

Rat Creek Press

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BY THE COMMUNITY - FOR THE COMMUNITY

NOVEMBER 2021

New mural will honour veterans

Green Violin to commemorate veterans on Remembrance Day



Pictured is the Seacan cabin ribbon cutting celebration on Oct. 5, 2021. The seacan is a prototype of tiny homes for formerly homeless veterans. | Supplied

- NAZREENA ANWAR-TRAVAS -

On Remembrance Day, Green Violin, a non-profit community development company, is honouring veterans with a mural on its new seacan (shipping container) project. The mural and seacan project are but a few of the many projects undertaken by the McCauley-based company, whose mission is to build vibrant spaces to connect communities and foster a better quality of life.

“The seacan cabin project is a demonstration prototype of tiny homes made from shipping containers for formerly homeless veterans to live in,” says Yasushi Ohki, executive director of Green Violin. The demonstration unit in Parkdale was built out of donations from Stuart Olson Construction and the sub-trades they organized under their employees Pat Williams, Je Hanz Daza, and Bryan Kondo.

Eight seacans from the demonstration units will be used to create a tiny home community on an infill lot in McCauley/Boyle Street which is still under negotiation.

The concept is to allow displaced veterans to use their support payments to secure micro-mortgages for small dwellings and build independent equity. Some veterans



Site construction crew: Randall, Mario, and Junior; the Stuart Olson team Pat Williams, Je Hanz Daza, Bryan Kondo, and Calvin; the artist Maia and her father George Skode, and Yasushi Okhi. | Supplied

suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and find it difficult to transition from their military life to normal civilian life.

Maia Skode, an artist living in Parkdale, will paint the mural. It will be a commemorative design for veterans and will be displayed on the street side of the seacan project, visible from 80 Street and 116 Avenue in Parkdale.

“The intention of the mural is to bring

the neighbourhood together and foster community relationships while beautifying the formerly vacant and derelict lot,” states Ohki. “It will also bring colour and art to the block.”

The mural will be unveiled on Thursday, Nov. 11 at 2 p.m. at 11640 80 Street. Ohki says he hopes MLA Janis Irwin and MP Blake Desjarlais attend the outdoor event. “We understand they have busy schedules. Nevertheless, we have reserved a spot for

them and hope they join as their schedule allows,” he adds. Everyone is welcome to attend.

Statistics in the 2018 *Everyone Counts* report from Employment and Social Development Canada show that veterans from the Canadian Armed Forces accounted for approximately 4.4 per cent of homeless individuals in communities across Canada. This is a 0.3 per cent decrease from 2016. “This is a positive sign,” says Ohki. “Veterans have fought for our country. They risked their lives to ensure we have a better life. We should not forget them. As community developers, we play an important role in society. By providing veterans a stable environment and an opportunity to reintegrate into society, we want to play a role in honouring these brave people who live amongst us.”

For more information, visit greenviolin.ca.

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.

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Qigong comes to Alberta Avenue

Participate in free weekly online classes

- MICHAEL ENDERS -

Reserve your Thursday nights for some inner peace by practicing Qigong with instructor Wayne Noel. Pronounced “chee-gong”, the practice involves working with the energy in your body to bring a flow that creates an equilibrium.

Qigong allows practitioners to learn the importance of breathing. For example, controlling your breathing during different movements can allow you to release and embrace inner peace. The practice enables focus and shutting out distractions.

“Feel the stillness, the quietness, the peacefulness of the universe. The successful factor of going into Qigong is allowing our minds to get into the universe. Happy thoughts,” said Noel.

During a movement at a recent session, Noel shared, “When I exhale, I exhale the anger in my body. Just put a SMILE on my face.” SMILE is an acronym in Qigong meaning Start My Internal Love Engine, as it creates chemistry inside the body. “There is so much power in emotions and it is harder for men to show love, but when we use SMILE it brings stability within ourselves.”

Noel has been practicing since 2005 and he explained this is one way for everyone to come together. He started practicing Qigong while on a quest for self improvement, and has done so steadily for the last five years to cleanse and heal. This has given Noel an objective to be in a

moment that does not allow toxicity.

“Nothing matters [about] our backgrounds, as we can all harmoniously work together to practice movements that allow us to be healthier, not just physically, but emotionally, spiritually, mentally. I met some people [who were] very angry, and they died before they could retire because they had a lot of toxicity in them,” he said. “I have to do something to help out our community. I can be more responsive than reactionary while I can listen more and speak less. This world needs a lot of healing. This community needs a lot of healing!”

“Feel the stillness, the quietness, the peacefulness of the universe. The successful factor of going into Qigong is allowing our minds to get into the universe.”

During a pub night at Alberta Avenue Community Centre this past July, Noel met league president Ali Hammington, who wanted

to add more activities for league members. Noel offered to lead Qigong, as a gym was available. The opportunity also allowed him to share his ability with others to find healing and inner peace.

Due to current health restrictions, he is teaching Qigong online until in-person sessions can resume.

Qigong is available for free on Thursdays at 7 p.m. through Zoom, and the link can be found on the league’s Facebook page. When in class, participants can send Noel a message with their email to be added to a list for an invite to future sessions.

Noel said he would like to see more classes at the league evolve where he can give more of a background to Spring



The continued practice of Qigong can lead to inner peace and well-being. | Michael Enders

Forest Qigong and share with others what his master, the founder and creator, Chunyi Lin has instilled in him.

As Lin said, “A healer in every home and a world without pain and suffering.”

Find more information at facebook.com/AlbertaAvenue.

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.

DON'T MISS THESE ONLINE ARTICLES

Publicly created art for the community

CreArt continues their beautification of Kinnaird Ravine
Published Oct. 5

Providing a space to grieve

Supporting families of missing and murdered Indigenous women through art
Published Oct. 7

Enjoy a masked parade in Westwood

Street performers are coming to Westwood Community League
Published Oct. 20

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ABOUT US

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Build Community, Encourage Communication, Increase Capacity.

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

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

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Capoeira classes are bursts of fun

The art form, combining movement and music, evolved to fight oppression



Left: Four-year-old Freeman (left) and Gloria, age eight, show their ginga movement. | Constance Brissenden
 Right: Freeman (left) with mestre Reni Ferreira. | Constance Brissenden

- CONSTANCE BRISSENDEN -

Reni Ferreira is a mestre, the highest level a student of Capoeira can achieve. Still, the teacher at Parkdale-Cromdale Community League’s free Capoeira classes is in awe of one of his young students. “I have students in the five to seven years range, as well as eight to 16,” Ferreira says. “One student, only four years old, is so coordinated that I am amazed.”

Capoeira (pronounced kapo-way-ra) is an art form, practised to songs and music. Its origin is deep in Brazil’s past, a martial art invented by slaves in the 1500s, with its roots in Africa. It was persecuted until 1937, when it was finally taken from the penal code.

Ferreira, now 42, began learning Capoeira in Salvador, Brazil, when he was eight. Salvador embraced Capoeira, an urban movement that grew out of political events. “Capoeira is the protector of Brazilian culture,” says Ferreira. “It was developed in response to oppression.”

Capoeira (pronounced kapo-way-ra) is an art form, practised to songs and music. Its origin is deep in Brazil’s past, a martial art invented by slaves in the 1500s, with its roots in Africa. It was persecuted until 1937, when it was finally taken from the penal code.

Here in Edmonton, Capoeira has been on the scene since 1998 with the launch of the Capoeira Academy as a not-for-profit society. Ferreira arrived in 2001 to teach. His brother, Antonio, who studied with him, now lives and teaches in Russia. “We went to a small private school. The principal was into Capoeira for physical training. Antonio and I both loved it.”

The free classes, offered on Tuesday and Thursday nights until Nov. 16, are sponsored by CreArt.

“My son didn’t want to register for any sports,” says mom Audrée. “We tried this out and he wanted to do it right away.” At eight years of age, her son Dashiel is in the older-student class.

In the younger class, Freeman, almost five years old, shows remarkable

endurance during the hour-long session. Although he sometimes takes a break, he persists, running and leaping with the rest. As the class progresses, the students are put through their paces in the guise of play. Ferreira knows just how to keep them moving and having fun.

Freeman’s mom, Elaine, brought him to class for a chance to “play around.” The activity, practised to the sound of a berimbau, a gourd-and-stringed instrument, gives Freeman a sense of music and is good for physical development, she says. “The teacher is so patient with him,” she adds. Elaine also Googled Capoeira online and practises with her son at home.

These young “Capoeiristas” learn two basic movements. The *ginga* (translated as swing or move in Portuguese) focuses on footwork while combining hand and head movements for “swagger”, says Ferreira. The *esquivas* (escape in Portuguese) features head movements that distract from the footwork of the *ginga*.

The central purpose, Ferreira says, is “not to kick and punch. It is how to

interact with others. The art form builds self-confidence because it teaches the children to socialize. They must take turns, be observant, and show respect.”

Ines is happy that her eight-year-old daughter, Kendra, is making new friends while getting stronger. Ines wants her daughter to be confident, and the class helps. “I was shy when I was a child,” she recalls. “The class is teaching my daughter not to be shy.”

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

“The art form builds self-confidence because it teaches the children to socialize. They must take turns, be observant, and show respect.”

Reni Ferreira

CAPOEIRA
 Parkdale-Cromdale Community League (11335 85 St)
 Tuesdays and Thursdays
 5-7 years old; 6-7 p.m.
 8-16 years old; 7-8 p.m.
 Sept. 28 to Nov. 15
 Ferreira is working with CreArt to include more classes.
 For more information, email reni@capoeiraacademy.ca

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Connecting via online communities

Community residents weave webs over the Internet

- NAZREENA ANWAR-TRAVAS -

By nature, humans are social creatures and crave interaction, and social media is evidence of another way we can connect.

Although the pandemic is responsible for fewer in-person community events, online communities on social media continue to grow in popularity and membership. Members may not know each other initially, but have the opportunity to connect with like-minded people and those with similar experiences. People mostly join these groups to meet new people in the neighbourhood, discover places of interest, and promote or sell their services. To join, prospective members may need to answer a few questions first.

As an added feature, the Facebook app offers Facebook Neighborhoods, a new section to help people connect with their neighbours.

"I am a trainee barber and I was looking for volunteers on Neighborhoods to have their hair cut free of charge," says Samir Ghani, residing in Eastwood. "I was initially skeptical, but the response was overwhelming. I was literally styling hair the whole day," he laughs.

Yuliya Kaminsky, a newcomer living in Cromdale, found her first friends via Neighborhoods. "I was only looking for someone to walk with in the nearby parks. I posted my interest and a few ladies messaged me. When we met, we discovered we also share other common interests, such as arts and knitting."

Nextdoor is another application that aims to promote community building. Through recommendations for local eateries, Achint Malhotra, a student in Parkdale, discovered a new restaurant near his home that ended up being his favourite. The app also helped Angela Groves, another Parkdale resident, to promote



Online communities are a good way of meeting members that share common interests. | Supplied

her bird sitting and dog walking services during the summer and she earned much-needed extra money.

When neighbours connect with one another, their local social and recreational opportunities increase.

"It is truly something to look forward to when the pandemic situation ends," says Kaminsky, who discovered events such as the Kinnart Ravine Mural Project and Jurassic Festival near Cromdale through the Parkdale Cromdale Community League Group on Facebook.

Other reasons to join online groups include seeking recommendations for services, promoting local businesses, posting pictures of lost and found pets, or reporting a burglary or theft.

"Reporting thefts is really helpful," says Sherryz Dhaliwal, a

mother of two living in Alberta Avenue. "This way, residents can exercise extra caution and be on alert."

Rebecca Lippiatt, a photographer and writer, sought local residents to submit stories for her Edmonton in the Time of COVID project (yegcovidstories.com) on the 118 Ave Femmes and Friends group on Facebook. Recently, this group has also been reporting fire incidents in the area.

Residents also feel supported, safer, less isolated, and happier in their neighbourhood. The online group has also been promoting initiatives like Green Alleys and Coffee with Cops that educate residents on how to report suspicious activity, and fostering a sense of safety in the neighbourhood.

Like with any other virtual platform, be careful what you share. Not everyone you meet is genuine. Ensure you don't reveal too much personal information when you are meeting or messaging someone for the first time.

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.

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Members can also promote their services, such as bird sitting, over community groups. | Nazreena Anwar-Travas

LOCAL ONLINE COMMUNITIES

Nextdoor app: ca.nextdoor.com

Facebook Neighbourhoods info: about.fb.com/news/2021/05/connecting-local-communities-on-facebook/

League Facebook pages: search your league name

Local Facebook Neighborhood groups:

118 Ave Femmes & Friends:
facebook.com/groups/264398370643849

Neighbors in Alberta Avenue - Parkdale - Cromdale:
facebook.com/groups/942796005808718

Parkdale Cromdale Community League group:
facebook.com/groups/pcclyeg/

Friends of The Kinnaird Ravine:
facebook.com/groups/257889723765/

Eat the Avenuel:
facebook.com/groups/405190486933594/

Alberta Avenue Housing Collective:
facebook.com/groups/761423110943428/

Alberta Avenue Cycle Nights:
facebook.com/groups/269422043818071/

Alberta Ave district Safe Streets Working Group:
facebook.com/groups/1127958197650190/

C.R.U.D. Community Response to Urban Disorder:
facebook.com/groups/98109265527/

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Shop for unique Indigenous goods

Whiskeyjack Art House offers a selection of goods and services

- SHAREE ALUKO -

Indulge in Indigenous offerings both beautiful and practical at Whiskeyjack Art House, located at 110 Avenue and 97 Street.

This establishment is an Indigenous owned art gallery and boutique that sells original Indigenous art work, jewelry, and products like soaps, lotions, Personal Protective Equipment (masks and sanitizers), candles, teas, and jams.

The store is owned by husband and wife James Lamouche and Lana Whiskeyjack.

“We are both *nehiyaw* Cree people. I am from Saddle Lake Cree Nation and my husband is Cree/Métis from Grouard in northern Alberta. I am also a multidisciplinary artist with a very supportive husband and our daughter Serina is the manager,” says Whiskeyjack.

Whiskeyjack explains that the name of the Art House has sentimental attachments.

“Whiskeyjack Art House is named after my great-great-grandfather whose

Cree name *kwěskaycak* was misspelled as Whiskeyjack and given as a last name. During that time, *nehiyawak* (Cree people) were being forcibly displaced from their lands and relocated on government-controlled Indian reserves. To me, my beautiful last name Whiskeyjack reflects intergenerational cultural resilience, resurgence, and restoration.”

Family connections to the business was another reason why the couple decided to open the Art House.

Whiskeyjack says, “Our relatives, Jo-Ann and Jerry Saddleback, opened Căhcacêp Art and Tea House three years ago, in this space. They wanted to focus on other pursuits and approached us about taking over the gallery. Căhcacêp Bows Arts is a traditional bow maker and training company that continues to operate out of a small workshop on our site.”

A great emphasis is placed on maintaining the authenticity of the Indigenous store in all facets of its operations. All of their artists, artisans, and suppliers are Indigenous,



Lana Whiskeyjack (pictured) owns the business with her husband, James. | Rebecca Lippiatt



Whiskeyjack Art House is located in a historically significant building. | Rebecca Lippiatt

local, or both. The business also offers a variety of goods and often hosts collaborative culinary and arts events with Pei Pei Chei Ow, an Indigenous catering company. Their beautiful art deco-inspired space is also available to rent for small events, meetings, and classes.

It is easy to find a reason to visit this locally owned store. Whiskeyjack Art House is a hidden gem tucked away in an interesting and historically significant building in the heart of the McCauley neighbourhood. One of their mantras is that supporting locals makes our communities stronger and our city better.

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

**WHISKEYJACK
ART HOUSE**
11051 97 St, #102
whiskeyjackarthouse@gmail.com
780.760.5225
Open Tuesday to Saturday,
noon-5 p.m.

A growing demand for trading cards

Common Box Games taps into a booming niche market

- SHAREE ALUKO -

Sean Kim and Gordon Huynh have turned their passion for trading cards into a business called Common Box Games, located on 89 Street and 118 Avenue.

They opened the store on Sept. 25.

Huynh says, “It is Edmonton’s one-stop shop for all your trading card needs. We offer a wide selection of sealed and single Pokémon, Yu-Gi-Oh!, Digimon cards as well as hockey, football, and basketball cards. Come play in one of our many tournaments or just stop by to buy or sell your single cards. We’re excited to join this great community and can’t wait to see all of you in the store!”

Kim has a long history of sales in his career and has been a part of Edmonton’s Yu-Gi-Oh! trading card game community for almost 15 years. Huynh has a bachelor’s degree in family science, but has transitioned his career into the IT sector for the past two years. Huynh has also been a part of Edmonton’s various trading card communities for 10 years.

The owners say their decision to open Common Box Games is simply a response to an increasing customer demand.

“We have been playing and collecting trading cards our whole lives and real-

ized that there were people just like us in Edmonton. We have always thought that we knew what the collectors and players would want in a card store, and so we decided to take the input from the community and open a store using the sugges-

tions of the community. We are a store for the players, by the players,” says Huynh.

This niche market is currently booming and is projected to continue to grow as it becomes more popular among collectors and investors. It is now considered

as an alternative asset class and a good investment for many.

According to BBC.com, collecting sports trading cards might seem like an old-school hobby. Its last heyday was about 30 years ago, but it has experienced a resurgence during the pandemic. Since the first lockdown began in spring 2020, sales have significantly increased on both sides of the Atlantic in both number and value.

The Sports Collectors Daily website reported that eBay’s sports card category sales from March to May 2020 were 92 per cent higher than during the final three months of 2019, with basketball cards seeing the biggest rise in sales.

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



Sean Kim (left) and Gordon Huynh (right) are the owners of Common Box Games. | Supplied

COMMON BOX GAMES
8932 118 Ave
Ph: 587.415.8488
Sun-Thurs: 11 a.m.-8 p.m.
Fri-Sat: 11 a.m.-9 p.m.

OPINION

Addictions treatment is crucial

More funding must be provided for harm reduction

- REBECCA LIPPIATT -

Addictions are present in nearly every age cohort and across the socio-economic divide. While in the inner city we see drug use on the street, addictions are an issue everywhere.

According to the Government of Alberta's health analytics, most people using drugs die in their own or another person's home. However, in the past two years, the percentage of people dying on the street increased from 12 to 25 per cent.

The UCP's addictions strategy is to move away from harm reduction. In 2019, Premier Jason Kenney stated, "Harm reduction efforts certainly have a place within the spectrum of public-health responses to the soaring opioid death rate, but not at the expense of life-saving treatment and recovery."

According to a *CBC* article published on July 25, 2020, "Harm reduction is a method that aims to reduce fatality rates and the harm associated with drug use, while acknowledging that abstinence is not always a realistic goal."

In 2019, \$140 million in treatment funding was announced. This includes \$25 million of funding for five new treatment centres across the province, some of which were meant to open in early 2021. None of the five facilities have yet opened, or even begun building.

Existing funding for harm reduction has stayed in place but has not increased—despite the increase in drug-related deaths, particularly in the past two years. For 2021, \$15.7 million is allocated to five supervised drug-use and three overdose-prevention

sites in Alberta. Many facilities have caps on the number of people they can serve with the funding they are provided, which is evident on the streets of our community. The problem is exacerbated by the closure of the Boyle McCauley Safe Consumption site and the decrease in funding. People accessing the services must also present a personal health number, which is a problem because many people in that situation either don't have one or don't carry one.

"Harm reduction is a method that aims to reduce fatality rates and the harm associated with drug use, while acknowledging that abstinence is not always a realistic goal."

CBC article published on July 25, 2020

Government funding announcements are confusing. While an overall budget is announced and published, there is little information other than news releases. The announcements sound hopeful, but it's not clear how many people will actually be helped.

Using Lethbridge as an example, \$2 million was cut and the ARCHES safe consumption site closed. The site was closed amid allegations of misuse of funding, yet an investigation revealed that the money was used appropriately and it was just a reporting error. According to data released to *Lethbridge News Now*, ARCHES had 848 clients for a total of 64,730 uses (averaging 460 per day). The approach was to switch to treatment rather than harm reduction. According to a July 25, 2020 *Global News* article, "In total, 125 long-term resident addiction treatment beds will be created: 75 on the Blood Tribe and 50 in Lethbridge County. As well, \$1 million annually will go toward creating 16 new beds at the Foothills Centre in Fort Macleod, and \$1.2 million annually to fund 16 new beds in the City of Lethbridge."

The government provides no analysis to show how many people will be treated

in those beds in a year. Given that average treatment periods are 30-90 days, they may serve 60 to 180 clients per year.

These policies have created a situation by which harm reduction efforts have fallen to the community. Naloxone kits are the best current method we have of dealing with overdoses, and there has been a considerable increase in kits given out over the past two years.

If you or a loved one is facing an addiction, first call 211 for information about available services. The logistics of accessing treatment can be tricky. The first stage requires detox, as most addictions treatment facilities require a period of sobriety before clients can use the services. Residential (live-in) facilities also have waitlists, so timing the detox period with the availability of addictions treatment is a barrier to accessing care. In positive news, publicly-funded residential treatment centres in Alberta are free, even for those without secondary health insurance.

Some treatment sites are Christian, some Indigenous, and some secular. For women who want to complete their treatment while parenting their children (such as single mothers with no family support) there is only one treatment centre, and it is distinctly Christian faith-based. Options that address issues faced by LGBTQ clients are also somewhat limited. Men have more treatment options given their higher rate of addictions, but no access to parenting/treatment facilities.

Providing live-in healthcare facilities for addictions is a laudable goal, but also unrealistic. Not many people can afford to halt their lives for 30 to 90 days to deal with their health issues. The Government of Alberta's policies create considerable gaps in services. Increased funds for harm reduction would give another option to those who are not ready or able to deal with their addiction with abstinence-based treatments.

According to health analytics from the Alberta government, addictions and deaths related to addictions span all ages of Albertans and are not limited to street-drug users. Nearly half of the people who died accessed Alberta Health Services for help in the 30 days before their deaths. Most importantly, this problem has increased considerably during COVID-19.

The Alberta government's health analytics paint a clear picture of the seriousness of the problem.

The highest number of deaths occur in the 30-39 age group, with men comprising 83.3 per cent of drug poisoning deaths.

For pharmaceutical opioid deaths, 80 per cent of people accessed the healthcare system in the month before their death.

Most deaths are accidental poisoning with Fentanyl (74 per cent), methamphetamines (56 per cent), and/or cocaine (29 per cent). Alcohol deaths are not insignificant at 23 per cent. For more of these analytics, view our online article at ratcreek.org.

It is clear that people who struggle with addictions are attempting to access health care, but are not being served by the current system.

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

Virtual Comedy Show



Wednesday, Nov. 24 at 7 p.m.

Tune in for some laughs with local comedians Kyle Canniff and Steven Darnell.

Kyle blends a mix of lived experience and a silly delivery while he jokes about being adopted, his first nations identity, and being on an only-meat diet. Steven has performed comedy around the world, was a finalist for Jester of the Year 2020, is the host of Live Laugh Debate! at the Comic Strip, and is Edmonton's 3rd tallest comedian. He is tall, but not that tall.



Followed by the Rat Creek Press AGM at 7:45 p.m.

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**EVENT LINK ON
FB.COM/RATCREEKPRESS**

Remember the importance of kindness

Staff enforcing vaccine passports do not deserve anyone's anger

- STEPHEN STRAND -

On the first weekend of October, my wife and I drove down to the town of Black Diamond for a change of scenery. While there, we stopped at a restaurant called The Westwood. As we walked in the door, we saw that the restaurant was following AHS protocols. Masking was required, there were Plexiglas dividers set up to help separate the customers and staff, and hand sanitizer was set out to use. Once inside, we ordered fries to share and coffee and talked to the woman behind the till. As soon as we ordered, she got quiet and averted her eyes. At barely above a whisper, she asked, "Can I see your proof of vaccination, please?"

This was the first time I had been in a business requiring proof of vaccination since the Alberta government implemented the restrictions exemption program on Sept. 20, and I had completely forgot-

ten about it. Luckily, both my wife and I had our proof of vaccinations on us because our worksites had required them before the government implemented the program. But, for a second, I hesitated. Because she spoke so softly, it took me a moment to understand what she was asking us and I got confused. And in that second of my confusion, I could see by the look on her face that she was expecting me to yell at her.

Once I realized what she said, I nodded and said, "Oh, right!" and pulled out my phone to show her the proof. Her whole demeanor relaxed.

It made me wonder how often she had been mistreated in the short time the exemption program had been in effect. Even if my confusion was mistaken as anger, I suspect her reaction was born out of experience. It's not her fault that the exemption program was implemented and it's definitely not fair that she (or

anyone in a similar position) is put in the situation of enforcing the rules.

The current state of public health emergency may have been avoided if people had listened to the recommendations of healthcare professionals, immunologists, and the World Health Organization. Because our government was lax with health protocols and declared that Alberta was "Open for Summer", the province had nearly half of the COVID-19 cases in Canada by September. The spike in cases strained ICUs, required the need for military assistance, renewed restrictions, and made international headlines when *The New York Times* wrote an article about the terrible state of COVID-19 in Alberta.

The exemption program, along with vaccine passports, have become a polarizing topic. It's to the point where people on opposite sides are rarely able to have a functional conversation without it becoming a heated debate. It appears empathy

has ceased to exist and an attitude of us versus them has washed over the province. People have become so entrenched in their side that they are unable to look at any opinion objectively. And, people seem to forget that mistreating restaurant or bar staff, healthcare workers, or anyone else who has to enforce the restrictions over the government's decisions will not change the government's mind.

We all want the pandemic and the accompanying restrictions to end. People who understand the necessity of the restrictions do not enjoy them anymore than you do. We are all stressed. We are all experiencing difficult times. We are all human. We all deserve kindness. Even if we can't see eye to eye, let us still be kind. As a friend of mine often says, "You will never regret being kind."

Stephen works in broadcasting and writes for fun.

Winter brings unique challenges

The 24/7 Crisis Diversion Team helps vulnerable Edmontonians



The 24/7 Crisis Diversion Team helps people in need. | Supplied by REACH Edmonton

- REACH EDMONTON -

As winter approaches, the 24/7 Crisis Diversion Team prepares itself for its busiest season as the needs of vulnerable Edmontonians increase with the combined effects of cold weather and the ongoing pandemic.

Many factors will impact the health and well-being of Edmontonians this winter. Resources and services are at critical levels as the pandemic continues to strain our at-capacity healthcare systems, vital to some of Edmonton's most vulnerable communities. The pandemic has also impacted the socio-economic fabric of Edmonton as deteriorating mental health and financial downturn has led to increasing rates of social disorder and unstable housing situations. Compounding this is the ongoing opioid crisis where deaths due to overdoses and poisonings continue to impact communities.

As the pandemic creates these new pressures at all levels of society, Edmonton's 24/7 Crisis Diversion teams see the effects on our most vulnerable community members everyday.

"Each winter tensions grow, and desperation to stay warm can sometimes push houseless Edmontonians into spaces that are not ideal, like vestibules, apartment foyers, convenience stores, and bus shelters," says Hayley Irving, 24/7 Crisis Diversion's connector.

"Being safe and warm is the ultimate goal, [but] oftentimes people are asked to leave these locations, which can lead to exposure injury, death, or worsened pre-existing health conditions. There is no time more serious and deadly than winter in our city for people on the edges of our society."

It is important, especially as colder weather approaches, that Edmontonians show compassion to one another. If you see someone in distress, call **211 + press**

3 to connect them to the 24/7 Crisis Diversion Team. By doing so, you not only connect those in crisis with the help they need but you also reduce inappropriate use of already strained and fragile emergency and police services.

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The teams support those in crisis by first offering immediate services like transportation to a safe space and basic needs like clothing, blankets, food, and water. Once the immediate crisis has been dealt with, teams assess what the well-being needs are to properly connect folks to a safe space whether it be a shelter, hospital, private residence, and other social services and supports.

As we enter into another COVID-19 winter, we all face potentially more vulnerability in various parts of our lives whether it is our relationships, jobs, physical, or

mental health. Know that the 24/7 Crisis Diversion program is there to offer compassion and safety for all Edmontonians.

"24/7 Crisis Diversion staff use love and compassion to build connections that help keep people safe," says Claire Macdonald, 24/7 Crisis Diversion program coordinator. "They take the time to get to know each person they meet to discover what is needed to keep them well. Empathy, in combination with being trauma-informed and person-centred, helps in this process."

To learn more about the program, a new website has been launched at crisisdiversionedmonton.ca. There you can find out more about the program's impact, stories from our frontline teams, and other valuable resources to help those in distress.

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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The homes in Elmwood Park were designed to accommodate veterans returning from the war, and those veterans planted Elm trees along the boulevards to beautify the neighbourhood.

This November we honour our veterans; past, present and future of Elmwood Park and all those who have served, by adorning the Elms in handmade poppies.

As you walk our tree lined streets, take a moment to reflect and to remember. They never forgot us,

LET US NOT FORGET THEM.

