works for Right at Home Housing Society. Jersak is an urban planner at Situate and a board member of Infill Development in Edmonton Association (IDEA). Leon is a psychologist with a private practice called Befriending Self. I’m a resident of Cromdale, a student

Farr led the panelists in two discussion questions. The first question, “What does ‘building to thrive’ and creating safe spaces mean to you?” asked panelists to speak about the mental and emotional aspects of feeling safe. The second question, “What barriers prevent people from thriving?” encouraged discussion of things that contribute to feeling unsafe.

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OPINION

How the pandemic has revealed privilege

Too many people are being left behind in the wake of COVID-19

REBECCA LIPPIATT

There is nothing like a pandemic to grimly illustrate the divide between the rich and the poor, the haves and the have-nots. The cracks have been there for years, growing with every dollar billionaires gained and the middle and lower classes lost, but the virus has starkly illuminated just how deep and how wide these cracks are.

When people with money stopped going downtown and to the malls, people on the margins suddenly became visible because they were the only ones left in public spaces. So highlighted, the provincial government funded the EXPO Centre so they had somewhere to go other than Tim Hortons and mall bathrooms.

Later, when the weather got warmer, the EXPO Centre was closed as a shelter and people without homes were again forced into the public eye. This time, they weren't taking it sitting down, and had a massive four month sit-in at Pekiwevin camp. Orange tents and blue tarps blossomed like flowers in the very heart of the city, shocking some, disturbing others, and generally creating conversation about homelessness in a way that had not been done before. It was hard to ignore the tent city. Some people were so disturbed by this colourful display of poverty and homelessness that they demanded the police remove them. Rational people asked "to where?"

The pandemic started with people banging pots and pans to honour essential workers. Not long after, the Health Minister announced that 11,000 people who make sure items like hospital sheets are clean would be laid off. They'll be rehired by a private company, but we all know that private companies pay their shareholders first. Sorry health-

care workers we know it's a pandemic, but you get the opposite of a raise.

Of course, raises were given to other essential workers—grocery store employees—\$2 per hour. We love those essential workers for putting their lives on the line. Meanwhile, they had to contend with hysterical shoppers, spitting in anger because they were asked to follow public health orders. Within two months, the raise was rescinded, despite the fact we increased the network of Loblaws by \$1 billion with our grocery buying.

Schools are staying open because people have to work to pay their bills. The most fortunate are able to work from home. While it is no fun being stuck in a house with the same people for months on end, at least these folks are at less risk of contracting COVID-19. Those who are in service, whether it is pouring our coffee, cleaning floors in the hospital, or packing grocery store shelves must continue to go to work and cross their fingers every day hoping not to get the virus.

Despite spending over \$7 billion on a pipeline (\$1.5 billion preferred equity investment and \$6 billion loan guarantee) whose certain completion depended on the now former president winning the American election, the UCP put a halt to the Emergency Isolation Support Benefit after only a short time when the federal CERB replaced it. Many hoping to access the one-time provincial fund could not due to frustrations with the website application. As usual, they blamed the empty provincial treasury on Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, whose government managed to put together emergency funding of \$2,000 a month, keeping millions of Canadians fed and housed. God forbid those people might get ahead financially, so the UCP

clawed back provincial benefits of anyone receiving CERB payments. Roughly 10,000 fewer households received provincial benefits. The UCP, being pro-business, gave out grants of 15 per cent of a company's gross income. However, for a small business owner making \$3,000 per month, three hours spent filling out paperwork for a \$450 grant is a spit in the bucket.

Meanwhile, the poor help the poor. In a thrown-together Facebook group Yeg Community Response to COVID19, a bunch of women figured out how to feed a bunch of people, because it always comes down to food. One single mother makes 100 plus meals a week to share with people who have nothing. According to the Pekiwevin website, the camp was "led by Indigenous 2 Spirit

women and femme folks working in solidarity with Black, LGBTQ2S and settler allies." These people operated the entire camp for 170 people on on a relatively small budget for the whole summer. The Bear Clan patrols our streets, handing out hot soup, sandwiches, naloxone, and love.

It's disturbing that deaths from COVID-19 keep increasing and there is no mention of planning for the long-haulers. Ten per cent of people who get the virus become disabled—and we have no idea how long for—with crippling headaches, body pain, exhaustion, strokes, or heart attacks. What of these people? How will they be supported? We cannot allow the long-haulers to fall between the cracks.

We all just keep staggering

along, hoping we'll make it through. This is a pandemic. It is hard. But there are lessons to be learned here. Capitalism doesn't take care of people, and when the shit hits the proverbial fan, caring for one another is what is really important.

Be well, friends.

Rebecca has attended free concerts as a bouncer, juggled plates as a waitress, completed a degree in microbiology, laboured in the oilfield cleaning storage tanks and worked as an editor for the Government of Alberta. In her current incarnation, she has been a full-time photographer for the last 13 years and is a mother to two boys and stepmother to two girls.

The pandemic has made the divide between the rich and poor very evident. | Photo by Benjamin Disinger on Unsplash



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Becoming more resolute in the New Year

Changes made last year may alter how you approach the future

NAZREENA ANWAR-TRAVAS

It is during the final days of the year when we reflect the most on the past, present, and future. When the pandemic hit in 2020, it changed the world and us forever. Whether we transitioned to working from home, lost jobs, or worked reduced hours, the whole experience redefined our lives. Unable to socialize or travel, we resorted to creative ways to spend the weekends. And when we had enough of endless chatting or video calling, we turned to ourselves.

Don't we discover ourselves the most when we are lonely? This was so true for my husband Jacques and I last summer. Fearing to go to salons, I learned to thread eye-

brows. Resolving to satiate our taste buds without ordering out, we discovered how to cook new cuisines at home using available substitutes. Jacques' pay was reduced. Skills developed years ago during an unemployed phase came in handy and eased our financial strain. I started giving online French conversation classes. Jacques did oil and tire changes for a small fee. The extra money wasn't much, but it still helped us offset some expenses.

One of our resolutions last year was to buy a treadmill. As this was no longer affordable, we walked outdoors a lot instead. When temperatures plummeted, we walked inside our condo building, climbing staircases, and walking corridors with masks on and sanitizers handy.

Shopping was restricted to bare essentials. Fancy face and hair masks were replaced with homemade recipes. Our Christmas gifts, though simple, were still dropped off at friends' doorsteps. At the end of the year, we realized that we had actually saved more money than the year before! That made us ponder.

If we lived for nine months this way, why not make the lessons learned a part of our lives and New Year resolutions list? Why wait for something to happen to change ourselves? Since 2020 was so different, we resolved to do things differently in 2021. First, to practice more gratitude, differentiate needs from wants, spend wisely, support local businesses, and prioritize health. Secondly, to improve existing or learn

new skills. Not only is this personal enrichment but it's also something that will be handy should, God forbid, another emergency hit. And last but not least, to focus more on people who stuck with us and distinguish the essential from the non-essential.

We were no match against a tiny virus. Why then should we harbour grudges or give importance to material stuff that were of no comparison with health or loving relationships? Of course, we all need a bit of fun too! We decided to buy a few board-games that will not only keep us occupied on lonely days but also be available for future game nights with friends when normalcy resumes. The key is to be realistic about what to expect and do in the new year. For instance, taking a vacation may

not be pragmatic even though vaccines have arrived. Losing weight quickly could be difficult, especially with restrictions still in place. However, realistic expectations of savings for that dream holiday might be achievable.

Resolutions are not only about doing something new or difficult. They can also focus on being better prepared for an unknown or difficult future. Is it not always better to be proactive than reactive?

Writing has always been Nazreena's biggest passion besides crocheting and breeding birds. Having changed nine schools as a child in different countries, cultural tolerance and flexibility to adapt to diverse environments come naturally to her.



Cut down ordering out by learning new cuisines at home. | Nazreena Anwar-Travas

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