

Rat Creek Press

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



BY THE COMMUNITY - FOR THE COMMUNITY

JULY/AUGUST 2022

Community gardens receive upgrades

Alberta Avenue and Eastwood's community gardens continue to grow



Alberta Avenue's community garden is getting an upgrade. | Karen Mykietka

- MYA COLWELL -

Community gardens are in full swing this summer. Veggies are planted, flowers are starting to bud, and bees are busy pollinating.

Both Alberta Avenue Community League and Eastwood Community League's community gardens will be expanding this year to fit the needs of the community.

Western Economic Development Canada awarded Alberta Avenue Community League a \$45,000 grant to upgrade their community garden, and the league is using the grant to build a gazebo, add flower beds and hardscaping, and expand the community garden. The City of Edmonton contributed an additional \$36,000.

The league is also preparing for a 12 by 20 foot greenhouse/potting shed by Exceed Solar who have found sponsors for the project. The Exceed Solar team has collaborated with architectural,

engineering, construction and technology experts to create modern and sustainably designed structures branded as Sol Spaces.

The league jumped on both opportunities to improve the garden, says Ali Hammington, league president.

"We're really hoping that it's going to make the garden a more attractive space for rentals. It would be a lovely space to do weddings and other similar events," says Hammington. "And we're hoping that the community will be able to get more use out of [the garden] as a result of having [these structures]."

Both the gazebo and greenhouse will have power for lights and heaters. The 12 by 18 foot gazebo will be constructed of wood and the greenhouse is made from manufactured structural insulated panels and metal siding.

Construction on the gazebo and greenhouse will begin this year, and while the hope was that the structures would be finished by the end of the summer it's

quite likely construction will run into next spring.

The league started the year with a deficit and having the garden enhancement will be another way to draw in revenue.

Hammington adds: "In my humble opinion, this is the best community garden in the city. And once these improvements have been made, it'll be hands down the best community garden in the city, and I'm really looking forward to showing it off."

Eastwood is also expanding their community garden this year, although it's not due to any funding. They are adding several additional ground plots on the east side of the rink before the end of the summer. These will be available for community members to reserve. And eventually, the garden may encircle the rink entirely, says Kate Wilson, the league's facility coordinator.

"Every year there's more happening," says Wilson. "We just plug away and improve [the garden]."

Eastwood's garden is full again this year, and veggies, annuals, and native Alberta wildflowers have been planted. The raised beds outside of the rink have wildflowers and veggies available for community harvesting and a bench for taking in the greenery. Wilson calls it Eastwood's micropark. "It's a place for people to come and gather food and just enjoy the space."

"We can provide benefits to the community by giving them access to nutritious, organic fresh food, free of charge, to come and harvest on their own time," adds Wilson. Surplus vegetables are brought to Bethel Gospel Chapel.

"Coming to the garden is almost like a refresher and a refuel," says Wilson. "It's a respite. It's very nice to be out here."

Stop by Alberta Ave and Eastwood's community gardens to take in the natural beauty, relax, and recharge.

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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New mobile washroom initiative

Public mobile washrooms are accessible at local league

- MYA COLWELL -

In May, the City of Edmonton introduced mobile washroom units around the city, including one in Alberta Avenue Community League's parking lot.

This initiative is part of phase two of the City's Public Washroom Strategy (bit.ly/3y3ThMS).

"The goal of offering these new mobile washroom locations is to provide washroom access this spring, summer, and fall to all Edmontonians when they are out enjoying our city... be that at a concert, festival, or community event," says Travis Kennedy, the general supervisor of infrastructure operations at the City of Edmonton, in an email statement.

"The mobile washrooms are a temporary solution intended to supplement (and not to replace) available permanent washrooms to take care of expected increased washroom needs during the summer months," continues Kennedy.

The mobile washrooms are open daily from 10 am to 9 pm, and they will remain open until Oct. 31.

The city chose the locations for the washrooms after consulting with stakeholders like Boyle Street Ventures Inc., Business Improvement Areas, and the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues.

Factors like average walking dis-

tance to public washrooms, the amount of expected outdoor activity in the area, levels of public urination, and the number of people experiencing homelessness in the area were considered in choosing locations for the mobile public washrooms.

The mobile washrooms are staffed by attendants from hiregood to improve safety and overall user experience at the washrooms, says Kennedy.

The attendants ensure that washrooms are maintained and deter activities like drug use or arson.

At the Alberta Ave location, there is a wheelchair-accessible porta-potty to the right of the washrooms.

So far, traffic has been light at the Alberta Ave location, says Sadie O'Rourke, who works

with hiregood, but the washrooms are available for anyone who's in the area, whether they're playing at the park, shopping in the area, or strolling along 118 Avenue.

The City will introduce more permanent public washrooms across Edmonton during phase three of their Public Washroom Strategy, and the mobile public washrooms this summer may help the city choose locations for those permanent washrooms.

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

So far, traffic has been light at the Alberta Ave location but the washrooms are available for anyone who's in the area.



New mobile public washrooms are accessible in Alberta Avenue Community League's parking lot. | Mya Colwell



"I was pleasantly surprised and even shocked by the amount of fruits and vegetables that were in the box for \$30!" - Happy Gud Box customer

thegudbox.ca/spruceavenue



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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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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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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.

Free All Bodies

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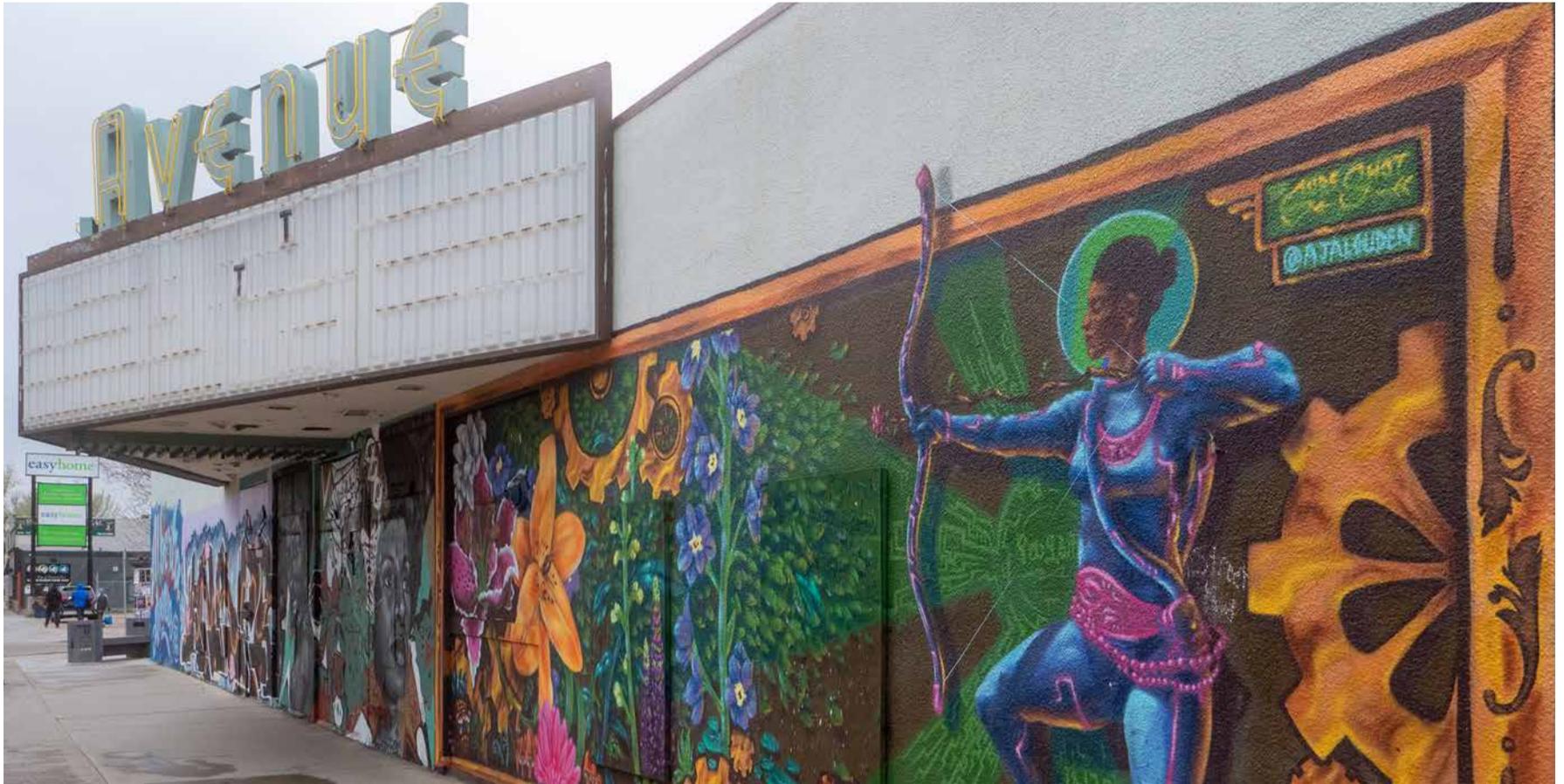
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Starting July 6

Art and history on Alberta Avenue

New guided walking tour explores local street art and history



Some of the street art on the Avenue Theatre. | Arts on the Ave

- ALOUISE DITTRICK -

Summer is here, making it a great time to get outdoors and explore the local area. You may have walked past the street art and buildings on Alberta Avenue and not known the stories and histories behind some of them. A new guided walking tour from Arts on the Ave (AOTA) wants to change this.

“If These Walls Could Talk—A Guided Art & Heritage Tour” is a new walking tour led by a staff member of AOTA. A staff member will take participants on an approximately two-kilometre guided tour of Alberta Avenue. The tour will explore the growth of street art, as well as other forms of public art in the area. It will also discuss some of the historic buildings.

“The idea is to get people to come out, feel safe walking through the neighbourhood, [and] get to know us,” says

Ruth Jeang, AOTA communications coordinator.

This tour will start and end at The Carrot Coffeehouse on 9351 118 Ave. The cost of \$35 per person includes a drink and muffin at The Carrot Coffeehouse before the tour. Arrive 15 minutes early to receive the drink and muffin. The first tour started on June 25 at 1 pm and ran about 90 minutes. During the summer, the tour will operate on Saturdays once a week. If there is interest, it could extend into autumn. There is also talk of possibly doing a longer bike tour in the summer, which would expand outside of 118 Avenue.

A focus for the art portion of the tour is learning about some of the graffiti-style street art. Jeang says, “In the past, graffiti art has had a bad reputation. Over the years, through different programs and City funding, we’ve been able to transform

graffiti into something that is welcomed by businesses and community members.”

More people are embracing these forms of street art, which can connect to the heritage of a business as well. One example is the aptly named Popular Bakery. “[It] is owned by a Portuguese family, so the mural [on the wall there] depicts a little scene from Portugal, and represents their roots and what they bring to our area.”

The influence of immigration will be a focus of the heritage side of the tour. The tour will help participants discover the history of some buildings there and how their use has changed over the years. It will also share stories of those who came to Alberta Avenue to live and work, and people who have helped to make the area the vibrant neighbourhood it is today.

Jeang hopes the tour will contribute to a sense of pride for community members. For locals and everyone else as well, this

tour will give people a chance to explore and learn more about the unique street art and history on Alberta Avenue.

IF THESE WALLS COULD TALK - GUIDED ART & HERITAGE TOUR
 Runs during the summer on Saturdays, 1 to 2:30 pm
 \$35 per person
 More info: artsontheave.org/thesewalls

Alouise is a professional writer and graduate of MacEwan University. She writes about travel and the performing arts at takemetotheworld.com.

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Annual General Meeting

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 9210 118 Ave**

Get some ink at Easy Tiger Tattoos

New shop is located in a character home in Alberta Ave

- STEPHEN STRAND -

Alberta Avenue is home to a new tattoo shop. Spencer Evans, tattoo artist and owner of Easy Tiger Tattoos, began the art form in 2008.

"I was travelling around a little bit right after high school, and kind of got out of this suburban bubble and start-

think that is kind of a natural progression. You kind of get to the point where you're like, 'I want to start making some of the decisions about where I am working and how decisions are made.'"

"I opened the first [Easy Tiger Tattoos] location in 2016. Just over six years now," says Evans. The first loca-

"As soon as I walked in, I was like, 'I got to pull the trigger on that.'"

Evans got the name "Easy Tiger" from a bakery in Texas.

"I was going through some stuff where I didn't really have a shop to work at. I was on vacation and [my friends and I] were all kinda sitting around and were like, 'You should

umbrella," Evans says.

The artists tattoo primarily by appointment, but are generally at the shop from noon to 5 pm.

For more information, check out Easy Tiger Tattoo on Instagram at @easytigertattoos or at www.easytigertattoo.com.



Top: A house is an unusual place for a tattoo shop. **Right:** Tattoo artist Korbi tattoos a customer at Easy Tiger Tattoos. | Mya Colwell

ed seeing tattoos and being in tattoo shops. And got inspired by that," Evans explains. After getting a tattoo upon his return to Edmonton, he decided to ask a local tattoo artist named Stacy Knight if he could train under him, and Knight agreed. Prior to that, Evans' only art training was doodling on his binders in school and taking some art classes in high school.

After working at a few different shops over the years, including Showdown Tattoos and Black Gold Tattoo Co., he decided it was time to open his own shop. "I

tion was on 109 Street and 84 Avenue. Evans moved to another location after that, and then in February of 2022, he moved into a house north of the river.

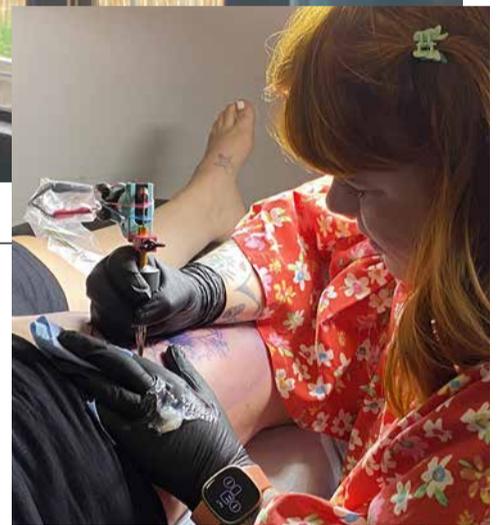
After getting a tattoo upon his return to Edmonton, Spencer Evans decided to ask a local tattoo artist named Stacy Knight if he could train under him, and Knight agreed.

"Well, [buying a house] was always in my mind. I just got the idea, like, 'I don't know if I'm ever going to be able to afford [to buy] a commercial building,'" Evans explains. So, he decided to look at old character homes that were zoned for commercial use. After talking to a realtor, he found the perfect home on 117 Avenue and 96 Street, right across the street from Pizza 73.

open up your own [tattoo shop] and call it Easy Tiger, or something." That was about four years before Evans opened his first location, but the name stuck with him.

Four artists are based out of Easy Tiger Tattoos. Ryan Griffiths (@ryan.philip.griffiths), Korbi (@korbiland), Spencer Evans (@spencerevanstatoos), and Liprat (@liprattattoo). They also have an apprentice named Travis at the shop.

At Easy Tiger Tattoos, the artists create traditional tattoos, which have bold and bright lines and are often brightly coloured. Think of tattoos created by artists Sailor Jerry or Don Ed Hardy. "We all have different styles of traditional that we are doing, but it would all fall under that sort of



EASY TIGER TATTOOS
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Stephen works in broadcasting and writes for fun.



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Bringing upcycling to Highlands

Tessa Raye Stamp opens The Tesseract in the neighbourhood

- MYA COLWELL -

Tessa Raye Stamp has always been many things: an entrepreneur, an upcycler, a set designer. And while some would describe her as a jack of all trades, she sees herself as a tesserae instead, which, along with her name, inspired the name for her business: The Tesseract – Creative Construction + Design.

Tesseract are the pieces of stone, glass, or ceramics that make up a mosaic. “My skills come together like unique little parts that make a mosaic... like a work of art that is [made of] all unique

skills and trades,” explains Stamp.

She sells products that have been upcycled, or ones that are low waste or no waste.

“My muse has always been garbage,” says Stamp with a laugh. “I’m really passionate about not buying new things [and] using what’s already there.”

The store primarily stocks Annie Sloan chalk paint, a versatile and easy-to-use paint — perfect

for upcycling — that can be used on almost any surface without needing to strip and sand the material first.

“My muse has always been garbage,” says Tessa Raye Stamp with a laugh. “I’m really passionate about not buying new things [and] using what’s already there.”

Her store also sells plants (herbs, annuals, and perennials) grown right in her home in Highlands. Acquired Taste Tea, Simpatico Makers beeswax wrap products, and upcycled materials made into art by local artists including Deanne

Underwood and Kailene Dillon are also given a home in her store.

“The store in Highlands is sort of a collection of all the things I love, and it’s really lovely to see other people love them,” says Stamp. “Finding that [your passions] connect with the community... it’s super heartwarming,” says Stamp. “You just feel like you’re finding your kindreds.”

Stamp started her business in March 2020, after Edmonton’s chalk paint stockist retired earlier that year. Because of her love of Annie Sloan paint and upcycling in general, she knew it was the perfect opportunity for her.

This past March, The Tesseract relocated from the Old Strathcona Arts Emporium to Highlands. Stamp lives in Highlands herself, just two blocks away from her store, and the strong community was an important factor in her decision to move locations.

Stamp also hosts workshops out of The Tesseract, including classes on how



The Tesseract is stocked with Annie Sloan chalk paint, plants, and upcycled products. | Mya Colwell



Tessa Raye Stamp welcomes the community into her brand new store location in Highlands. | Mya Colwell

to make Mason jar centrepieces, how to paint on wood, Annie Sloan painting 101 classes, and Yard Yahtzee — where you make your own giant version of the game.

Her goal is to inspire others to upcycle and to try a no-waste lifestyle. “It’s nice to inspire people with things that inspire you,” says Stamp. One of her favourite parts about owning The Tesseract is answering questions about upcycling, DIY projects, and of course, Annie Sloan paint.

The Tesseract is located at 6421 112 Ave. Visit thetesseract.ca for more information.

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



Rat Creek Press

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Support community through housing

NiGiNan Housing Ventures provides supportive and affordable housing

- MYA COLWELL -

A tragedy led to the creation of NiGiNan Housing Ventures, a non-profit charity that supports Indigenous people in Edmonton through affordable and supportive housing initiatives.

NiGiNan was founded in 2014 by a group of seven Indigenous and Métis social workers who worked with Ambrose Daniels. Daniels was an ironworker, and when an accident at work required him to take a prolonged break from his job, he turned to alcohol and eventually lost his home.

Daniels died of pneumonia while living on the streets, without any supports or housing. This compelled the social workers to create Ambrose Place in order to rectify the absence of Indigenous-led housing and support in Edmonton.

"We can't just help people from colonial [perspectives], it's not working," says Blake Jackman, the program manager of housing at NiGiNan. "NiGiNan is here to add that cultural component, [to] actually address people's medicine wheels, and support them in that way from bridge housing all the way to permanent supportive housing."

The non-profit charity owns Ambrose Place, Omamoo Wango Gamik, and the Sands Inn and Suites, where they all offer supportive housing for Indigenous individuals or families who are unable to receive support from other organizations.

"[These are places] where you can access your forever home," says Jackman. "We eat meals together, we do family style dining in our dining room... we play games together. I might be too busy to play games with my family, but I'm out there playing a game of crib with Mooshum [grandfather in Cree] in the afternoon."

"We treat everyone we serve as family," continues Jackman. "It's brother, sister, uncle, auntie, mooshum, kookum [grandmother in Cree].... And it's not just something we're saying, they see it in our actions." He continues: "Our community doesn't just end at the front door at Ambrose Place. It's out on the land, it's going to ceremony, it's praying with each other at sweat lodges."

The Sands Inn and Suites is being renovated to provide 54 supportive housing suites. Currently, there are 32 bridge housing suites in the hotel, and the renovated supportive housing is set to open on Dec. 1, 2022.

At Ambrose Place, open since 2014, NiGiNan houses Indigenous people that



Top: NiGiNan provides affordable and supportive housing for Indigenous people in Edmonton. **Bottom:** Residents at NiGiNan have the opportunity to engage with Indigenous culture. | Supplied

are hardest to house within Edmonton. Residents have severe addictions as well as complex mental health diagnoses.

Ambrose Place has 42 units of supportive housing that range from bachelor suites to one- and two-bedroom apartments. NiGiNan offers wrap-around supports from Alberta Health

Services (AHS) workers and non-stop cultural supports with elders.

"Every aspect of life is seen through the person's medicine wheel," says Jackman. "We address all aspects of their medicine wheel: their physical health, their mental health, their emotional health, and their spiritual health,

knowing that they're all interconnected. And if one is out of balance, it's likely all four quadrants need a little bit of help."

Housing and independent living support teams are also available to help residents.

Omamoo Wango Gamik houses Indigenous youth and young families that need a home.

"We can start working with those families [when they're] young, engaging them in culture, engaging them in healthy routines in life so that their children are going to grow up without these same traumas that their parents experienced," says Jackman. "And so in that way, they won't grow up to be in the same cycles of addiction, and they can live happy lives full of dignity."

NiGiNan takes a housing first approach, where housing is the first step in wellness. "We know that... the first thing that we can do is we can get someone in a home and we can start feeding them three meals a day," says Jackman. "That's going to already crush a lot of the behaviours or addiction cycles that they're currently experiencing from living rough. And from there we can build on housing, and we can build on all kinds of supports — reengage them to the land, teach them about natural medicine, [and have them] sit with elders."

They also take an Indigenous approach to harm reduction at NiGiNan, which means being attuned to the needs of individuals, treating them with love, and providing access to culture.

"We just really meet [residents] where they're at, understanding the generational trauma that they've experienced, and then family trauma," says Jackman. "Living on the streets creates a lot of trauma. We do provide them that love and support and [we're] there 24 hours a day when they need somebody."

NiGiNan is providing services and homes for Indigenous people in Edmonton which are vital today, but Jackman hopes they won't always be necessary, that moving forward, all Indigenous people will have housing and support.

"We don't want to work in this industry in 50 years or seven generations ahead," says Jackman. "All these [NiGiNan] buildings will be able to go away one day."

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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Call Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-8477 if you have a tip and want to remain anonymous

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Alberta Ave District Beat Team: nwbeats@edmontonpolice.ca

For more support, contact greenalleys@artsontheave.org





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(780) 471-1580

Small towns offer adventures

You don't have to travel far to enjoy the summer



A family enjoys the Trochu Arboretum. | Derek Quittenton

a couple committed to preserving the town's history.

While writing this article, I learned of more attractions. I love to swim, and the Trochu Community Swimming Pool and Brian's Splash Park are open in the summer. Entrance ranges from free to a family rate of \$12.

Another gem is Henry's Shoes on Main Street. Town social media director Jamie Collins notes that it's a favourite for bus tour visitors. First comes lunch, possibly at Sweetgrass Café a few doors down, then a dive into the shoe store. Vern Rist is the second-generation owner, presiding over 18,000 pairs of shoes and other items.

Main Street will soon have a facelift with a hefty grant from the Canadian Community Revitalization Fund.

The Trochu Golf and Country Club is noted for its superior greens. The club features nine holes on a hilly course overlooking a picturesque valley. An electric cart is recommended. Call for a reservation.

For a final treat: look up at the 12 metre high white golf tee marking the course. It's the world's largest tee, but one might ask, "Are there actually any others?"

Alberta's small towns offer accessible antidotes to Edmonton's bustle and noise. Travelling close to home is cost-effective.

Trochu may inspire you to search afield. The town's website is town.trochu.ab.ca. Contacts for everything in this article can be found online.

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

- CONSTANCE BRISSENDEN -

One of Travel Alberta's recent pitches encouraged residents to explore rural Alberta and its small towns. Last summer, I did just that and became acquainted with a number of small towns. Rimbey has a great thrift store. Caroline Meats in Caroline offers quality fare for barbecuing. The Parkview Restaurant in Lamont has yummy Chinese dishes.

My favourite town was Trochu, 240 kilometres from Edmonton at the junction of Highways 21 and 585. After passing through to the Tolman Bridge East campsite on the Red Deer River, my first impression of a dusty ghost town was replaced by the pleasure of discovery.

I now shop at Trochu Family Foods on Arena Avenue for every camping trip. The staff set the tone for the town. Town secretary Kim Helmer sums it up nicely when she observes, "Kind people and the friendly atmosphere make Trochu inviting."

As an antidote to camp food, eat in town. The Store, as it is simply known, on Arena Avenue offers tasty hamburgers grilled up by Denise Frere. Rob Frere, her husband, is a second-generation owner, with a wealth of knowledge on local history inherited from his history-loving parents.

On a sunny day, take your lunch to the Trochu Arboretum a few blocks away. This delightful botanical park

is attractive with trees, flowers, flitting birds, a Japanese-style fishpond, and plenty of benches. Entry is free but a donation is welcome.

After passing through to the Tolman Bridge East campsite on the Red Deer River, my first impression of a dusty ghost town was replaced by the pleasure of discovery.

Murals of the town's past dot Arena Avenue. Blackfoot people have lived in the area for centuries. Forty kilometres from Trochu, Dry Island Buffalo Jump Provincial Park is a must-see attraction.

No camping is allowed, but the views are awesome and swimming in the Red Deer River is wonderful.

In 1905, an aristocratic French citizen named Armand Trochu established the Ste. Anne Ranch Trading Company. Buildings from this endeavour are preserved for viewing.

Also on Arena Avenue, the Trochu & District Museum is open May through August. Many of the fascinating artifacts were collected by Lorene and Louis Frere,

Travelling close to home is cost-effective and Trochu may inspire you to search afield.



Views on the road to nearby Dry Island Buffalo Jump Provincial Park. | Constance Brissende



Janis Irwin, MLA
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A tale of two different gardens

Resilience, food, and flowers in two Delton gardens

- CHRISTINA IGNACIO-DEINES -

Rat Creek Press Home & Garden Tours is a series that highlights the beautiful spaces in our neighbourhoods and talks 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+, youth, seniors, and more.

This is a year-round column, and we are already fully booked with summer gardens. If you're interested in sharing about your home, or if you have or know of a garden with fall/winter features, I'd love to know more. All submissions are welcome and encouraged!

To submit, please send an email to Christina at: cignaciodeines@gmail.com

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.



LINDSAY FOSTER

In Foster's garden, she focuses on growing her own food and increasing food security within a modest urban lot. She worked with garden designer, Naomi Pahl, to turn her former front lawn into a low maintenance, water-conserving mix of perennials and edibles. During last year's heatwave, Foster's deep mulch kept her garden beds cool and moist.

Age of home: 53 years — built in 1969

How long have you lived in your home? Five years.

What are three words to describe your garden? Chaotic, cozy abundance.

A perfect day in your garden: A sunny but cool afternoon with no wind, just lounging on the deck listening to all of the birds. Maybe with a mimosa.

Favourite time of year in the garden: The end of May, when things start coming up, and I make the rounds every evening to see what has come back to life and if I can remember what anything is.

What are you loving about your garden right now? How effortlessly accomplished a bunch of perennials can make me feel!

What are some challenges you're experiencing? Creeping bellflower and all of the neighbourhood cats using the mulch as a litter box.

How does your garden inspire you? By experimenting with new things and learning what works or doesn't work in the garden.

Where do you see your garden in five years? Hopefully with much more production from fruit trees and bushes, an irrigation system for veggies, and maybe a small chicken coop.

Best thing you've learned while living here? Learning to let go of the idea of perfection and focus on the trial and error as part of the whole experience and fun of gardening.

What's the best gardening advice you've ever received? Mulch everything!

Best compliment you've received about your garden? It looks like a retired person lives here.

What would you like to see more of in the community? Community garden activities like tours, veggie shares, seed swaps.

What is your favourite local resource? Greenland Garden Centre.

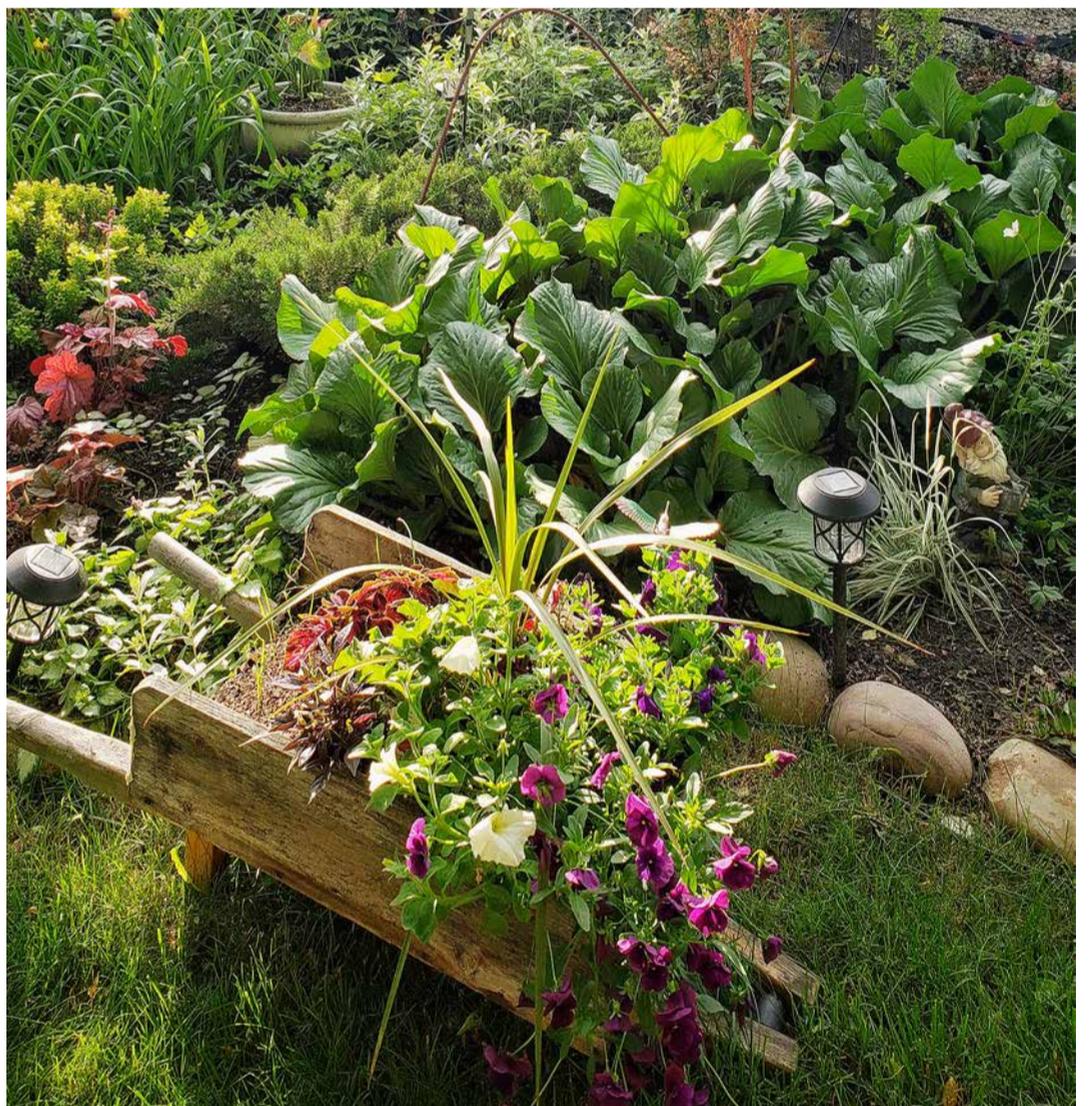
A few words of advice? Experiment with what works for your yard, find someone who will share some perennials, and shop end of season sales at the garden centres!

Circle: Wonderful surprises come up in the garden, like this is nigella love-in-a-mist. | Lindsay Foster

Top left: Lindsay Foster's 1969-built home, with mulched garden beds designed by Naomi Pahl. | Christina Ignacio-Deines

Bottom left: A path into the vegetable garden, with raised beds on the left and flowers on the right. | Christina Ignacio-Deines

Right: A corner bed in the front yard with irises, chives, sweet Williams, nasturtiums, and sunflower seedlings. | Christina Ignacio-Deines



CHRISTIE MAWER

Mawer’s playful garden is full of colourful surprises. Gnomes, birds, bugs, and more are tucked into her front flower beds amongst the perennials. She is planning to expand her garden beds in her backyard to include more vegetables and fruits.

Age of home: About 60 years.

How long have you lived in your home? Five years.

What are three words to describe your garden? Eclectic, controlled wildness.

A perfect day in your garden: Walking around, checking out what is blooming, what is struggling, I pull weeds or dead head as I go. After the tour, I decide what needs tending, such as putting in new plants, more extensive weeding, pruning, mowing, etc. Once all the work is done, I love to sit in the back in my gravity chair to read. As I’m reading, I usually get distracted by my animals, or the birds flitting in and out of the birdhouses on my garage, or by the beautiful prairie sky. I’ll usually end up having a little nap as well.

Favourite time of year in your garden: May/June. I love spring and watching everything return. The various shades of green. Seeing items that I wasn’t sure would make it return.

What are some challenges you’re experiencing? Carrots aren’t coming up and lily beetles. After years of fighting, I finally took out my lilies.

How does your garden inspire you? I’m not much of an outdoorsy person. I don’t like to just sit around, so my garden gets me out and doing things and actually enjoying the short summers we have.

Where do you see your garden in five years? I am adding a space in the back for more vegetables. Last year I put vines, gooseberries, and haskap berries along the side fence. I expect they will be quite something in five years. I’m also hoping to add a little library and seed exchange box to my front yard.

Best thing you’ve learned while living in the community? The residents are great. I’ve been given so many plants and now am able to return the favour.

What’s the best gardening advice you’ve ever received? Give plants lots of water, especially in pots as they dry out so fast. I also tend to get too excited and plant too early, so I’ve slowly been listening to the “plant after the May long weekend” advice.

Best compliment you’ve received about your garden? I’ve received four Front Yards in Bloom nominations. I also get many people stopping to talk to me and compliment my yard as they walk by.

A few words of advice? Experiment, try, have fun! And look at the care tags. Know if your space is shade or sun and choose accordingly. It really does make a difference.

Did you work with a contractor or local business to design your garden? Not at all. I’m not a planner so I fly by the seat of my pants most of the time. “OOOO this is pretty.... Now, where can I put it?”

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.

Top left: Planters and hanging pots with gnomes tucked into them.

Bottom left: Christie Mawer’s 1960s bungalow features a sweet yellow door.

Top right: A row of mirrors along the front fence reflects the lush foliage.

Bottom right: A little wheelbarrow with cordyline, coleus, and petunias.

| Christina Ignacio-Deines

Two sides to the mosquito story

Protecting biodiversity is the goal

- CONSTANCE BRISSENDEN -

For some, like myself admittedly, mosquitoes are the stuff of nightmares. I once had a dream where a giant mosquito lifted me up and took me away to a quiet place to bite me.

Others, like environmental activist Dr. Raquel Feroe, see mosquitoes in a totally different light. The former doctor is a member of Pesticide Free Edmonton. She is passionate about the environment and a future based on natural and personal ways of avoiding mosquito bites.

Bti, one of the products the City of Edmonton uses for its annual spraying, is a pesticide that uses proteins from a bacteria. While it is approved for use by Health Canada Pest Management Regulatory Agency, and is considered non-toxic to almost all aquatic species, Feroe points out that there are still issues with using it.

“Bti kills non-biting midges as well as mosquito larvae,” she says. “Midges make up 50 to 70 per cent and more of the abundance (biomass) that feeds birds, amphibians, fish, and spiders.” As well, adult male mosquitoes are useful pollinators. It’s the females that do the biting.

Feroe encourages us to be careful about using the term “pests.”

“We need to humble ourselves to develop a better relationship with nature,” she says. She quotes a friend who said: “Making the environment deadly can’t possibly create health and vibrancy.” In Feroe’s view,

“Natural or synthetic, senseless killing is unwarranted.”

The City works closely with other programs to pursue more natural pest-control measures. Mike Jenkins, pest management coordinator, says, “We do have an active and robust targeted ground control spraying program to proactively manage the mosquito pop-

Environmental activist Dr. Raquel Feroe is passionate about the environment and a future based on natural and personal ways of avoiding mosquito bites.

ulation. We are also considering various alternative biological control measures, as well as enhanced monitoring and surveillance of mosquitoes and biodiversity.”

In a typical year, most mosquito development starts declining in mid-August, as precipitation decreases and mosquito populations begin declining. Wide-scale applications past this period are rare, unless

the conditions are unusually warm and rainy.

“We are increasingly focusing on a natural approach to mosquito control,” adds Jenkins. “Through the implementation of alternative approaches and by focusing on increasing biodiversity, we continue to provide [access to mostly mosquito-free natural settings for] Edmontonians who want to enjoy the outdoors during the summer months, while preserving our environment.”

Feroe asks that we don’t accept spraying without thinking of the consequences. “An insect apocalypse would have a devastating effect on biodiversity, the food chain, and our ecosystems.”

Pesticide Free Edmonton continues to encourage the City to do more. “The City can educate people to have better ecological knowledge. To develop wildlife habitat for fish and birds, we need to work with nature versus against nature.”

Jenkins admits, “These programs follow natural processes and may take some time to establish.”

In the meantime, we can all follow the advice of both the City and Feroe. When outdoors this summer, wear cover-up clothing and long-sleeved shirts, and use plenty of approved insect spray. Insect spray with DEET works as a repellent, but some people find Citronella also works. I will be doing all that, for sure.

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



Work with nature rather than against nature, says Raquel Feroe. Male mosquitoes are plant pollinators. | Constance Brissenden



Spruce Avenue Community Garden

Come and garden with us
garden@spruceavenuecommunity.com



Community Hall Mural

Spruce Avenue League is working with Emily Chu to cover the front of our hall with a 120 foot mural. The mural will evolve over the summer and the official unveiling will occur in September.

Wandering Woolies

Saturdays
At Eastwood Hall
2:00-4:30PM

Bring your knitting, crafts, crochet or artwork & enjoy the company of fellow crafters



Cool off in Borden Pool

Outdoor pools and spray parks are open for summer fun

- CONSTANCE BRISSENDEN -

On a hot day in Edmonton, a dip in an outdoor pool or a run through a spray park is enticing. In addition to award-winning Borden Natural Swimming Pool, opening July 1, 73 spray parks dot the city, with several conveniently located in our area.

Three other outdoor pools will operate this summer: Oliver Outdoor Pool, Queen Elizabeth Pool, and Fred Broadstock Pool. Mill Creek Outdoor Pool is closed for rehabilitation work.

The best recommendation is to reserve your time slot at the City of Edmonton's website MoveLearnPlay (movelearnplay.edmonton.ca/). Access to outdoor pools is free for children 12 years old and under.

"We encourage Edmontonians to reserve a time to visit outdoor pools this season to guarantee they can access the pool at the time they prefer. However, we are also accepting walk-ins and people can pay at the door," says Christopher Webster, communications advisor for the City's community services, communications and engagement. "After introducing time booking as an option during the pandemic, we heard from many that they liked the option, and so we have kept it in place for the 2022 season."

While Queen Elizabeth Pool opened June 22, Borden Pool and others were delayed to July 1. The culprit was a reduced season approved as part of city council's 2021 budget deliberations.

"The budget reflected a new fiscal reality given the pressures everyone faced as a result of the pandemic," said Shauna Graham, supervisor of operations at the City of Edmonton. "While we understand this will disappoint some residents who look forward to hitting the outdoor pools each year, we are looking forward to opening our doors on July 1."

Pool hours will be 10 am to 7:45 pm from July 1 to Aug 6, and 10 am to 5:45 pm from Aug 7 to 31.



Borden Park Natural Swimming Pool reopens on July 1. It first opened in 2018, seen here. | Constance Brissenden

Located in a beautiful park, Borden Natural Swimming Pool, which opened in 2018, is Canada's first public, man-made, natural swimming pool.

While Queen Elizabeth Pool opened June 22, Borden Pool and others were delayed to July 1. The culprit was a reduced season approved as part of city council's 2021 budget deliberations.

While this type of pool is popular in Europe, there are only two in North America. The other is in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

In 2019, the pool won the prestigious Innovation in Architecture award that "honours its integration of chemical-free technology into a beautifully designed public recreation facility." The design process involved developing a pool technology that cleanses water through stone, gravel, sand, and botanic filtering processes.

The Royal Architectural Institute of Canada gave the award and assesses factors such as research and development, new and adapted technologies, construction methods, and fresh approaches to details and materials.

Take a mini-vacation at Borden Pool, while relaxing on lounge chairs with umbrellas and with sand on one side. Individual change rooms have lockable

doors and free lockers are available. The beautiful complex cost \$14.4 million to build and every penny was worth it.

What could be better, and cheaper? Goodbye Hawaii, hello Borden Park!

On a hot day, the 23C degree water is a pleasure. Because the pool is partially filtered by aquatic plants and plankton, the temperature stays cool and refreshing.

"It's like swimming in a lake," said Graham at the opening event.

Guidelines for Borden Pool are different from other outdoor pools because no chemicals are used to disinfect the water. The pool depends on rock filters and natural processes such as plants instead of using chemicals to replicate naturally occurring filtration. Layers of granite rock, known as the Neptune Filter, remove big articles such as leaves, dissolved solids, and larger organic materials. A biofilm on top of the rock is used to filter out smaller micro-organisms.

Two other methods enhance the pool: hydrobotanical beds are constructed wetlands using plants to filter phosphates, nitrogen, carbon dioxide, and other contaminants from the water. Intense ultraviolet from the sun controls bacteria levels before water is recirculated into the public basins.

Edmonton's spray parks are another delightful, and free, choice for family fun.

Recirculating spray parks have a large underground storage tank that is filled with water pumped to the treatment equipment. The equipment filters and disinfects the water, which is then sprayed onto the play area.

Spray parks are open for the season from 9 am to 9 pm. Conveniently located spray parks include Alberta Avenue (9210 118 Ave), Eastwood (11803 86 St), Elmwood Park (12505 75 St), Highlands (112 Ave and 62 St), and Spruce Avenue (10240 115 Ave).

CONTACTS

Outdoor pool time slot bookings:
movelearnplay.edmonton.ca
To find your closest spray park, call 311 or online at
edmonton.ca/activities_parks_recreation/spray-parks-water-play

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

Activities:

Organized for kids 6 to 10 years old

Kids can join in for free games, sports, crafts, music, drama and more at their local playground

Keep kids active and engaged all summer!

GREEN SHACK PROGRAMS

Locations:

Norwood Square Park
 95A St & 114 Ave
 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Alberta Ave Park
 93 St & 118 Ave
 2:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Check for updates on other openings and times at Edmonton.ca/Greenshacks

Pouring heart and soul into a community

Local residents enrich lives in Parkdale-Cromdale

- MYA COLWELL -

Kevin Wong and Steven Townsend have been pillars of the Parkdale-Cromdale community since they moved to Parkdale in 2014.

Becoming involved with the league happened almost by chance. "One year, Kevin and I really, really decked out our house in Christmas stuff," says Townsend. "We ended up on the news."

"I had always grown up in townhouses or apartments and you couldn't really do that kind of thing," continues Townsend. "My favourite Christmas movie is *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*, so I dreamed that one day I would have that [wildly decorated] house."

Townsend and Wong ended up winning the Christmas light contest in Parkdale-Cromdale, and they received a note in their mailbox inviting them to the Parkdale-Cromdale Christmas celebration, where they could also pick up the prize for winning the contest.

"That's the first time I stepped into this hall," says Wong, and the couple have been involved at the league ever since.

Townsend and Wong have served in almost all of the positions on the league board over the years. And in all their roles, they've found ways to champion community and start new initiatives in many different ways.

For Wong, his goal while on the board was to champion collectivity. "It's a collective effort on making decisions. It's about identifying [issues and opportunities] together," says Wong. "I believe the league's position should always be a platform to enable people to do things they want to do, so I think that [was] my only goal: to make sure the league is accessible, [and that] the resource is accessible to people that want to do things."

Townsend's goal while on the board was to bring people together, "making sure that the community had an inclusive place to gather, somewhere that everyone felt welcome no matter where [they] came from."

The couple have organized and led countless league initiatives and events. Some of those projects include the art installation for missing and murdered Indigenous people, installing solar panels on the league roof, creating the chain link fence mural, and designing the Great Edmonton North Challenge cards to help residents get to know the north Edmonton area safely during COVID-19.

Other projects included upgrading the league's security system and financial system, moving the bookkeeping system online, creating two permanent positions at the league, and introducing a summer internship position.

Wong and Townsend also raised the Pride flag and the Treaty 6 flag at the league.



Kevin and Steven cook New Year's Day brunch at the league. | Supplied

"Representation does matter," says Wong. "I think more... local organizations should [raise the Pride and Treaty 6 flags]." Wong says that the provincial government raised the Pride flag for one week at the Legislature grounds, and then they took it down. "We decided to leave it [up]."

"It was meaningful not only to me, [but] to a lot of diverse community... members in our neighbourhood," says Wong.

Townsend says there are always fantastic events and initiatives happening at the league, but creating the community garden was by far his favourite project. Realizing that the league didn't have a community garden really convinced Townsend, an avid gardener, to become involved there in the first place so that he could champion the project.

The garden was a place to bring people together. "It wasn't about gardening, it was about building friendships, meeting new people, getting new people involved," says Townsend.

With the produce from the community garden, the league could celebrate Harvest Fest together. "People have a connection to where their food comes from," adds Townsend.

For a while, youth shelters and group homes in the neighbourhood took up a few plots at the community garden to learn where their food comes from, and

"to [build] connections to the community," says Townsend

Townsend was also involved with getting the rink operational again and with organizing Drag Queen Storytime. "Drag Queen Storytime [was] some of my favourite of [the events]," says Townsend, "just bringing that to the community and allowing people to see stuff... outside of what they might normally see."

Wong found it difficult to pick just one favourite event, but a few that stood out were the missing and murdered Indigenous people installation, where Wong learned so much, delivering gingerbread houses to community members at Christmas during the pandemic, and the parties throughout the year, including the high tea party for the gardening group and a Hygge night, which is the Danish idea of coziness in the winter.

Another memorable event was the horse-drawn carriage that went between Parkdale and Cromdale. Wong recounts wryly that the horse got spooked and refused to cross the tracks, trapping the carriage in Cromdale for the longest time.

Both Townsend and Wong have been ceaselessly involved with the league, and they always found the motivation to take on new projects.

"When I first started here, I ran a business with four locations," says Townsend. "I was super busy outside of here, but I still found the time. Honestly, when people go to me and [ask], 'Where do you find the time?' I'd be like, 'Well, I just don't watch TV shows.'"

"I use that time to better my community and hopefully enrich the lives of other people," continues Townsend. "I'm not expecting everybody to do that, but I do hope that more people consider how much more fulfilling it is to be involved in the community and do these types of initiatives and projects as opposed to just watching a TV show."

"Whatever [we]... do helps to bring people together. I think that's key, getting neighbours to know each other, making them feel welcome and... hoping they will reciprocate to some other neighbours," says Wong. "That's how you build community. It's through little things, through the local things."

"The league wouldn't be as successful had it not been [for] all the involvement from all the people, and I merely [am] the face of the league and the talking head," says Wong. "It's the people that step up, whether it's five minutes or organizing events, or even just having conversations or stepping in to listen to a board meeting and thinking of getting involved. All those neat people, I think they need to be given credit for their involvement. And it's those little things that add up to the bigger picture."

The league means more to Wong than people know.

"This is one of the places that we poured our heart and soul into," says Wong, "and hopefully it shows."

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



MLA Janis Irwin recognizes Kevin and Steven for all their work in the community. | Supplied

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Introducing a community volunteer

Michael Janics makes his community a better place



Michael Janics (pictured) is a volunteer at Alberta Ave Community League. | Karen Mykietka

- MIKE ENDERS -

Michael Janics is no stranger to Alberta Avenue, as he spends countless hours volunteering his time to make his community a better place.

“Volunteering does give me a sense of pride and self worth, boosting my ego and confidence in myself and my personal relationships,” says Janics.

Janics volunteers not only at Alberta Avenue Community League, but also throughout Edmonton. As a huge fan of wrestling since first seeing it at a young age at the Calgary Stampede, Janics loves to help out by cooking for Monster Pro Wrestling events. He also enjoys helping run a senior’s event with Carol Brooks, Community Drop-in Night programs with league president Ali Hammington, and local fundraisers with the facility and office manager, Karen Mykietka.

Janics is looking forward to an event he has been working hard on for the Alberta Avenue Community Centre on July 30. From noon to 8 pm, the Gnome Whom Did It Summer Garden Festival will take place, featuring a garage sale, farmers market, concessions, and mystery garden plot for kids involving the Edmonton Police Service.

Janics is looking forward to an event he has been working on for the Alberta Avenue Community Centre, the Gnome Whom Did It Summer Garden Festival on July 30.

Janics can also be seen volunteering his time to help with snow removal or lawn care for seniors, or dropping food off for friends and families through food banks or soup kitchens. He has also pitched in his time at organizations throughout Edmonton like Bethel Church, Garneau Theatre, or Spirit of Hope United Church.

When not volunteering, Janics loves to go for walks, listen to music, or star gaze, which aligns with his love of astronomy. “Being the artist that I am, I always look for inspiration in nature, life, or even my own emotions from time to time.” He cherishes every bit of the time he spends on those walks.

Janics also enjoys painting, drawing, or working on puzzles. He cherishes his artistic skills and does his best to teach others in the community how they can develop their own skills. In fact, Janics found out recently through Alberta Avenue’s community garden that he is a decent gardener.

“Just don’t tell the president that. She will gloat,” he says.

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.

Advocating for art and history

Wesley Andreas builds community in Spruce Avenue

- MYA COLWELL -

Wesley Andreas is an influential community builder. He has been involved in countless projects in Spruce Avenue and the Alberta Avenue district since moving to Edmonton from Calgary in 2012, and he continues to be very involved in championing community, local history, and art initiatives in the neighbourhood.

Andreas moved to Edmonton for work, but it was also important for him to find community. “Part of the reason I applied to work [in Edmonton] was because I wanted to... set down roots in a neighbourhood where I felt like you could build community,” says Andreas. He had heard about Alberta Avenue, especially the arts and festivals that thrive in the area, and he wanted to become a part of that.

“My partner and I moved to Edmonton with the idea

that we could buy a house somewhere in the Ave communities, settle down, build some roots, get connected in the community, [and] build relationships,” continues Andreas.

Once Andreas was settled in the kind of ‘40s character home he had always dreamed of owning, something that wasn’t affordable in Calgary, he began to look into the history of his home and Spruce Avenue’s history in general. This led him to the Spruce Avenue Community League, and he got involved right when they started thinking about creating a history project for their 65th anniversary.

Local history is a big passion of Andreas’, and he caught the local history bug after going to a “learn about your house” event when he was growing up in Windsor, Ontario.

“That got me interested in local history and [understanding] a bit more about what you could find out and all... the background and how [history] could be really connected to place, as opposed to just the generic dates that you memorize of some far-off place... in a history class,” says Andreas.

“Local history really ties you to a place and you can really think about... where are

we sitting right now and what happened before and how is that connected.”

Andreas co-founded the Spruce Avenue Celebrates History project with league treasurer Verna Stainthorp, which started during the league’s 65th anniversary. It has become a multi-year project involving several initiatives like the house history research and placard program, a pop-up museum where residents bring historical items that represent the neighbourhood, and a seminar on how to research your house’s history.

Wesley Andreas caught the local history bug after going to a “learn about your house” event when he was growing up in Windsor, Ontario.

Andreas is currently the secretary and the history director at the league, and his position as the history director involves advocating for the historical elements of the neighbourhood.

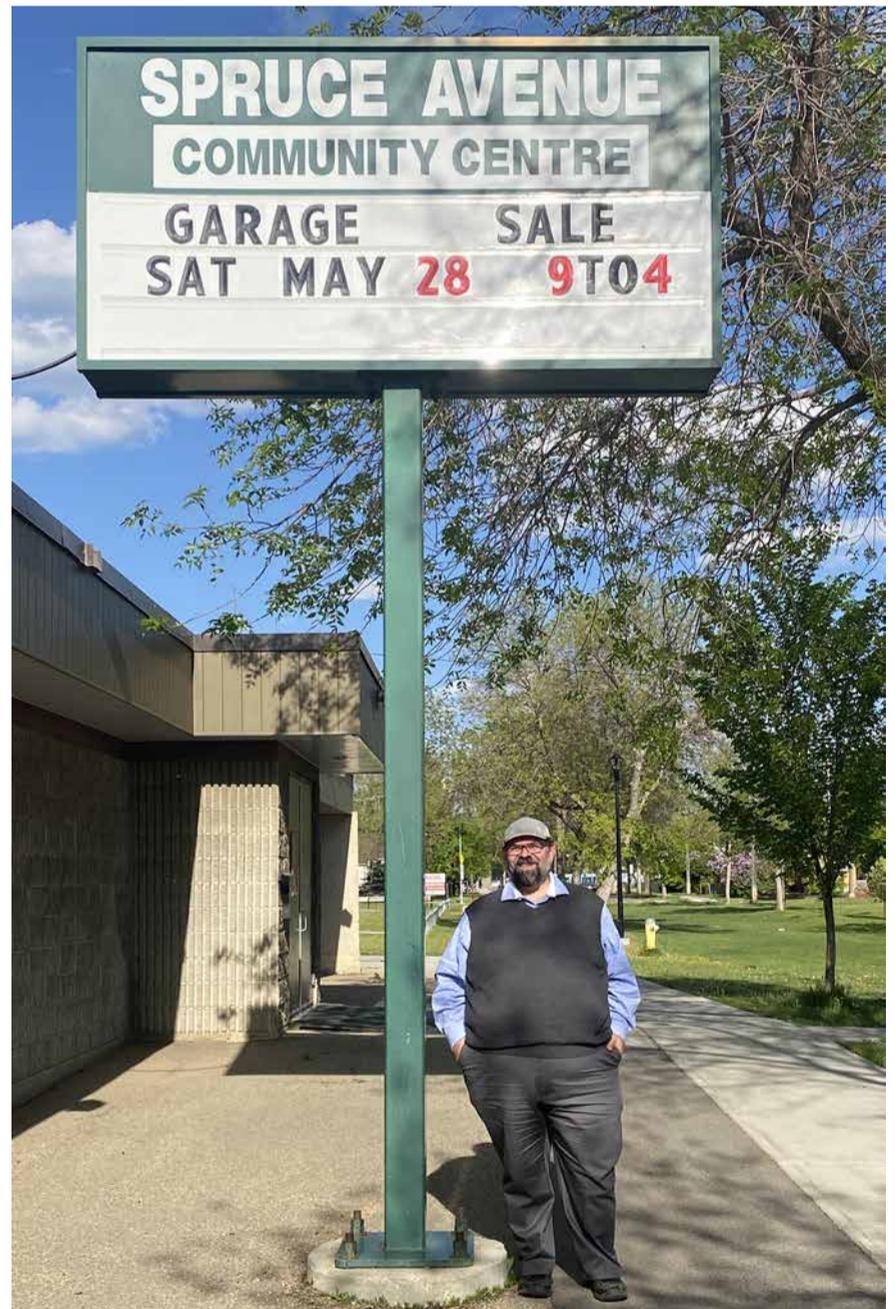
When Spruce Avenue underwent neighbourhood revitalization, Andreas advocated to include original street names underneath the current names. After some back and forth with the city, Spruce Avenue was approved for the signs, including on arterial roads, which are often left out.

Andreas also leads Spruce Avenue’s Jane’s Walk every year, taking residents through the neighbourhood and teaching them about local history.

Andreas’ neighbourhood contributions extend even further. Andreas was part of #DIYcity, painting a mural on his garage to reimagine Edmonton community space. He also participated in #100in1DayYEG, where he led a project called Animate the Alleys. He encouraged volunteers from Alberta Avenue neighbourhoods to paint their garages and create a pop-up engagement space in their alley for a day. They were able to animate 10 alleys throughout Alberta Avenue. The following year, Andreas held an initiative called Red Chair Ave, where he brought over 60 chairs to underutilized spaces in Alberta Avenue and encouraged people to sit down and have a conversation.

Through his positions on the board, Andreas hopes to continue building capacity and connecting with more neighbours.

“I’m always interested in getting more people involved, so I’m always interested



Wesley Andreas champions community and local history in Spruce Avenue. | Mya Colwell

in ways to build capacity to, to get other people excited so that they get involved,” says Andreas. “That’s what really keeps me going... the idea that we can get other people involved and they can see and understand their community better and understand the value of connecting with

their neighbours and learning about their local history.”

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

Exploring urban green spaces

Edmonton Forest School gives children hands-on learning in the outdoors



Edmonton Forest School gives kids the opportunity to learn about Edmonton's natural spaces. | Tara Beck

- MYA COLWELL -

Edmonton is known for its festivals, for West Edmonton Mall, and for its long and arduous winters. But the city is also known for its incredible urban green spaces that make exploring natural spaces possible within city limits.

Edmonton Forest School (EFS), a not-for-profit society founded in March 2020, decided to capitalize on the abundance of green spaces across the city and teach children the importance of caring for and co-existing with natural spaces.

"Everything we do is working to connect... our learners with the land and the learning that comes from the land," says Tara Beck, the co-founder and secretary of EFS.

Many original founders of EFS were classroom educators. They loved spending time outdoors and in natural spaces with their students and wanted to share that experience with others.

"Edmonton has certainly got the most incredible green spaces that are accessible and beautifully maintained and cared for," says Beck. "And so we thought, why not [start a forest school in] Edmonton?"

One of EFS's goals is to teach kids about the land all year round, regardless of the weather. "Students that are enrolled in our programs, they start with us in September and we are together all the way through to the end of June," says Beck. "So we get to experience the full arc of Edmonton's seasons as we learn together and learn from and with the land."

They use a learner-led teaching style, which means that students can explore what interests them in the outdoors. Educators observe what students are curious about and use those natural curiosities to base their teachings on, whether that means students play in mud puddles for awhile, build a stick house out of fallen branches, or build sculptures out of rocks.

In addition to following the interests of learners, EFS also spends time during every session to read stories together and reflect on the experiences of the day.

Many original founders of Edmonton Forest School were classroom educators. They loved spending time outdoors and in natural spaces with their students and wanted to share that experience with others

"No two days in the classroom look the same because the classroom is just this dynamic living... experience," says Beck.

The not-for-profit also stresses the importance of being treaty people by incorporating Indigenous teachings into their programming, working with Elders, and connecting students to Medicine Wheel teachings. "We want to make sure that the story is told of the land and those that have cared and stewarded the land since time immemorial," explains Beck. "So there's a lot of teachings about reciprocity, the importance of taking care of each other, taking care of ourselves, and taking care of the land."

"Not all of our educators are Indigenous, but we're committed as a board to ensuring that there's a lot of opportunity for us to be working with Indigenous community members in Edmonton."

Edmonton Forest School runs a variety of programs for different age groups of children, and their home base is located at Gold Bar Park in the Capilano area. They're also piloting an extended version of their programs by collaborating with Inquiring Minds to create site schools. Site schools move teachers and their classroom to nearby green spaces for a week-long experience that helps students cultivate an appreciation and understanding of the land.

"The hope [is] that [the schools] then continue beyond our week-long experience with that class... to steward and care for and connect with those places," says Beck.

In June, EFS ran a site school with Virginia Park School in Kinnaird Ravine and at the Edmonton Urban Farm. "It was pretty magical," says Beck. "We found some beautiful clearings where we were able to set up our home base, our tarp, and share food together and share stories together..."

And when [you're] in the middle of that ravine there was no way to tell we were in the middle of a city."

The Grade 3 class explored single-track bike paths that went past some of the more well-traveled paths and into the heart of the ravine. They had lots of bird sightings and even glimpsed a coyote from a distance.

Edmonton Forest School runs a variety of programs for different age groups of children, and their home base is located at Gold Bar Park in the Capilano area.

Beck hopes EFS programming can help children feel a sense of place in the world, curiosity about what's around them, and motivation to care for natural spaces.

"The students just grow so exponentially, and the independence that they're able to achieve and the sense of connection [they create] with the land is really something to behold," says Beck.

For more information, visit <https://edmontonforestschool.com/>

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



Grade 3 students from Virginia Park School explored Kinnaird Ravine and the Edmonton Urban Farm with EFS. | Tara Beck

Playing is healing for refugees

Sports program helps Afghan refugees get settled in Edmonton

- REACH EDMONTON -

As refugees from Afghanistan arrive in Edmonton, play is helping families adjust to their new lives in Canada.

Every weekday, from 10 am to 2 pm, more than 60 kids and 30 parents gather to play games, get settled, and begin their healing journeys.

These activities are part of a new program by Free Play for Kids, which gives new Afghan refugees a place to go with structured games and activities during the crucial just-arrived period, before they begin attending school.

“[The refugees are] in the middle ground because they’ve arrived here but don’t have schools or homes yet,” says Tim Adams, executive director of Free Play for Kids. “We’ve been running the program for about six months.”

While many recently-arrived families are living in hotels, their children are able to get on a program-run bus in the morning and head to the facility where they can participate in organized sports and begin their settlement journey.

The effect the programming has on the families is incredibly positive.

“It’s amazing, seeing them become more comfortable with our staff, and seeing their communication,” says Adams.

Rabie Altaye, a youth leader and soccer coach with the program, says he’s seen firsthand the positive effects sport can have.

“I believe in this program because I used to be a refugee, and I know exactly how they feel and what they need,” says Altaye.



Free Play for Kids is offering a new sports program to newly arrived refugees. | Supplied

The program introduces the kids to many sports, including football, soccer, and hockey.

“The aim is for kids to have fun and then they can develop their skills and their habits from the other side,” says Altaye. “We know they are refugees coming from their country and need a safe space to join other people and make friends.”

With regular access to the program, families attending often see drastic personal changes in a short period of time.

“At the beginning of the program,

many of the boys and girls are shy and cannot express themselves and don’t want to play or share,” says Altaye. “Our goal is to help them join in and after a few days they start sharing, now they are superstars and they want to play.”

Encouraging the children to move from shy and closed off to ready to play, is essential to integrating and healing from the intense events they have experienced.

“Youth sports like hockey, they don’t have that in Afghanistan. So this gets them familiar with the sports and espe-

cially the teamwork after many years of war,” says Altaye.

Even playing on mixed teams is an adjustment for the youths, who may have lived with strict gender rules before their arrival in Canada.

“They come and play and express themselves,” Altaye says. “We see how happy they are.”

Parents see the good the program is doing for their children, who have just lived through a significant life trauma.

“We have very good feedback from the parents about the kids’ behaviour changing in the home after the program,” says Altaye.

The parents were so impressed, they wanted to participate themselves, which led to a separate program for adults.

“When the women saw that their kids could go and have a space to express themselves, at the beginning, all of them asked if they could come and join this program,” says Altaye.

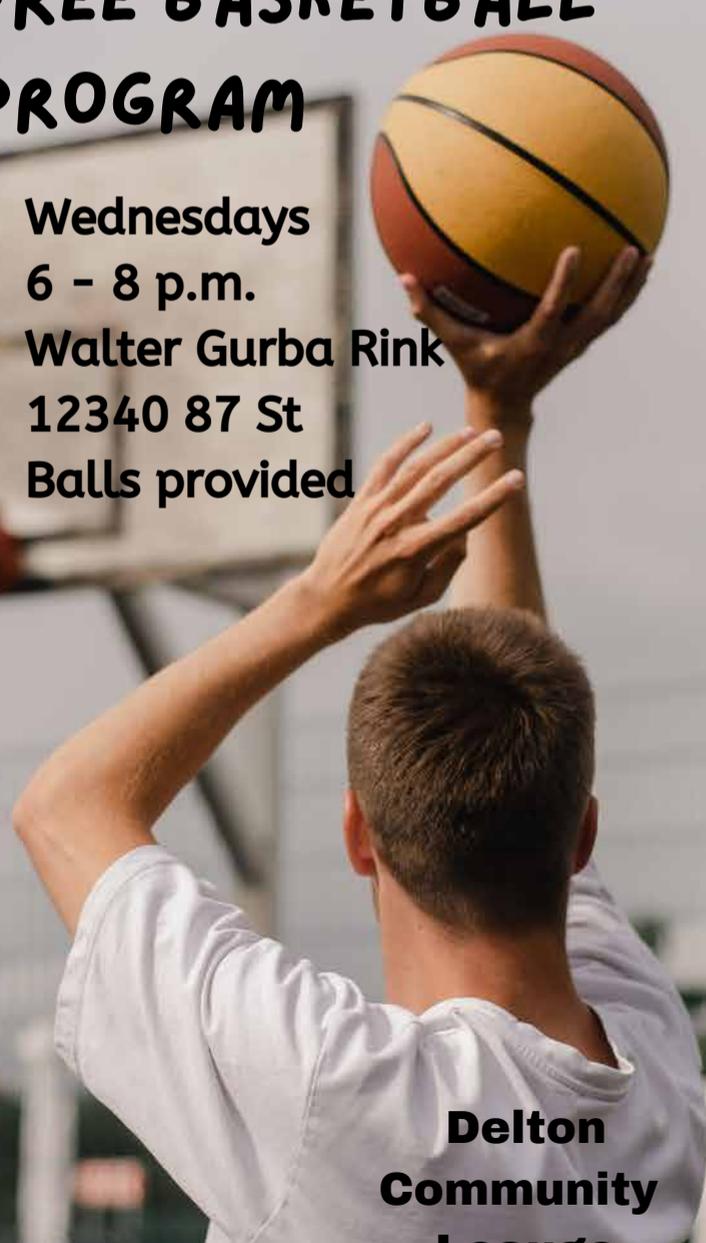
The program, which is funded by Jumpstart, aims to support Afghan refugees in these practical ways, while families settle into Edmonton and begin their new Canadian lives.

For more information about Free Play for Kids, visit freeplayforkids.com.

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.

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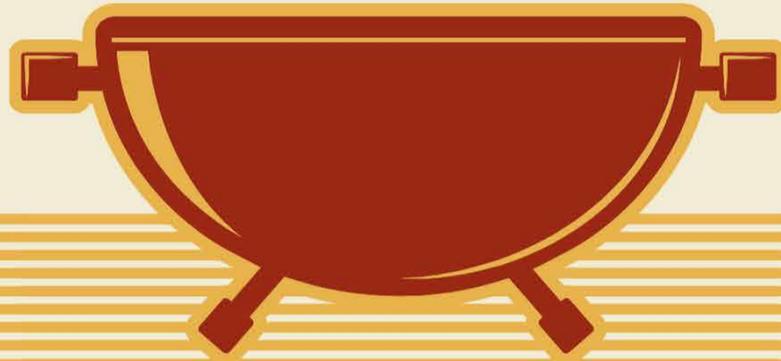
Epicure

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12505 75 St**

* BBQ
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* Entertainment

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