

Rat Creek Press

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



BY THE COMMUNITY—FOR THE COMMUNITY

SPRING 2025

Community Highlight: Andrew Altimas

Eastwood Community League's newest president and his vision

JACOB ULICKIJ

It's said that the best leaders hesitate to call themselves leaders in the first place. If true, Andrew Altimas of the Eastwood Community League may be the best person for the role of president. After all, he didn't intend to run for any official title — he joined his first meeting by chance on his way to a yoga class.

With only a handful of months under his belt as president, it is immediately clear how much he respects the opportunity to spearhead initiatives for his community. His approach to his growing board and the league is holistic, grounded, and immensely practical. A background in addiction support and working with the unhoused taught him that a community is made up of much more than the membership on the surface — it's an embodiment of values.

Andrew believes “a community league is the elevation of the community — not the voices of the board itself.” In that way, he has already turned to familiar faces in the neighbourhood for inspiration from projects as large as expanding the community gardens, to small goals like repairing the hall.

“A gentleman was sitting down over a cards night recently,” Andrew says, gesturing at the warming room around him. “He got up and toured me around the entire hall, telling stories and pointing out details from the days they built it. That's lived experience, and it's what makes a community league special.”

As for Andrew's accomplishments to date, he cites new security assessments, such as safe walks and cleaning the grounds, as good first steps to renewing local relationships with the league building. From there, he hopes to expand his board and learn about the community's wishes before taking on any projects that

tap into grant funding.

“I like big visions, like those you see on Arnold Schwarzenegger posters. I've certainly had them in my personal life. But now, especially here, I believe in smart goals — even the small ones. Hall maintenance, getting the word out about the league, and following the will of the community and board are our first steps.”

Andrew's personal journey is a testament to his commitment to personal growth and healing. His practice of boxing, yoga, and spiritual arts has helped him find a centre within himself and his surroundings. This journey has not only inspired his philosophy on community leadership, but also served as a source of inspiration for others.

With the first steps to renewed leadership in place, the next piece involves you — our community members. Everyone is encouraged to gather, share experiences, and contribute to causes that inspire the area.

Connect with the league! Your ideas, skills, and initiatives are welcome. Additionally, citizens of the Eastwood neighbourhood are encouraged to register for their free league membership and take advantage of community votes, free swimming days, reduced rates on hall rentals, free skating, and much more.

“Right now, it's about getting enough bodies for a vision,” Andrew says. From his excitement even in turning on the hall's lights to host a short interview, it's evident that this vision is poised to include each and every one of us.

**Andrew believes
“a community league
is the elevation of
the community —
not the voices of the
board itself.”**

**Eastwood
Community League**
11803 86 St
780-477-2354
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Andrew Altimas in front of Eastwood Community League where he's taken on the role of president . | Jacob Ulickij



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Meet McCauley’s newest coffee bar

Paper Birch is poised to become a new community hub

JACOB ULICKIJ

McCauley’s latest coffee bar, located centrally inside Paper Birch Books, had its grand opening on February 23 in conjunction with a community Lantern Fest in McCauley.

“We’ve been open as a bookstore for about two years now,” says owner Celine Chuang. “It’s been lovely and enthusiastic. Because of that, we’ve had enough support to launch a coffee bar years ahead of schedule.”

With a successful soft launch under their belts, owners Celine Chuang and Benjamin Hertwig are eager to formally debut their hot drink menu alongside local pastries from La French Taste and Sugared & Spiced. The community’s feedback and support have been instrumental in shaping the coffee bar’s offerings, and the owners are committed to continuing this collaborative approach. While any future plans are subject to the wishes of their community, readers can look forward to a patio space as the days grow longer and eventual licensing for alcoholic beverages. “I hope coffee will make us a community hub,” Chuang explains.

“We like those little points of connection. It makes our communities better and safer.”

Two new baristas joined the Paper Birch team to support the opening of the coffee bar — both previous employees of the recently closed Mandolin Books & Coffee Company. The new team is combining their love of coffee and literature with Paper Birch ownership to offer a diverse menu of locally blended teas,

specialty coffee, and a variety of milk alternatives for various consumers.

“We want to be a place for connection and comfort,” Chuang says. “There’s a lot of stigma about what our neighbourhood is. The truth is, there is a lot of heart.”

Paper Birch Books
10825 95 St
Tue-Fri 10-6
Saturday 10-5
Sunday 10-4
Monday 10-5



Left: A fitting name for Paper Birch’s signature blend, roasted and packaged by Roasti in Sherwood Park. **Right:** A polished La Marzocco sits ready to serve up Paper Birch’s roster of hot drinks. | Photo by Jacob Ulickij

Rat Creek Press

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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.

Spring 2025

Aydan Dunnigan-Vickruck is a retired social worker, blogger, tango dancer, outdoor enthusiast and co-parent with Patricia to 8 children, 18 grandchildren, and 3 great grandchildren. He’s also a resident of the hood and loving it. Blog site: www.dancingwithpresence.com

Chelsea Boos Chelsea Boos resides as a guest on Treaty 6 Territory and the homelands of the Métis Nation. She works at the intersection of creativity, climate justice, and education. As a decorated cultural worker, arts non-profit administrator, and community member of Edmonton, she is passionate about co-creating this city with her community. Check out chelseaboos.com for a portfolio of writing, lens-based art, and illustration.

Constance Brissenden is an experienced presenter, writer, editor, and historian living in Cromdale. She is co-author of nine award-winning books by Cree author Larry Loyie (1933-2016), in addition to more than 20 books of history and travel.

Gail Silvius recently moved back to McCauley after living in Delton

Jacob Ulickij is a writer and craft beer professional living on Alberta Avenue with his three talkative chickens.

Jeff Woodward is a photographer, educator and visual storyteller based on Treaty 6 territory. Hes been a part of the Parkdale Cromdale community since 2019.

Julie McCrea is a 12 year resident of Alberta Avenue, and spent five years serving on the league board where she continues to help as an event volunteer. What free time she has between her work as an adult educator at NAIT and the Newcomer Centre is spent gardening, reading, and as a foster mom for rescued dogs.

Karen Mykietka is a long-time resident who has poured her heart and soul into building community in the Alberta Avenue District. She lived in Eastwood, then Alberta Avenue, and now Parkdale.

Kevin Blakeman has been making video games for almost two decades and writes for fun. He is originally from England but currently lives in Delton.

Sherridon Routley is a friend of the community who enjoys urban exploring every corner of the city by bicycle. Although he had previously owned a house south of the RCP district and understands the challenges of the area, he now resides in East Glenora.

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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.

GOALS
Build Community, Encourage Communication, Increase Capacity.

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CIRCULATION
Serving 12,000 community members.

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

Ramadan is coming

Alberta Avenue celebrates community and tradition

ALBERTA AVENUE BUSINESS ASSOCIATION

Rvaramadan is a sacred time for Muslims worldwide, marked by fasting, prayer, and reflection. In 2025, Ramadan is expected to begin on the evening of February 28 and end on the evening of March 29, depending on the sighting of the moon. During this holy month, Muslims fast from dawn to sunset, breaking their fast with a meal called Iftar. It is a time of spiritual renewal, charity, and community, where families and friends gather to share in the blessings of the season.

For Alberta Avenue, Ramadan is more than a date on the calendar — it's a time when the neighborhood comes alive. Home to one of Edmonton's most prominent mosques, Masjid Al Quba, Alberta Avenue becomes a hub for worship and celebration, drawing thousands of visitors weekly. The energy spills over into the streets and businesses, where Muslim-owned establishments play a central role in supporting the community during this special month.

on the Ave Campaign, an initiative by the Alberta Avenue Business Association to celebrate the vibrant contributions of the local Muslim community. Last year, in partnership with Masjid Al Quba and FreshCo Coliseum, the campaign successfully ran a toy drive where over 300 children from the community received gifts, spreading joy and generosity during the holy month.

Building on this success, this year's campaign will focus on a video project showcasing the amazing businesses that

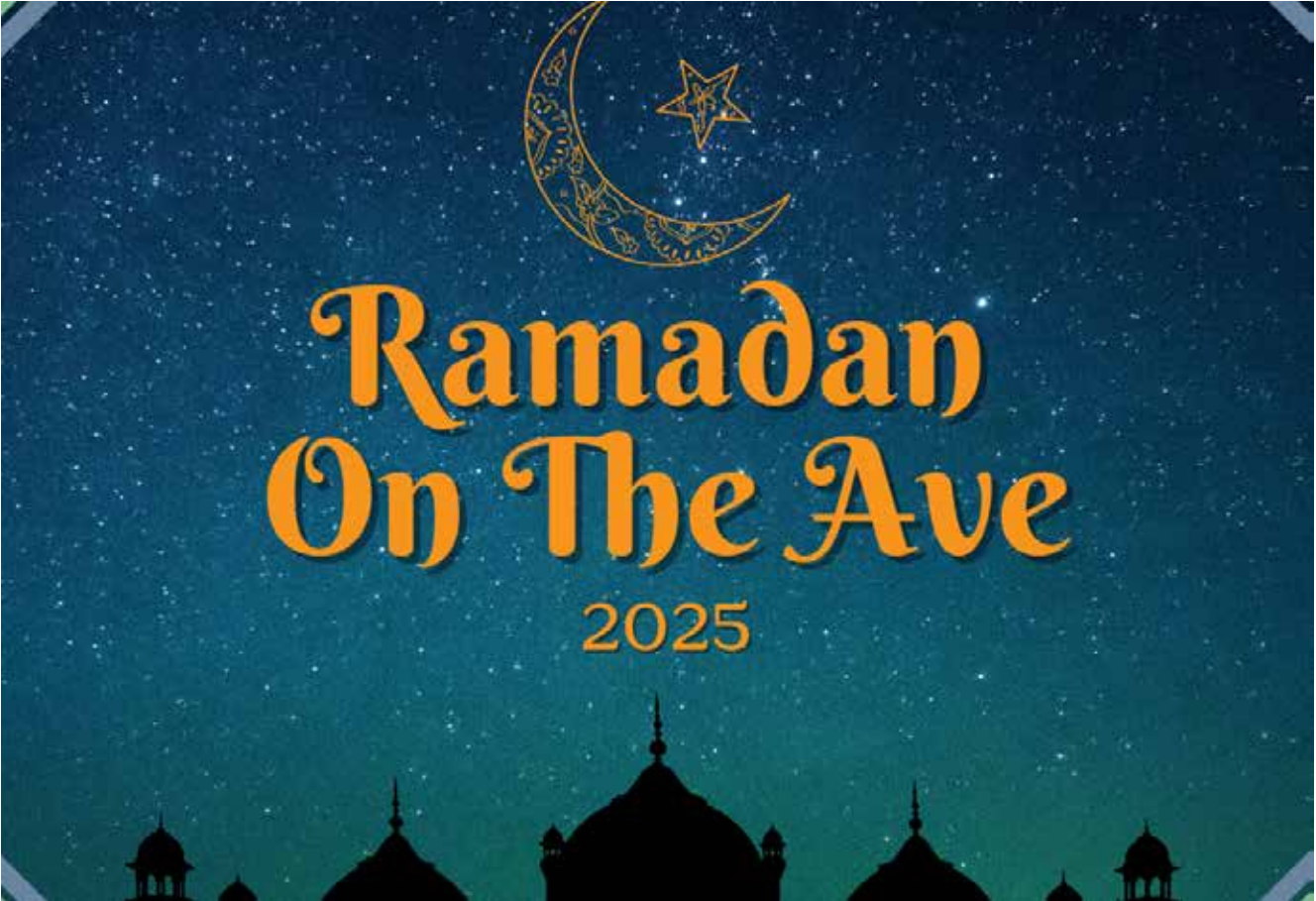
make Alberta Avenue special. The videos will feature everything from halal grocery shopping to festive fashion boutiques and delicious halal restaurants, highlighting the diverse offerings that create a vibrant hub for Ramadan and Eid. This campaign aims to highlight the positive contributions of Muslim-owned businesses to

Alberta Avenue's economic growth and overall community wellness.

So, whether you're observing Ramadan or just curious to learn more about its traditions, Alberta Avenue invites you to explore, support local businesses, and experience the welcoming spirit of the season.

RAMADAN MUBARAK

*From all of us at
Alberta Avenue Business Association*



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community league

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League membership required for admission.
Memberships available at the door. AlbertaAve.org

Fire destroys a local landmark

Ice and ash cover Avenue Trading Post early Sunday morning



The Avenue Trading Post was destroyed by a fire and then demolished into a pile of rubble two days later. | Steven Michos

**JACOB ULICKIJ
& KAREN MYKIETKA**

Edmonton firefighters faced both extreme cold and heat as they raced to control a blaze that struck the Alberta Avenue Trading Post (9544 118 Ave) early Sunday morning. The commercial structure fire was reported at 4:45 am, with crews responding to the scene just four minutes later. The two-alarm fire had a total of 11 crews and nine trucks working, encasing the burning structure in water and ice. As of yet, no casualties or injuries have been reported.

Footage from security cameras at the Alberta Avenue Community

League over three blocks away show flames and smoke billowing over the alley around 7 am. The fire engulfed the top floor on the east section of the building. It took firefighters several hours to get the blaze under control. Water flooded 118 Avenue and adjacent sidewalks as far as 91 Street, leaving an icy mess in frigid temperatures. Water infiltration was reported by some nearby businesses as well.

Owners Rico and Mario Potestio had recently listed the 1959 building for sale along with all inventory and the business name, although the listing was no longer active. According to the listing, the property included four commercial units, four apartments,

and a single family home directly behind it. The pawn shop occupied two commercial spaces, a vape shop and beauty salon the other two.

The Potestio business changed significantly over the years, but with community consistently at its heart. From operating as a trading post that supplied mining camps, to a family grocery through the 60s and 70s, this latest incarnation as a pawn shop tells the story of a neighbourhood forced to adapt to changing economic conditions.

“Pawn shops arise to fill a need,” says historical writer Jon Weller as he discusses the history of Alberta Avenue. “A need for a group of people who are often neglected by traditional retail and financial systems. For better or worse, they provide a much needed service to a marginalized population and to a great extent this population is a significant and important part of the community.”

Between the structural damage to the building and the ice caking it, the area around the structure is unsafe. The site is taped off, 118 Avenue between 95 and 97 Streets is closed, and police and fire are monitoring and securing the area. On Monday morning, an excavator started to tear the building down but then broke down itself. The two block section of 118 Avenue will likely be closed for a few days until the building can be pulled down.

We are encouraged by Weller’s words in the 2012 edition of Rat

Creek Press and his description of inevitable change. While the trading post will be demolished, the symbol of commerce and communal spirit will continue in the memory of long-time residents.

“Even the hard times have a role to play, because out of the ashes has arisen an area with a new, more diverse and wildly enthusiastic face, a face likely unimaginable to early residents, but one fit to face the new world.”

We await the new face and vision that in time someone will bring to this space..”



Building turned into ice castle after fire-fighting efforts. | Steven Michos

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Atonement Home Demolished

Memories still haunt many who stayed there as children

KATE QUINN &
PAULA E. KIRMAN

This article was previously published in the February-March 2025 edition of Boyle McCauley News.

Juanita Murphy was always haunted by bad memories when she passed the Atonement Home on 92 Street and 110 Avenue on her way to medical appointments. December 20 was different. The building was being demolished. Old wounds ripped open as she could see into the bowels of the structure.

“I suffered various forms of abuse at the hands of nuns and priests, all in the name of ‘God’,” she recalls. “I am grateful that it’s over, and my inner child is safe. I am glad to see it go, but the memories will always linger.”

Atonement Home was a Catholic boarding school opened by the Franciscan Sisters of the Atonement in 1928. It became a temporary residence for children aged 3 to 12 while they awaited either return to their families or placement in foster care. It closed as a children’s residence in 1988.

Atonement Home was not added to the list of residential schools recognized by the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement because it was not federally funded. Alberta Children’s Services was responsible for placing children there.

After 1988, the Franciscan Sisters Benevolent Society operated a



Demolition work at the site of Atonement Home in late December. | Paula E. Kirman

number of programs, including a day care and Head Start program. The building later became known as the Franciscan Centre.

Catholic Social Services acquired the land in 2024 with plans to expand housing supports for vulnerable Albertans.

The demolition came as a surprise to many in McCauley and beyond. On December 28, activists April Eve Wiberg and Stephanie Harpe organized a “flash rally” at the site for survivors, their children, and supporters. Stephanie was 10 when she and her brother were taken to the Atonement

Home. “As they break this place and as it crumbles, I let it do that to me for a short while but I took back my healing, I took back my power. I took back my place. I ignited my home fire, my spirit,” she said.

“I choose not to be that rubble. Today I take back that hurt. Today I take back my spirit, and that’s all that matters. It’s a beautiful, powerful day.”

Clinton Marty spent seven years at Atonement Home. “We were all children, innocent children,” he said.

“There is a lot of hidden history here . . . to bring light in any form is

necessary for people to wake up and see what happened. There’s neighbours here who never knew what happened in this building. The memories will live with me. My children and grandchildren will always remember to tell the stories of abuse.”

April Eve Wiberg’s siblings spent time at Atonement Home. She said, “I’ve seen the lifelong harm. It ends here with us. We have to get these stories out.”

Catholic Social Services provided an email statement to Boyle McCauley News explaining it did not make a public statement in order to protect the safety and security of clients and staff in nearby programs. The transfer of the property was marked in a gathering with an Elder and CSS staff where the Elder guided reflection on the aspirations for vulnerable Albertans who will be served by the new facility. CSS envisions the new building as a vital community resource, providing 33 suites and access to wraparound services.e..”

Kate Quinn lives in McCauley, a few blocks from the former Atonement Home. She is one of many neighbours who did not know what happened inside until she and Juanita Murphy worked together at CEASE (Centre to Empower All Survivors of Exploitation and Trafficking).

Paula E. Kirman is the Editor of Boyle McCauley News.

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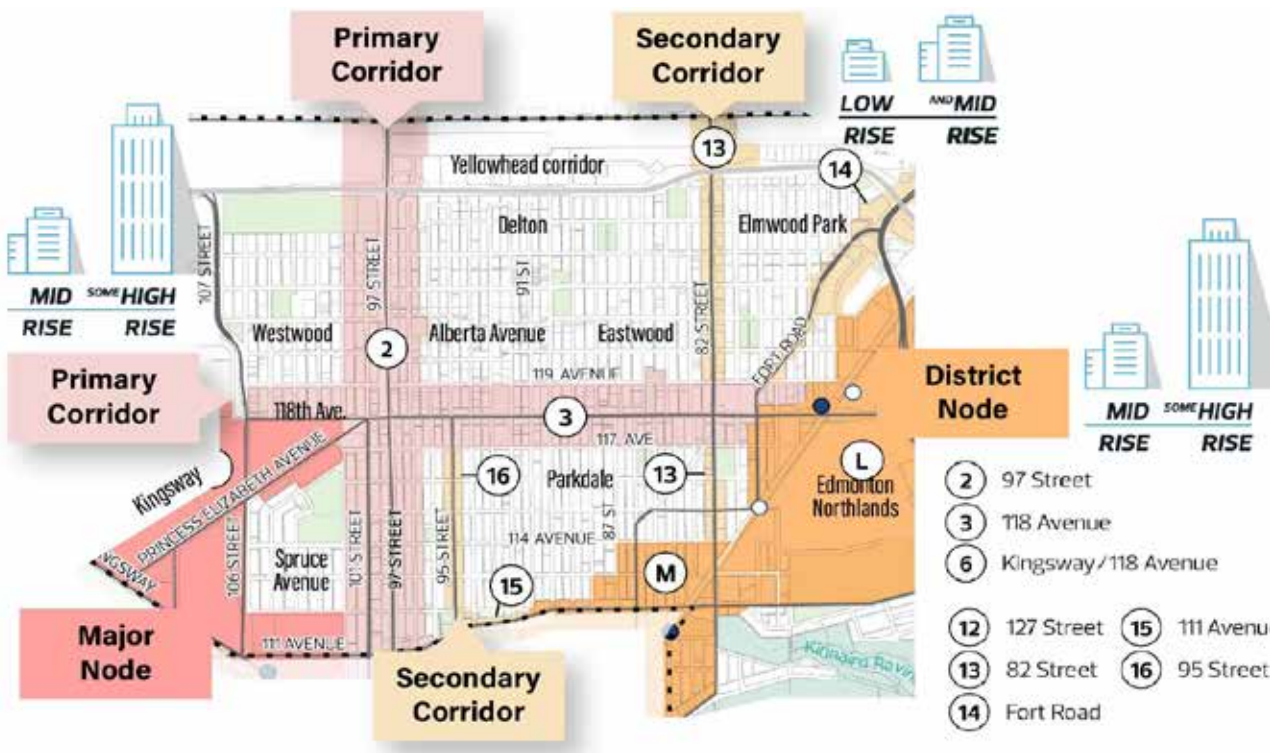
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City rezoning raises concerns

Community residents criticize bylaw changes in information session



SHERRIDON ROUTLEY

An infill information session regarding the City of Edmonton's new zoning bylaw 20001 and its impact on local residents was held in early February at the Alberta Avenue Community League. The event, hosted by community league civics director Alan Bolstad, drew a small but informed group of the north central community who tried their best to vocalize their concerns to the city.

The good:

Edmonton has experienced significant population growth, with more than 100,000 new residents making the city their home over the past two years. This growth coincides with many neighbourhoods reaching their maturity phase, creating an opportunity for revitalization that can accommodate the expanding population while attracting investors and residents who want to contribute to the area's development.

The greater Rat Creek Press area is particularly well-suited for development, with residential lots typically measuring 33 by 120 feet. These lots, which can be purchased for as little as \$100,000 (lot only), have been rezoned under the revised "Small Scale Residential Zone" designation. This zoning classification creates excellent opportunities for thoughtful densification.

The development of multi-home units in these areas provides a crucial advantage by increasing housing affordability for new families entering the market. Adding to the positive momentum, recent changes to business parking regulations have removed historical barriers that previously made new construction challenging, opening up more possibilities for development.

Primary and Secondary Corridors

have been rezoned under the new guidelines to include mid- and high-rise development (see illustration).

The bad:

Resident Donna Paliwoda is a supporter of increased density and infills, but was vocal about how the current plans are unrealistic.

"I did not know that they eliminated parking [bylaws] and I want to know if, in that decision, they considered the width of streets because ours are so tiny compared to newer developments," Paliwoda noted. "It's idiotic to think in these old neighbourhoods you're going to have higher density—which we do welcome—but higher density without parking."

It was made clear that the city's ambitious transit and accessibility goals rely on the assumption that 50 per cent of the population will depend on public trans-

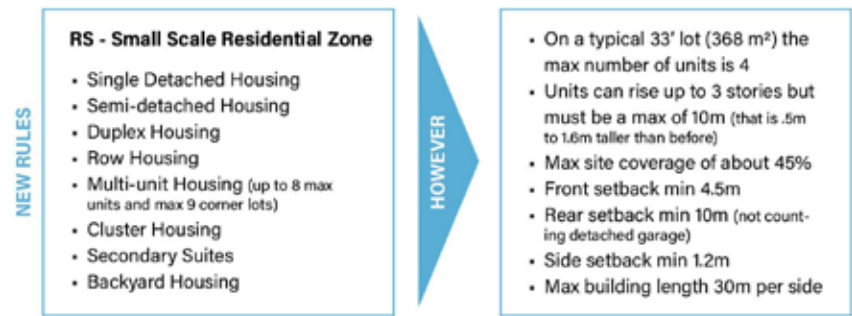
portation in the near future and have access to amenities within a 15-minute radius. Many residents believe that, while noble, this is currently more of a fantasy: Edmonton has a high car dependence rate, with one of the highest car-to-population ratios in Canada likely due to factors like weather, terrain, and suburban sprawl. Doubling or tripling

the density on any residential street in the north central area will likely result in a free-for-all fight for parking spaces. Residents are already dealing with some streets being too narrow even for fire trucks to access and have had poor experiences in the past getting the city to respond to issues (remember the 'pit of doom' saga?).

As for current transportation, Paliwoda weighed in saying, "I would love to have an efficient public transit system, I would probably not drive as much as I do. Sometimes you have three [bus route] number five's in a row within two minutes. You need an efficient transit to go hand-in-hand with a denser population. I tried to live that 15-minute lifestyle for the last 20 years and, unfortunately, public transportation in the city has not kept up with the demand."

There was a follow-up meeting where residents brought up more concerns:

Aging infrastructure could be tested



to its limits with power and sewer systems possibly needing upgrades before the properties go in. Could this also increase taxes for people already living in the area?

Backyards may be obscured by three-story developments and, if they live near a main artery like 95 Street, six-story

developments.

Large multiplex developments would cause increased foot traffic and less privacy for the existing neighbours.

The proximity of the two primary corridors (at 101 Street and 97 Street south of 118 Avenue), and 95 Street's secondary corridor which is zoned for developments that obscure the sky for anyone nearby. The burden of accessibility and parking poses even greater problems for the area.

Possible solutions:

Several attendees spoke of implementing mandatory on-premise parking requirements for each residential unit, either through underground parking facilities or dedicated rear parking spaces. It was also noted that this does not always solve the problem either, as infill garage space is notoriously small.

Another approach would be to establish strict regulations linking the number of permitted infill developments to available parking capacity in the area. However, this was not something the city seemed interested in dealing with.

Any solution involves improving the public transit system to make it a truly viable and attractive alternative to personal vehicles. This would require making it more efficient, with better routes and schedules that actually get people to their desired destinations on time, while keeping fares affordable.

Going forward:

Clearly this is an important issue that affects all residents in the RCP area. During the meeting, city officials seemed dismissive of their ability to address the issue and they would often point to their position just being one of "delivering a decision that has already been made." The main concern is that math simply doesn't add up if we are to increase density without guaranteeing the developer will consider parking in some form.

According to the city, the primary recourse for residents is to contact their councillor (currently Ashley Salvador). However, this suggestion was met with some skepticism, as meeting attendees reported difficulty in establishing communication with Councillor Salvador in the past. Maybe the community league could arrange a formal consultation with the councillor to figure out a plan of action — this is an election year for council, and they may be more responsive to constituents' concerns knowing their jobs are at stake.

More information can be found at the following links:

zoningbylaw.edmonton.ca
zoningbylaw.edmonton.ca/part-2-standard-zones-and-overlays/residential-zones/210-rs-small-scale-residential-zone

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City team tackles derelict properties

The Problem Property Initiative: Two years in review



A property that was redeveloped after being cleaned up by the PPI.

For years, concerned Edmontonians called for stronger measures to deal with problem properties. That’s why the City of Edmonton developed a strategy to address these places, in consultation with people impacted by them. In January 2023, the Problem Property Initiative (PPI) was launched to clean up properties, secure or demolish unsafe buildings, and uphold housing standards at high-risk properties.

From January 2023 to December 2024, the PPI conducted more than 14,000 inspections at over 1,800 unique properties.

Cleaning up and creating space for new development

The City’s focus on cleaning up and demolishing problem properties is contributing to neighbourhood vibrancy and paving the way for redevelopment. By addressing neglected and unsafe properties, the PPI is helping to ensure that neighbourhoods continue to be desirable places to live.

The PPI has coordinated 394 property cleanups and 10 demolitions, removing 1.63 million pounds of debris and hazardous waste from Edmonton neighbourhoods. All costs related to this work are billed to the problem property owner. Furthermore, tickets issued by PPI

enforcement officers, along with a higher tax rate for derelict properties, are making it increasingly costly for owners to neglect their properties. Following interventions by the PPI, 379 properties were demolished by their owners. Of those demolished properties, over 225 have since been redeveloped or have submitted applications for development permits.

Reducing fire risk in neighbourhoods

Fires in unsecured vacant properties are a significant risk to the community and first responders. The PPI has a dedicated team to reduce this risk by securing — and holding landowners accountable for — vacant buildings that pose a fire risk to the surrounding community. Where needed, 366 properties (out of 927 inspected) were secured with the related costs billed to the property owner. Over 300 of these properties have since been demolished by their owners. This work has led to a significant decrease in structure fires in vulnerable neighbourhoods.

Innovative approach to derelict properties

Derelict properties are often a blight on neighbourhoods and a burden on City resources. In 2024, Edmonton

became the first city in Canada to introduce a tax subclass for derelict properties. Designed to encourage owners to improve or demolish their properties, the Mature Area Derelict Residential subclass allows the City to triple the tax rate for owners of properties in mature neighbourhoods that show serious signs of neglect, are dilapidated, are falling into significant disrepair or are unliveable.

Of the 202 properties assessed as derelict for the 2024 year, 54 were demolished, eight were remediated and 48 were sold. The subclass also generated revenue to help offset the costs of otherwise dealing with derelict properties. The City is now looking to expand the subclass to all Edmonton neighbourhoods, as well as non-residential properties and vacant land.

Supporting vulnerable populations

A PPI inspection team ensures that housing standards are met at high-risk residential properties. Throughout the course of inspections, the team helped connect 156 vulnerable individuals or families to 123 different service agencies for financial, medical, mental health, or basic needs support. Additionally, 81 people, including 37 children, were successfully rehoused from unlivable properties.

Expanding efforts across Edmonton

The PPI has a data-driven focus on the neighbourhoods most affected by problem properties. In 2023 and 2024, proactive resources were dedicated to eight core northside neighbourhoods, like McCauley and Alberta Avenue. This year, 15 neighbourhoods will receive the same attention, including five on the south side. Community members from these neighbourhoods were informed of this expansion at a public meet-and-greet in October 2024. The PPI has participated in 72 stakeholder meetings with 125 groups and 7,300 individuals.

To learn more about the Problem Property Initiative visit:
edmonton.ca/ProblemProperties.

To report a problem property, visit:
edmonton.ca/ProblemProperties or call 311.

To report an unsecured vacant property email communityproperty-safetyteam@edmonton.ca or call 311.

Information provided by the City of Edmonton.



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A message from your Edmonton Griesbach MP and Edmonton Centre NDP Candidate

BLAKE DESJARLAIS AND TRISHA ESTABROOKS

During these challenging times, we know you're worried about the impact of U.S. tariffs. Edmonton Griesbach MP, Blake Desjarlais, and Edmonton Centre NDP Candidate, Trisha Estabrooks, want you to know that the NDP supports dollar-for-dollar retaliatory tariffs, cutting off the supply of critical minerals to the U.S. and increasing trade between provinces. But these countermeasures only address half the problem. The NDP are calling for support for workers impacted by tariffs and countermeasures. And in the longer term, a *Build Canadian, Buy Canadian* plan that creates jobs in Canada.

If there's one thing you need to know about New Democrat MPs it is that we

work hard and fight for the people we represent. In the fall of 2021, MP Blake Desjarlais was elected as the MP for Edmonton Griesbach. This next election, we are hoping to elect former school board Trustee and journalist, Trisha Estabrooks, to stand up for Edmonton Centre in Ottawa.

We expect a federal election this spring and, as with many elections, there is a lot at stake. Both Blake and Trisha have heard from voters at the doors. Besides the top concern regarding the impact of US tariffs, we have also heard concerns about the affordability crisis.

We get it. The cost of everything is going up and as NDP MPs, we will continue to fight to prioritize the needs of people over the profits of corporations. Canadians are struggling with rising rent and grocery costs. Our solutions

to making life more affordable include cutting the GST on essentials, stopping price gouging, and restoring fairness to our tax system so big corporations pay their fair share.

Housing affordability continues to squeeze many Edmonton Centre and Edmonton Griesbach residents. The reality is we are facing an affordable housing crisis due to decades of Liberal inaction on building affordable, non-market housing and Conservative cuts to funding for affordable housing. Housing is a human right and as your NDP MPs, we will fight for Canadians' rights to adequate, affordable and accessible homes.

You've also told us at the doors that you want your representatives to defend our healthcare system. The NDP's national pharmacare and dental care programs are making a difference in the

lives of millions of Canadians. But we cannot rest. Canadians are concerned a Polievre government will further privatize our health care system, making it more difficult to access free health care.

This upcoming election, the NDP are the progressive choice for Edmonton voters.

When you elect a New Democrat MP, you know that we will fight for people, for your rights, for policies and programs that support you and your family.

If you have questions about the NDP or want to join our team to re-elect Blake and elect Trisha you can email us at trisha.estabrooks@ndp.ca or blake.desjarlais@ndp.ca.

Check labels, buy Canadian

Choosing local products can help our economy, and even your wallet

KEVIN BLAKEMAN

It seems like only yesterday U.S. logging tariffs forced us to start reading the origin labels on the products we bought, so we could try to reduce the impact of powerful foreign entities on the Canadian economy. But it wasn't yesterday; it was 2018, and here we are in

2025 with a similar situation unfolding. Trade wars. Tariffs. It's all very confusing and, while these international political wranglings might seem a world away from our Edmonton neighbourhoods, the consequences are sure to hit very close to home as we anticipate rising prices on a wide range of products and services.

So what can we do this time to help ease the burden on our economy, and our wallets? Just like in 2018, buying Canadian and buying local is a great start.

Last time, we learned that Heinz is produced in the U.S. but French's is Canadian made (though everyone always forgets about Primo ketchup, which is Canadian made and Canadian owned),

and if we take a little time while shopping it can be simple to check the origins of the things we buy. We all have our favourite Canadian fruits, and everything from craft beer to cosmetics can be made by Canadian manufacturers and bought from Canadian retailers.

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Alberta's healthcare isn't broken, it's being dismantled

We need to send a message loud and clear to our leaders: it's time to rebuild Alberta's public health care system. RebuildOurHealthcare.ca



Is \$20 good value for a street-legal hug?

Lessons in caring, generosity, and civility

AYDAN DUNNIGAN-VICKRUCK

Previously published at dancingwithpresence.com

It’s hard to keep track of the street value of differing commodities these days, in large part because the neighbourhood has changed. There was a time when you could buy almost anything on almost any street corner — from drugs, to sex, to pieces from your neighbour’s bike. Even once our missing Christmas ornaments!

Women on almost every street corner giving away free smiles, charging for everything else.

Here’s a wild story. Once our bird feeder was being used as a drop-off for drugs. I discovered the stash and forwarded it to the RCMP. There were a lot of angry “bird watchers” the next day.

One morning, I walked out the front door to find eight crisp \$20 bills on the sidewalk. Another transaction gone sideways.

Oh, the good old days, the Wild West. Coming home to police officers in SWAT uniforms ducked behind trees, with their automatic rifles trained at the house across the street.

Now, gentrification has made everything monochrome.

What I do miss are the panhandlers. I think of them as the last remnants of the Mendicant tradition: a religious order which practiced begging as an act of devotion, throwing oneself on the mercy of God and others. Jesus sanctioned tending to the needs of the homeless and hungry with his directive, “In as much as you

have done it to the least of these, you have done it to me.”

What panhandlers did with my contribution, I have no idea and couldn’t care. What I do value is that, for one brief moment, they popped my little self-absorbed bubble and forced me to notice and care about someone other (and less fortunate) than myself.

In “the golden age of Panhandlers” I could get a “God bless” for a toonie. Great value. It would have cost me \$10 to get a “God bless” from a priest and I would have to suffer through an hour-long service to boot.

Besides, there just seems to be something a little more authentic, earthy certainly, about a “God bless” from the toothless grin behind the grubby, calloused, nicotine-stained, outstretched hand.

Not so much anymore. Which is why I have come to appreciate my friend Tabatha. She shows up occasionally on the street corner outside my favourite shopping centre. Her carefully written sign “Please help. I am homeless. I appreciate whatever you can give” is leaning against the lamppost.

I am untypically generous with my contribution, partly because I get so little opportunity to practice this sort of gen-

erosity anymore, but also because every time we meet, we have a friendly chat. She compliments me on my flamboyant styling. I get to learn a little more of her fascinating — part tragic, part heroic — story.

We make good eye contact, and have a cordial conversation. She thanks me sincerely and appropriately. All the while my social worker’s eye is checking for telltale signs of abuse, or drug use, or a psychotic meltdown, but I don’t detect any of this. Tabatha just seems to be down on her luck and is doing what she needs to do to stay on her feet.

So one day, when I hadn’t seen her for a few weeks, I gave her \$20. Tears welled in her eyes, “Really? \$20? Are you sure? You have no idea.”

She’s right. I have no idea. Truthfully, if the \$20 had blown out of my hand I would have thought twice about chasing it down the street. All I can assume is that it meant more to her than the extra tub of ice cream I had in my grocery bag meant to me (and, just to be clear, I like my ice cream).

This felt real. A raw moment. I was feeding off the connection. “Can I have a hug,” I asked, calculating that was a fair exchange for my \$20.

“Sure,” she said, “since you asked. You have no idea how often men just walk up

and grab a hug without even asking. They think it is their right. You asked, so, sure.”

\$20 for a hug. Good value? On a dance night, I would get 100 hugs for that \$20.

But the real gift was that she held my face up to how scarce and precious basic civility is. More often people take what they want or need without any consideration of how they are getting it or from whom they are taking it. On street corners, as in boardrooms, and in presidential palaces.

In my tango dance world, there are rules and rituals about how to ask for a dance and then how to negotiate un abrazo, an embrace, a hug. The embrace is often identified as the essence of the dance.

In other words, this is not a little thing. The privilege of being in close contact with someone else for even a few songs is something not to be taken for granted, but prized and treasured.

I continue my walk home, groceries in hand, reflecting on having paid handsomely for a brief, basically a dollar-a-second, hug.

But the lesson will last a lifetime, one I will revisit every dance, every week:

*A hug is not a right.
It is a privilege to be treasured.
Be courteous. Respectful.
Ask.*



Image from Pexels.com | Eva Bronzini

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Weaving with Traceable Textiles

Local artisans turn farm byproducts into garments

JACOB ULICKIJ

The smell of bubbling herbal teas and laughter hangs in the air of a converted house on 95 Street. Here, a talented collection of artisans convert wool from local farms into comfortable and stylish blankets, decor, and garments. Best of all, every stitch is made traceable from the farm to your door.

Traceable means that every material in the supply chain is visible to the consumer, allowing you to make an educated decision on what you purchase. In the age of fast fashion and big box stores, a traceable system ensures transparency and ethical standards at every step.

While specially bred sheep like

opportunity to reduce waste while weaving beautiful fabrics.

“Traceable Textiles began as a COVID business. We wanted to find a way to share local knitting and yarns with the community,” she says, sharing her story with an open-house crowd.

With over 20 years of crafting experience, Nelson pursued a master’s degree in weaving from Olds College. As a thesis project, she employed the skills of local

as challenging as you want to,” she says, overlooking her beautiful wooden loom.

Together with her business partner Kylie Boychuck and others in the Edmonton Weavers’ Guild, their team follows shearers through March and April to collect fresh “skirts” from sheep farms. Suitable cuts of wool are then blended, cleaned, and brought to an industrial spinner in Carstairs, AB. After six months, the now-workable

puts money into the hands of local farmers for byproducts while reducing the strain on our waste collection system, resulting in beauty at no additional cost to the environment.

“If your parents or their parents lived on farms in Alberta, you know the importance and the beauty of creating something from nothing. That’s what we’re doing by working with waste wool. Creating something from nothing,”



Left: A family-owned sheep farm in Leduc County. Without local wool workers, the thick coats will be sheared in the spring and go to waste — often to the frustration of shepherds who value sustainability. **Centre:** Shannon Nelson demonstrates steeping marigold, tansy, and coreopsis flowers into a natural yellow dye. **Right:** A hand-operated loom at the Traceable Textiles Alberta Avenue store



Nelson says proudly. The quality of their handmade wool products cannot be overstated. From softness to durability, their fabrics match or outperform cotton and specialty wool while keeping money in the local economy.

You can find their products online or in person at their store (11602 95 St) or Gather Textiles (12155 Fort Rd NW).

Merino or Rambouillet are raised for their expensive and premium wool, local farmers who raise hardier breeds for meat often see wool as a wasteful byproduct. As a result, mountains of unused wool fill barns and stables in the Edmonton region, offering master weavers like Alberta Avenue’s Shannon Nelson an

farmer Kalea Turner Beckman to help her source and convert waste wool into a high-quality material. Shortly after, her thesis project grew into a steady commission-based business where nine stores would purchase her hand-spun wool.

“The nice thing about working with natural materials is that you can make it

wool is returned to Edmonton, naturally dyed, and worked by hand into various products.

From hand-dyeing wool with dried flowers to spinning entirely on hand-powered machinery, Traceable Textiles honours sustainability throughout its small operation. Their business model

With various classes and workshops to participate in, Traceable Textiles is helping locals create delightful works that will last for generations. Interested readers are encouraged to join the Traceable Textiles e-newsletter, where their team shares important dates for community classes, loom lessons, and seasonal sales.

LATIN PUB NIGHT!

Bring you appetite and your dancing shoes and join PCCL for an all ages evening of fun!



A dream becomes real

Nuestra Coffee Shop offers treats, arts, and community

JEFF WOODWARD

If your travels have taken you along 112 Avenue next to Borden Park, you might have noticed a cozy-looking new business tucked into the Virginia Park neighbourhood on the corner of 76 Street. Nuestra Coffee Shop, which opened back in November, is the culmination of a dream that partners Nichola Hildebrand and Antonio Velasquez have spent years planning and working towards. They have transformed a modest little spot that was originally a body shop, and most recently a tile

“It really means ours as in, ‘it belongs to everyone in the community’.”

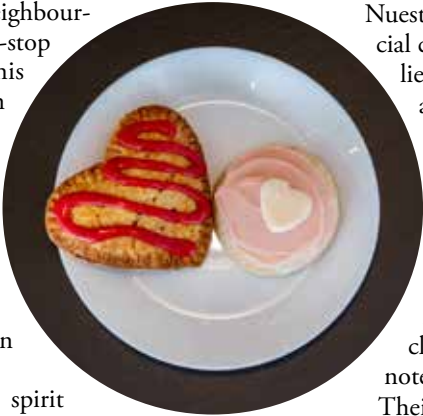


Owners Nichola Hildebrand (l) and Antonio Velasquez (r) sit smiling at each other in a booth at Nuestra. | Jeff Woodward

and flooring store into a warm, inviting space that feels much bigger than it actually is. Velasquez got his start in the coffee business many years ago at the much loved Leva Cafe in Garneau, working as a barista. He immediately took to the social nature of the job and loves “being able to visit and check in with people as part of doing my job.” Hildebrand comes from a psychology background and really enjoyed the challenge of applying her training to making the mood of the space at Nuestra reflect their vision. And what a vision it is, too! Interestingly, in a 30-minute conversation, neither Hildebrand nor Velasquez ever

referred to Nuestra as a coffee shop or cafe. Instead, the term “community” kept coming up. They describe their goal for the business for it to become “a meeting place and community hub for people in the neighbourhood,” and “your one-stop shop for local.” This vision is reflected in the name, as Nuestra means “ours” in Spanish. Velasquez asserts that, “while it means ‘ours’ as in, our business, it really means ours as in, ‘it belongs to everyone in the community’.” This collaborative spirit is reflected in virtually every aspect of the coffee shop. They have a rotating roster of local roasters whose beans will be featured in their drinks, two in-house bakers prepare a growing list of tasty treats that include some of the best gluten-free (GF) pastries this writer has ever tasted. You must try the GF pop tarts! Many of the ceramic mugs used at Nuestra were handmade by Hildebrand who, in her spare time, is a

talented ceramicist. The shop has cards, pottery, and other knick-knacks for sale from local artisans. Even the art on the walls comes from friends and is available for purchase. Nuestra hosted its first official community event earlier in February, a meet-and-greet for local artists to forge connections, but it’s not the only opportunity. “There’s already informal groups meeting in the shop. A knitting club, book clubs. It’s wonderful,” notes Hildebrand. Their hope, and the hope of many of the residents of the neighbourhood is that Nuestra becomes a focal point for the community.



Nuestra is open 7 am - 4 pm Monday to Friday, and 9 am - 5 pm on the weekends. You can find them at 7601 112 Avenue NW.



Left: The space at Nuestra right after Antonio and Nichola took possession. Centre: The space at Nuestra stripped down to the studs with all the tile and marble samples still on the floor. Right: Jackhammering the sample tiles off the floor mid-renovation.



Parkdale Cromdale Community League

Programs:

- Freeart music: Sat. 10am-1pm creartedmonton.com
- Playwright Club for Teens: Tues. 4 30-5 30pm
- Norwood Family Centre Stay and Play: Thursdays 10am-12pm
- Yoga with Jesse: All levels. Tues 7-8pm
- Tango: Mon. 6:45-10pm
- Grower’s Dozen Garden Club: Register for a spot on our website
- Latin Dance classes: Spring dates/times TBA
- League Swim at Commonwealth Rec Centre: Sat 3-5pm, Sun 1-3pm
- Collective Kitchen and Art Classes: Currently full, email for waitlist

Upcoming Events:

- Latin Pub Night: March 21 7-11pm
- Mother’s Day Brunch May 11 10am-1pm
- Father’s Day BBQ June 15 12pm-3pm

Membership at:
www.parkdalecromdale.org/membership

Look for details/updates at:
parkdalecromdale.org or email
programs@parkdalecromdale.org



Spring bikeability report

An assessment of the RCP area and spring biking tips



SHERRIDON ROUTLEY

Things are warming up nicely! February is over and I went cycling around the north central area and beyond to assess the bikeability conditions.

Conditions were good overall on the bike paths, but sometimes downright impossible to navigate on side streets. It's no longer a matter of the City of Edmonton clearing snow, but more of a random patchwork of ice, water, and slush.

My top tips for spring cycling

Your experience may vary, but these are my recommendations:

Watch the ruts and slush!

When riding on the road, the remaining grooves made by other vehicles and bikes can be your worst enemy. They can easily send you flying with anything less than the fattest tires. If the side street is covered in slush, I recommend choosing another route or riding on the main corridor. If you really need to, ride or walk on the sidewalk in low-trafficked areas. Many times I will get off my bike and walk it over problem areas when exploring side streets.

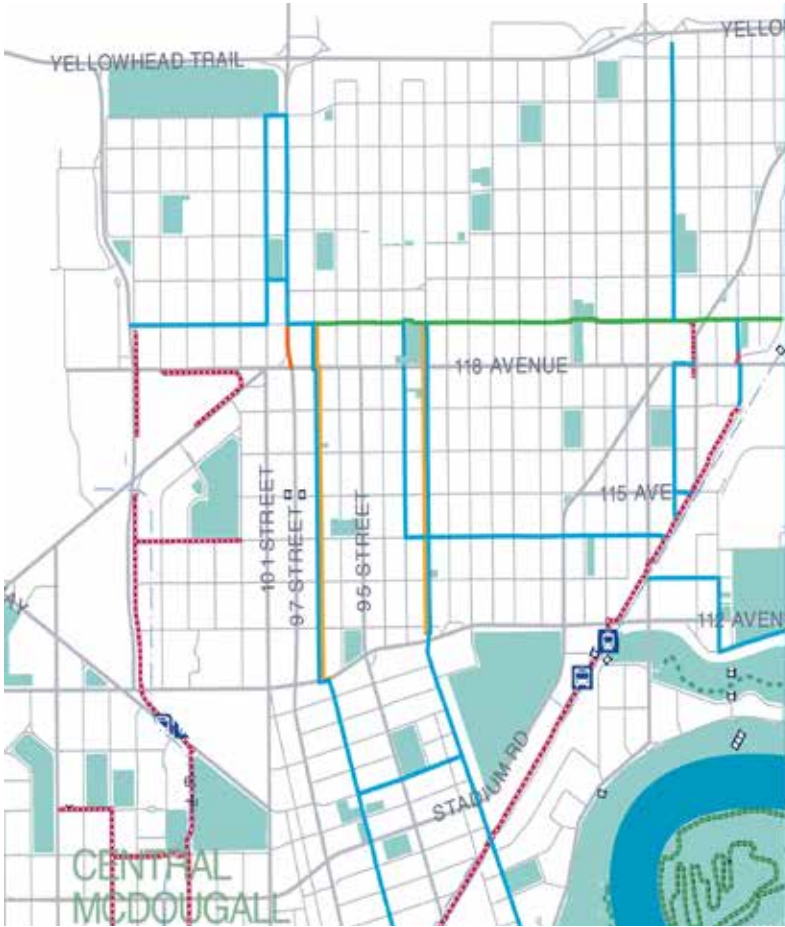
Watch the debris!

Every year about this time, I get a flat from riding around the city because all the snow has melted and the debris is now scattered on the side of the street. If possible, ride in the middle of the lane in well-trafficked areas as sharp gravel, broken plastic, and glass can get into your tire and puncture your tube.

Use a fender/splash guard:

Use fenders to protect yourself from road spray and melting snow. A rear fender is a must but a front fender can help too. I use a quick-remove mud guard on my rear tire.

Dress appropriately:



The north central area has a wealth of cycling options

RCP Area Simplified cycling map

- Shared Pathways Cleared in Winter: are paved, off-street paths made for many activities.
- Protected Bike Lanes: are on-street bike lanes protected from moving cars, parked cars, and sidewalks, by a physical barrier.
- Painted Bike Lanes: are on-street bike lanes marked with paint and designated for bikes only.
- Shared Roadways — Lower Traffic: Cyclists and motorists will be sharing the roadway with other vehicles on relatively quiet neighbourhood streets. These routes are marked with blue or green bike route signs, or painted markings on the roadway. These are considered good routes for cyclists.
- Shared Roadways — Higher Traffic: Cyclists and motorists will be sharing the roadway on relatively busy main streets. These routes are marked with blue or green bike route signs, or painted markings on the roadway. This is a route with more car and possibly bus traffic and is suited to the more

You are likely to get quite dirty if you like to ride through puddles and muck, so wear shoes and clothing you don't mind making a mess of. It's a good idea to put your shoes in front of a vent or radiator to dry when you get home. Continue to dress in layers you can pack so that you can keep warm when the temps drop. Wear a water-proof, windproof, and breathable outer layer, and a warm moisture-wicking inner layer.

Avoid large puddles:

Sure, we all like to make a splash. But watch out for some deep puddles, as there can be hidden debris or potholes. Sometimes there's still ice below the water and, if you slip, you'll be one soggy cat!

Visibility:

Since you may need to ride on the main streets in traffic, it's imperative to have visible clothing and bike lights, especially when the sun is going down. Even though I usually like to listen to music on relaxed rides, I would much rather be aware of my surroundings in trafficked areas. Always shoulder check and hand signal when on the road and even on bike lanes. Have a good front light (400 lumens and up) if you intend to ride after sundown — many

hazards are hard to see in the dark.

Rust is still your bike's enemy:

There's still plenty of road salt and sandy slush that can wear down moving parts. It's important to clean your bike often and remember to wash it at the end of your ride. A simple wipedown of the moving parts with warm water is good enough to keep your bike functionally clean. I like to make a short visit to the manual car wash for a good spray. Never spray a power wand wash directly into your moving parts, as it will remove the grease that is supposed to be there. If your bike is a princess, there are dedicated cleaning products and procedures to follow.

Tires:

Generally, you need tires with good traction and not bald. Thick-tread mountain bike tires are a good option. Fat bike tires are the best, but a fat bike

is a whole other investment. If you expect to encounter ice, you may want to lower your tire pressure a bit.

Maintenance:

Clean and lubricate your chain with chain lubricant, you'll be surprised at how much this improves your ride. Check and upgrade your brakes, since wet conditions can reduce their efficiency.

Carry a bus pass or change:

It's always a good idea to be prepared for an accident or flat, and this year was no exception for me as I had a flat riding out in an industrial park. Even though I stray far from the city centre, it's still a good idea to be prepared if you ride locally — walking your bike home with a flat tire can be quite annoying.



Left: Some streets are near impassible. Right: Although bike lanes were cleared by the city, melting snow can stil be a problem | Sherridon Routley

Gardening in community

Community gardens provide space to grow food, knowledge, and relationships

KAREN MYKIETKA

We live in an amazing district! Six of our seven community leagues run some form of community garden program. Whether it is a small box, an individual inground plot, or communal space, you can find a place to get your hands in soil and grow seeds into plants.

The City of Edmonton describes community gardens as places where neighbours share basic resources of land, water, and sunlight. They work together and alongside one another to nurture, develop, and sustain a growing space in their community.

Gardening has many benefits both for the volunteers who join (healthy food, active living, recreation) and for the community (beautification, community building, knowledge and resource shar-

ing). It's important to remember, however, that gardening with others in a communal space will be different from gardening in our own private space.

Community gardens have rules and guidelines to follow and may have volunteer requirements. Respecting others' garden spaces, not entering them or picking their produce are common rules.

Violations can happen in communal gardening, whether intentional or not. If the garden is not fenced off from the public, there's even greater risk. You need to approach community gardening with a different level of attachment and expectation than you would a private garden: approach it with an attitude of kindness, cooperation, appreciation, and sharing. Be grateful for any harvest you get, along with the learning and community building opportunities.

Delton

Delton will have garden boxes again this year and they are planning a plant sale. Email greendeltoncommunity@gmail.com for more information.

Growers' Dozen Community Garden (Parkdale-Cromdale)

Parkdale-Cromdale has 22 four-by-four garden boxes on pallets that they move into their paved rink area for the summer. In 2024, they charged a \$10 fee and required two hours volunteering per month. Register for a spot on their website or email info@parkdalecromdale.org.



Alberta Avenue Community Garden

Alberta Avenue started its garden in 2011 and it has grown and expanded significantly. It now has 45 individual plots (two of which are accessible), a gazebo, and a greenhouse. It also has a large communal space, which has mostly produced potatoes the last couple of years. In 2024 gardeners paid a \$80 deposit, refundable if they completed 16 hours of volunteer work (four hours per month).



Elmwood Park Community Garden

Elmwood Park's garden in their large fenced yard includes a beautifully landscaped green space, gazebo, and picnic tables. They have 20 raised beds they rent for \$40 plus a deposit. Go to their website to book a spot or email ElmwoodparkCL.info@gmail.com.



Eastwood Community Garden

Eastwood has raised garden beds on the concrete pad outside the rink fence, as well as in ground beds between the fence and the rink. Its members are hosting a gardening planning session on March 22 from 2-4 pm. Email info@eastwoodhub.org or call 780-477-2354 for more information.



Spruce Avenue Community Garden

Spruce Avenue's garden was launched a few years ago, after careful work from the community on its design and build. If you're interested in a plot, email garden@spruceavenuecommunity.com.



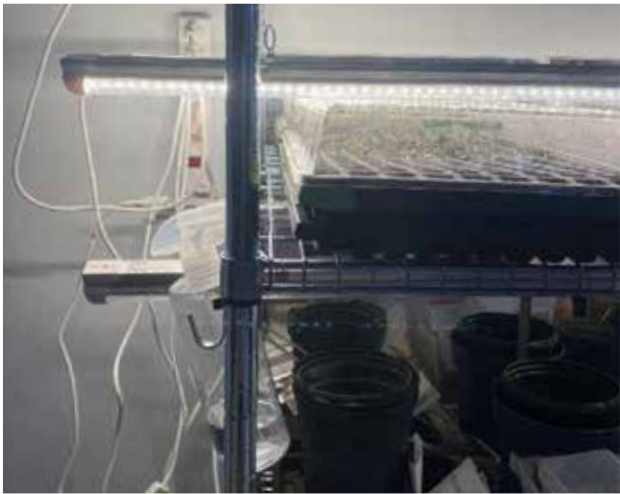
All pictures supplied by their respective owners.

How to grow a garden from scratch

Part one: starting your seeds



Enjoying the fruits of a first-year backyard garden. | Photo by Jacob Ulickij



Lastly, let's discuss lighting.

The most significant up-front cost for a gardener looking to grow a large number of starters is going to be artificial lighting. Grow lights come in all shapes and sizes, and not everyone will have access to the best of the best options. No matter what you have access to, you can't go wrong with following a couple of simple rules.

Firstly, starters thrive with sixteen hours a day of light. The simplest way to meet that requirement is to invest in a digital timer to handle your lighting on a customized schedule. Secondly, your light source must be as close to your seedlings as possible—almost touching them. Even high-quality full-spectrum grow lights are not nearly as powerful as the sun and must overcome their low output by being as close as possible to young plants.

If you don't have electric grow lights, you still have access to the best lamp of all—the sun. A south-facing window is the perfect place to give young plants the boost they need.



With good soil, daily misting, and access to a healthy light source, your starters should poke up and out of the soil within the week! From there, monitor your seedlings for signs of struggle—usually caused by overwatering (wilting, sickly plants) or insufficient light (long pale stems and very few leaves).

To echo the advice at the start of this article, don't overthink it. Gardening is a mixture of successes, failures, triumphs, and disappointments. Like us, our gardens will never be perfect. Still, we can learn, grow, and chase opportunities to thrive — reaching every day for light.

Our next article on starting your garden will look at strategies for moving your starters to bigger pots and getting ready for a healthy transplant in the spring.

JACOB ULICKIJ

Gardening — whether big or small, ornamental or fruit-bearing — will be fun. Through every season, you will come to appreciate the uniqueness of your yard, your soil, your growing skillset, and your vision for a backyard oasis. There is no perfect strategy and, like any good relationship, you'll learn to trust in and communicate with your garden as it sprouts, flowers, and eventually wilts away to make space for next year.

Gardening in Edmonton presents a unique challenge. Our growing season is relatively short and is impacted by extreme heat and cold weeks. Unlike some climates where plants thrive outdoors year-round, in Albertan we can ensure timely harvests by starting plants indoors before transplanting them to an outdoor space.

This article discusses selecting and starting seeds indoors regardless of budget or experience level. Watch for upcoming articles that will walk you through the next steps in growing food!

Starting plants indoors requires a gentle hand. In the wild, a seedling can self-regulate to adapt to changing conditions. Indoor environments remove variables like wind, temperature swings, and pest pressure that make the plants hardy. A benefit is reliable germination, but the downside is that our plants must be handled carefully.

First, select your growing medium

Seedlings require soil that is rich in nutrients, airflow, and hydration. If that sounds contradictory, you're not wrong. I felt overwhelmed the first time I read that the soil had to be both moist and well-draining. In fact, I felt like everyone knew something I didn't about how soil worked! Modern gardening stores give

you everything you need for healthy starter soil.

I recommend buying a bag of pre-mixed seed starters for first-time seed starters. These bags contain a healthy mixture of peat moss (provides structure and drainage), perlite (retains water without dampening soil), compost (nutrient-rich additives), and antibacterial compounds (prevents mold from overwhelming your young plants).

Seed-starter bags are relatively inexpensive and available from hardware stores and independent retailers like Apache Seeds or Zocalo in McCauley. As your skills and confidence grow, you'll be able to mix custom starters that are uniquely suited to the plants you choose to grow. Grabbing soil from the garden is not a good choice, as it will be full of insect seeds, bacteria, and fungus that will take over your growing pots before your seeds can sprout. seedling can self-regulate to adapt to changing conditions. Indoor environments remove variables like wind, temperature swings, and pest pressure that make the plants hardy. A benefit is reliable germination, but the downside is that our plants must be handled carefully.

Second, pick your potting setup

Potting is where creativity and frugal thinking can be great options for hesitant gardeners. Anything that holds soil, won't fall apart immediately, and is small enough for the plant to develop a dense root system is fair game.

Indoor plants struggle with long-term growth when planted in a large container. If the container is too large, the young plant cannot absorb enough moisture from the soil, and that waterlogged soil becomes a perfect place for anaerobic bacterial growth. On the other hand, a container that is too small will need to be watered constantly, and

if allowed to dry out completely, will stress the plant into growing without producing fruit. Yikes!

There are many options for finding that middle ground. Commercial seed-starting trays are sized appropriately for young plants and feature drainage and lid features to help manage moisture. Compostable pots are excellent for transplanting, as they are buried directly into their final growing spot without disturbing the roots. The best starter of all is seed blocks, which do not contain plastic and have no ongoing costs after the initial equipment purchase.

Upcycled options for seed trays include egg cartons, empty toilet paper rolls, clean yogurt cups, dairy tubs, or any plastic container you can think of. Styrofoam from grocery store meats is durable and a great way to reduce waste. Just be cautious not to introduce an unnecessary amount of plastic or ink into your pot. Too much ink or protective coating could draw unwanted chemicals into your plants.

Once you've picked your soil and filled your pots, **it's time to sow some seeds!** Begin by poking holes a few centimeters deep and drop two or three seeds into each of your containers. By over-planting, you increase the overall chances of success per pot and allow yourself to thin out the crowd later, or transplant only the strongest seedlings into a bigger pot when the time comes.

Not all seedlings do well when started inside and moved outside (also known as transplanting). Beans, peas, and root crops like carrots or beets often succumb to transplant shock and will die when repotted or moved outside. If this is your first year starting indoors, stick to beets, broccoli, cabbage, chard, collards, lettuce, strawberries, eggplant, peppers, or tomatoes for the best chance of a healthy crop.



To learn more about the exciting world of seeds, visit Seedy Sunday at the Alberta Ave Community League on March 23, 2025, from 11 am to 4 pm!

Fruit trees are coming to McCauley yards

How you can join this green pilot project

JACOB ULICKIJ

Reductions in crime, lower home heating and cooling bills, and increased soil resiliency are among the many benefits that Dustin Bajer is bringing to his neighbourhood through Cultivate McCauley — a love letter to front gardens, back alleys, and everywhere in between.

With funding via Edmonton’s revitalization project macro-grant, Bajer has taken on the impressive challenge of raising 1,000 heritage and fruit-bearing trees in community mini nurseries before transplanting them into McCauley yards. In the spirit of community and longevity, workshops and mentorship will follow each step of the process, which is powered by volunteers willing to donate time, space, and care to these plants throughout their lifetime.

“This grant is a proof of concept,” Bajer says. “Anything we learn from this can be applied more broadly. It’s conceivable that we could take lessons from

this project and apply that to growing hundreds or thousands of green plants in surrounding neighbourhoods like Alberta Avenue and Parkdale.”

Mini nurseries are dispersed in volunteer properties throughout the community. These nurseries will grow trees from seeds and cuttings during workshops. After plants reach six to 18 inches in height, they will be distributed to interested households to become permanent additions to yards, alleys, or anywhere they may grow and thrive.



Young hands planting apricots. | Photo by Dustin Bajer

2019 census data lists McCauley’s population at 4,738 residents, of which 78 per cent are renters. With just over 2,400 occupied dwellings, the goal of 1,000 trees highlights the need for volunteer support. With a thousand new trees, the project has the potential to be immense — especially when considering McCauley’s low canopy coverage despite the maturity of its boulevard trees. The need for biodiversity is further highlighted by Dutch elm disease, which can devastate even the largest

and most established boulevard trees in Edmonton.

As for what volunteers can expect, their voices and yards will determine the final outcome. Seed kits include heritage and fruit-producing trees like apricots, walnuts, sweet cherries, and chestnuts. Others are more focused on shade or pollination. “It’s a very diverse group,” says Bajer, “and we hope to find the right plant for the right place and person.”

The powerful combination of plants, people, and community is well known to Bajer. As he approaches his fifth season of managing the permaculture team behind Shrubscriber, his experiences in grassroots gardening continue to show how viable rewilding efforts can be when communities are empowered and inspired. Put simply, he believes growing and planting a thousand new trees is an opportunity to engage and

connect McCauley residents, businesses, and social agencies around a shared community project that improves the land in countless ways.

“In addition to the good this project will do, I look forward to learning about the logistics so that it can be repeatable and scalable. After all, I’m just one tree weirdo. It’s not hard for one tree weirdo to grow a thousand trees. But 100 tree weirdos growing 1,000 trees a year? Now we’re talking about something incredible.”

Volunteers and interested households are encouraged to visit the Cultivate McCauley website and click “Get Involved” to hear about upcoming opportunities.



4’x4’ mini nurseries will house young plants in community yards. Volunteers with yard space are encouraged to get involved. | Photo by Dustin Bajer

Join Delton’s Garden Party

Sign up for your own garden box

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greendeltoncommunity@gmail.com

Watch for our Plant Sale Coming Soon!

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Bring your thoughts and Ideas for the future of Eastwood!

Free food, drinks and great time connecting with neighbours

Save the Date!
Saturday April 26, 2025
2 - 4pm

Reach out for more information
info@eastwoodhub.org

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Karaoke & Trivia Night

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Westwood Community Hall

Westwood
Community League

March 14, 2025
7:30 pm - 10:00 pm
Westwood Community Hall,
12139 105 Street NW
\$ 5.00 entry with membership
(includes free drink!)

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Classifieds in the digital age

How LinkedIn can level up your job hunt

JULIE MCCREA

More years ago than I would like to say, I walked into a store in a mall and handed them my resume. This bold move led me to my first proper “grown-up” type job. Sure, I had baby sat, done seasonal work wrapping Christmas presents for an outerwear company, counted laps for racers at a go-kart track, and even dressed up as a clown and spun a sign at the grand opening of a store (let us never speak of the clown gig again please!). However, I got all those short-term jobs through word-of-mouth between family and friends.

Once I graduated from high school, I needed to find something more stable. Back then, it was common for job seekers to walk into a place of business, engage with the staff directly, and drop off a resume in hopes of a follow-up. The initiative was generally appreciated, and many people reading will recognize doing this themselves. Fast forward some years, and I am looking to apply for a job again, but I am told I must create a cover letter. What sorcery is this?! I remember grumbling about it, but I had to adapt to the new way of doing things to move my career ahead.

Things have changed a lot in the job search over the years, but the truth remains that you either adapt or miss out on opportunities. Those who change with the times tend to have the most success.

This article is to help those of you job searching or just maintaining your current employment with some advice about LinkedIn. Plenty of people would prefer not to bother with it, but it is the direction things have gone in, just like the transition to cover letters before it.

LinkedIn is a big deal. Worldwide, it

has over 1 billion users. In Canada, there are over 27 million users. Considering that our country’s entire population is just over 40 million puts things into perspective. Also, considering that many organizations check people’s LinkedIn profiles as a human resources policy, you can see why paying attention to this particular social media might be a good idea.

Currently, I teach a monthly workshop for newcomers about how to create and maintain their LinkedIn accounts. To do this, I meet with employers from Edmonton, across Alberta, and a few across Canada to get their input on what they want to see on people’s profiles:

When you apply for a job, companies will review resumes and shortlist a few of their preferred candidates. Then, their LinkedIn accounts are often looked at for a few important reasons.

One example is to check if your **job dates and companies match what is on your resume**. If not, they may wonder if your application errors were purposeful untruths or lack of attention to detail. Neither will sit well with an employer.

Another reason is to **ensure you are**

a good culture fit. While your resume and cover letter must be tailored to the specific job you are applying for, LinkedIn contains much more about you. Employers don’t just want to find someone with the training and experience to do a job — they want to find someone who will fit with their already established employees. Your profile should have elements that speak to who you are so they can see if you are a good fit.

LinkedIn is not only a job search tool. Many people will create an account when looking for a job and then abandon it for years until it is time to look for work again. Since anyone looking at your profile can see when you last were active, following organizations

in or connected to your industry will give you more things to interact with. Reading and reacting to posts and articles shows your credibility in the field and will help you stay informed. A question that can be asked in interviews is, “What do you think is one of the biggest challenges in our industry/work right now?” By keeping your knowledge current through relevant articles and posts on LinkedIn, you would be in a better position to answer that question.

Finally, and most importantly for community-minded people in Edmonton, **is using LinkedIn to show off your volunteering experience**. Whether you’ve volunteered for a neighbourhood festival, delivered community flyers, or supervised recess at your child’s school, LinkedIn’s own statistics show that profiles that list volunteer experience get six times more views than those that don’t.

Volunteering allows you to show a broader range of transferable skills. To be a successful volunteer, you need to be reliable, punctual, organized, able to take directions, and have clear communication skills — all desirable qualities in the workplace. Also, it’s a great way to gain references especially if you don’t have an extensive

work history. I encourage everyone in the working world, no matter the type of work you are in or are looking for, to consider having a LinkedIn account and managing it properly to reap the benefits. I can’t promise it will guarantee a job, but a good profile certainly can increase your chances.

The truth remains that you either adapt or miss out on opportunities. Those who change with the times tend to have the most success.

Worldwide, it has over 1 billion users. In Canada, there are over 27 million users.



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Income Tax 101

Understand taxes and benefits and even file your own tax return!

KAREN MYKIETKA

Do you fear numbers and math or filling in forms? Is your filing system shoving official papers into a plastic bag? Regardless, if you are 18 years old or older you need to file a tax return. You want to file even if you have no income so that you receive benefit payments. Even children who work should file a return. Are you prepared to do your 2024 income taxes? Here you will learn how, and which benefits you can claim.

You can also read our previous article and the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) Get ready to do your taxes webpage.

Ways to do your taxes

- 1. If you've received a letter from CRA inviting you to use SimpleFile, follow the instructions in the letter.
- 2. Use NETFILE-certificated tax software (see below for more information).
- 3. Use a community volunteer tax clinic if you qualify.
- 4. Work with a tax preparer.
- 5. Complete a paper return (this is really the hardest and slowest way).

The earliest day to file your 2024 taxes online is February 24, 2025. The deadline to file and pay any taxes owing is April 30.

Filing income tax yourself isn't as scary as you think! Income tax software is available for you to use on your computer, tablet, or phone — some tax software is free or low cost. You just have to type in your name and address, answer some questions, and then transfer the amounts on your tax slips to the program. Better yet: Use "Auto-fill my return" to avoid having to enter all those numbers in the right boxes manually.

The volunteer tax clinics use the UFile software. UFileFREE is available online for free for students, seniors, people with income below \$20,000, or single T4. Other options are TurboTax, Wealthsimple Tax, CloudTax Free, and Studio Tax. You can download their apps if you're using a mobile device.

Getting your refund

You can check processing times online but it generally takes about two to three weeks to receive your refund when it is sent electronically, and four to six weeks if mailed. Some tax services like H&R Block offer instant refunds if you will be receiving more than \$600. It will cost you 15 per cent on the first \$300 and 5 per cent on the rest, so \$60 of \$600.

Make sure you have a CRA direct deposit set up or that CRA has your correct mailing address. It's best to set up My Account with CRA. It is a bit of a process, but then you can easily access your Notice of Assessment and proof of income statements, update your contact information and much more.

What you need to know about income tax

You pay a percentage of tax on your taxable income. The combined Alberta and Federal personal income tax brackets and tax rates are:

- 25 per cent on the first \$55,867
- 30.5 per cent over \$55,867 up to \$111,733
- 36 per cent over \$111,733 up to \$148,269
- 38 per cent over \$148,269 up to \$173,205
- 41.32 per cent over \$173,205 up to \$177,922
- 42.32 per cent over \$177,922 up to \$237,230
- 43.32 per cent over \$237,230

- up to \$246,752
- 47 per cent over \$246,752 up to \$355,845
- 48 per cent over \$355,845

Taxable income is your gross income from all sources, minus any tax deductions you qualify for. Some common deductions are RRSP contributions, child care expenses, and union dues. Your tax bracket is progressive meaning taxable income is separated into multiple levels. You pay different percentages of tax on each level of your income.

- \$55,867 taxed at 25 per cent = \$13,967
- \$4,133 taxed at 30.5 per cent = \$1,261
- Total tax: \$15,228

So if Jane's income is \$65,000 and she puts \$5,000 in RRSPs. Then her taxable income would be \$60,000. Total tax owing would be:

But wait! The government reduces how much tax you have to pay with a variety of tax credits such as basic personal amount, credit for over 65, children, disability, tuition, medical, employment insurance, Canada Pension Plan, and interest on student loans.

You don't pay any federal income tax on the first \$15,705 or Alberta tax on the first \$21,885 of taxable income.

Understanding benefits

If you work for an employer, they already took income tax off your income and sent it to CRA. So why file an income tax return? One reason is because you may have paid too much income tax, and in that case you would get a refund. On the flip side, you could have paid too little and now owe money to the CRA. But for most families, especially those

with lower incomes, the most important reason to file a return is to get the benefits you qualify for.

GST rebate - For people at least 19 years old and it is based on family income. You could get up to \$519 if single, \$680 if married, plus \$179 for each child. This total amount will be divided into four and payments will be sent on the 5th of April, July, October, and January.

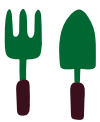
Canada Carbon Rebate - For people at least 19 years old. You automatically get it after you file your income tax return. It is not affected by your income, but by location (rural residents get a higher rebate), marital status, and number of children. The rebate is paid quarterly on the 15th of April, July, October, and January. A single person will receive \$225 each quarter.

Canada Workers Benefit - For people working and earning a low income. The amount depends on your income. Advance payments are made on July 12, Oct 11, and January 10.

Canada Child Benefit - For people primarily responsible for the care of a child under 18 years. Payments from July 2024 to June 2025 are based on our 2023 income tax return. Your 2024 return will be used to calculate payments starting in July 2025.

Alberta Child and Family Benefit - For families that have children under 18 years based on income. Payments are issued in August, November, February, and May. Payments between July 2024 and June 2025 are based on your 2023 income tax return. Your 2024 return will be used to calculate payments starting in July 2025.

Claw backs - The CRA may keep your tax refund, GST and carbon rebates, or parts of other benefits to pay government debts such as income tax or benefit overpayments. If this causes you financial hardship, contact CRA to discuss relief measures.



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 - thinning/pruning
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 - food preserving
 - composting
 - garden planning & more

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A believer's journey

Patricia Dunnigan's memoir opens dialogue on our own life

CONSTANCE BRISSENDEN

Memoirs are true stories of a person's life. Many touch on the good points and gloss over the rest.

In *How I Learned to Swear*, by local resident Patricia Dunnigan, hard truths are shared without sugar coating. She traces her life from birth in Montreal, Quebec, to Nova Scotia, back to Quebec, and on to Alberta, a journey that is deeply influenced by her faith.

Dunnigan's sharp memories of childhood show her to be a sensitive, caring person. Born into a staunch Roman Catholic family, she takes on the mantle of the good child, the good believer, the good wife and mother. Her life is selfless, because she feels it is her duty.

Simmering under the surface are tough lessons about her very existence.

None of the memoir suffers from the "poor me" syndrome. Straightforward and detailed, *How I Learned to Swear* is often humorous

In her early years, the lessons are softened by the transcendent joy she feels in response to the beauty of nature. The lessons are tucked away, but not forgotten.



Patricia Dunnigan proudly holds *How I Learned to Swear*, the memoir she wrote during the COVID-19 years.
| Aydan Dunnigan-Vickruck

As her childhood turns into adulthood, Dunnigan must quit teachers' college to care for her ailing mother and younger siblings. She feels this is the right thing to do. The sting of loss is added to the list of other sacrifices she makes in the name of duty.

None of the memoir suffers from the "poor me" syndrome. Straightforward and detailed, *How I Learned to Swear* is often humorous. At seven years old, living in Quebec, she hears her first swear word, spoken in French by her young playmate. And just like that, it pops out of her mouth at a family dinner. She gets a spanking; it's a lesson learned.

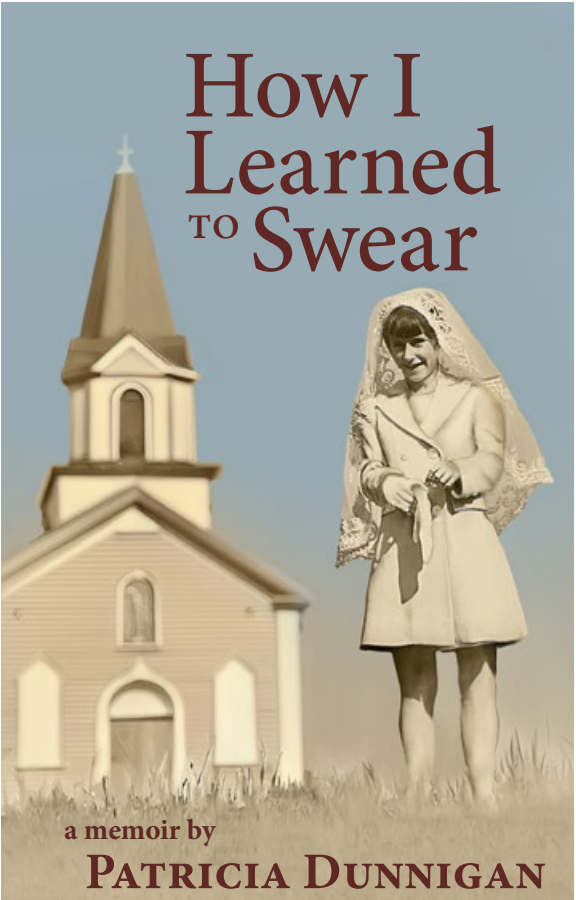
A big family is on Dunnigan's wish list. Married at 20 to a fellow Catholic believer, she and her husband set out to accomplish this. Six children later, not yet 33 years old, Dunnigan is increasingly aware of her powerlessness, both as a wife and as a member of her church.

There is comfort as well, as Dunnigan makes new friends in various communities. These friends begin to open doors for her with surprising results.

As a reader, I was drawn in by the progression of Dunnigan's belief journey. I began to ask myself: What is going to happen? Will she stay with the beliefs she practiced since childhood? Will her husband change, or must she be the one? How did I feel about her growing awareness? Have my beliefs changed over time as well?

It would be unfair of me to give away the ending. Suffice to say, it comes with a sharp crack. Like so many aspects of our lives, change may not be what we planned or expected. But the right kind of change can also be blessed.

How I Learned to Swear by Patricia Dunnigan is available at *The Carrot Community Arts Coffee House* (9351 118 Ave) and *Audreys Books* (10702 Jasper Ave). Price is \$20.



Patricia Dunnigan's second memoir.



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Vee considering the final touches to their painting, *Circle of Life* | Chelsea Boos

CHELSEA BOOS

For individuals seeking a sense of self-worth, creative outlet, community belonging, and skill sharing, the Art Mentorship Society of Alberta (AMSA) seeks to empower groups through affirming programming for wide-ranging techniques of artistic expression and connecting to others through celebrating differences and common interests. AMSA believes above all, that artistic expression is critical to the mental health of individuals and wellbeing of the broader local community. The non-profit society's mission is to reduce barriers to art creation by providing open access to free art mentorship programs, funded by the Canadian Mental Health Foundation - Edmonton region.

As Interim Executive Director of AMSA and Peer Facilitator of the online group, I see first hand how the relationships fostered and meaning created by each one in AMSA's in-person and virtual drop-in Art Studios keep people coming back to their art practice week after week. Being vulnerable in shared spaces laden with anxiety and misinformation is not easy during the best of times, but art mentorship programs are here to make it more pleasurable, even on dark days. It is natural that people

consistently choose to return to the joyful spaces offered through The Nina Haggerty Centre for the Arts and online platforms by AMSA.

Stephen Hobbins is a core member of the group that meets for art mentorship open studio from 1-3 pm on Fridays at the Nina Haggerty Centre and enjoys creating in a range of mediums from canvas to comic books. His work can be found on exhibit at Bleeding Heart Art Space and in stores such as Warp 1.



Stephen Hobbins holds his colouring book, *The Musical Swashbuckler*, while surrounded by his work on exhibit at Art From the Unknown | Chelsea Boos

"It brings me a sense of accomplishment when I've completed an artwork," says Hobbins.

"I have been a member of the AMSA community for 10 years. I like the fun group at the drop-in on Fridays. You can work on various mediums like collages, contour drawings, watercolour, acrylic painting, or you can work on your own project, and go according to your schedule. All the supplies are provided and it is free. It's a regular social event to go, something to look forward to every week. I am happy to do art as a hobby. There is no pressure."

Weekly Friday workshops are facilitated by Jai Tanninen, an established local artist and peer mentor with AMSA for 10 years, and Krista O'Brien, recreational therapist with AMSA for six years.

"Jai is a great instructor. He gives good advice and knows about upcoming events to submit your art to. Krista is great too. She hands out art supplies and helps people apply for art shows. She is also good at helping with print orders," says Hobbins about the team. "Chelsea helps members by attending markets like Art From The Unknown to represent AMSA member's artworks, helps us find new markets for our art, and sets up shows like the community art exhibition at The Aviary."

If you passed by The Nina Haggerty Centre in February on a Friday afternoon, you might have looked through the plate glass window unto the artist Vee putting final touches on their latest painting. For four consecutive weeks, they have braved freezing in -20°C and below temperatures, amid other setbacks, to work on transmuting their vision into acrylic for a piece they call *The Circle of Life*. Vee is no fair weather friend! Follow along their art journey on

instagram (@xipha7) or attend the Art Mentorship Open Studio in the future to see the finished work up close and congratulate Vee on their labour of love.

With mobility being of concern to so many people, AMSA also hosts a virtual drop-in art mentorship group weekly on Thursdays from 12-2 pm. The online meeting is facilitated by a peer mentor like myself and sometimes visited by guests who have a connection to the community. A visit to the virtual drop-in art mentorship program will teleport you inside my studio, the space of a working artist, community organizer, and arts administrator.

This cozy video call brings together participants from multidisciplinary creative practices for a validating experience while sharing announcements, talking shop, linking assets, or referring services. Like a university seminar or art workshop, presentations investigating the historical and contemporary practice of visual art encourage group discussion and prompt new lines of thinking.

Get in touch with the online community of participants sharing skills and discussing artworks when you subscribe to receive AMSA updates includes receipt of a supply list and topic of discussion by email in the week before the session.

AMSA is calling on the community to support and empower passionate local artists with inadequate access to materials, art space, and community care by donating to the Canadian Mental Health Association in Edmonton. Please give the gift of art education and peer support to AMSA members.

Contact AMSA
chelsea@artmentorshipab.com
for more about programs
or to become a member or
receive updates



Spruce Avenue News

Get Involved, Stay Connected

Volunteers Needed

Board Position: Sports Director
Communications Team
General Volunteer

Positions for all ages
Contact:
communications@spruceavenuecommunity.com

Become a member

Benefits
Hall Rental Discount
E- Newsletter
City of Edmonton Discounts
Community Garden
Contact:
memberships@spruceavenuecommunity.com

Upcoming Events

Spring Market

- March 22, 2025

Monthly Bingo

- Friday, March 28
- Last Friday of the Month
- Time: 6 - 8 pm
- Location: Spruce Avenue Community League 11507 103 ST NW
- Details: Family Friendly. Includes 1 free card. Bring loonies and toonies for extra games

Garage Sale

- Friday & Saturday, May 2 and 3, 2025
- Time: Fri: 12- 7 pm and Sat: 9 am - 5 pm
- Vendor Price: \$10/ table
- Details: Book a table at the community garage sale.
- Contact: verna.stainthorp@shaw.ca or 780-479-8019



A big hug to Jasper after the fire

Residents try to stay positive as the town rebuilds



A historic 1928 church reduced to sad columns. | Constance Brissenden

CONSTANCE BRISSENDEN

Jasper was devastated by fire last summer. We watched on television, the flames reaching 100 metres above the boreal forest of Jasper National Park. More than 20,000 residents and tourists fled. Within a few short days at the end of July 2024, one-third of the townsite’s structures were destroyed. Some 2.4 million hectares of the park burned.

In December, almost five months later, I decided to visit Jasper to support the town’s economy. My conclusion? Go there if you can.

article. “A lot of people are still picking up the pieces,” she said. “We respect that it wasn’t an okay ending for many.” Tension from differing perspectives, and differing losses, is understandable.

Jan’s family evacuated to Valemount, BC, then to Prince George, Grande Prairie, and Edmonton. Alice, another tourism worker, headed for relatives in Edmonton. After August 16, they were allowed to return. Both were fortunate to find their homes still standing. Both are grateful that there was no loss of life by fire anywhere in the park.

The Jasper Information Centre, run

okay. Avoid taking photos of burned-out houses.

Another survivor is the Jasper-Yellowhead Museum & Archives at 400 Bonhomme Street. For anyone visiting, this is a must see. Displays feature irreplaceable artifacts and photos going back to the earliest days of settlement. Unique photos of the proud Moberly family, the area’s early Metis fur traders and homesteaders, stood out.

Drop your donation at the door and learn about Jasper’s history. Perspective is everything.

Signs of hope seemed to spring up everywhere. Over Christmas, one house displayed a Nativity scene on a street facing rubble. The famed Christmas lights inside Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge lifted the spirits. Abrar Chowdhury, assistant manager of the Great Hall dining area, stopped by our table to chat. “We feel the love of Albertans,” he said.



The boreal forests of Jasper National Park will take a century to regrow. | Constance Brissenden

It may seem an uncomfortable suggestion: Why see the burned hillsides, the massive forests that are now endless rows of black stubs? Why view the rubble of nearly 400 structures? Why shed tears at the stone pillars of the St. Mary & St. George Anglican Church, all that remains of a 1928 heritage church?

Go to Jasper to talk to residents and workers. Show solidarity. Stay in the hotels, eat in the restaurants, shop the stores. They appreciate our support. Like Jan, a restaurant worker, they feel our “big hug” and appreciate it deeply.

Many residents that I interviewed, like “Jan,” asked for anonymity in this

by Parks Canada, is one of the surviving buildings. It was helpful to talk to Peter, an information centre attendant. He took out a free map and highlighted the areas of town that burned. Most of the southeast of the townsite was ravaged. Some stores on the once-busy Patricia Street were in the process of being repaired. Some well-known shops, notably Our Native Land on the same street, were still “closed for the foreseeable future.”

Other areas, he advised, haven’t started rebuilding or repairs. Visitors are encouraged to avoid being “looky-loos.” Instead, visit where it’s obviously

One last stop was the free store near the Information Centre. Located in a former Baptist Church, the store gives away donations of everything from pots and pans to winter clothing. First opened in Hinton, AB (about 80 km away) for needy and displaced Jasperites, it was soon moved to Jasper. The smiling faces of the three volunteers who greeted me were uplifting. Although I am not a fire survivor, they gave me a small quilt, one of hundreds of new quilts that arrived from Ontario donors.

After our favorite breakfast of porridge with all the fixings at the historic Athabasca Hotel, reopened in October, we drove back to Edmonton. Reassuringly, animals came out along Highway 16. We saw elk, white-tailed deer, mountain sheep, and mountain goats. Like the people of Jasper, they survived, to show visitors the best that this mountain park and town have to offer.



Irreplaceable artifacts and images of Jasper’s early days survived in the museum and archive. | Constance Brissenden

Go to Jasper to talk to residents and workers. Show solidarity. Stay in the hotels, eat in the restaurants, shop the stores. They appreciate our support.



Smiling volunteers keep Jasper’s free store open in a former Baptist Church. | Constance Brissenden

The reality of Cuba

In spite of adversity, Cuban pride is strong



Country transportation avoids gas prices near the farming cooperative of Martires de Bolivia. | Joel Mercer



Birding guide Paulino with farming collective worker. | Photo Joel Mercer

CONSTANCE BRISSENDEN

Birding guide Paulino Lopez Delgado drives a 1956 Bel Air. He has repaired it countless times over 30 years of ownership. “Don’t slam the doors,” he instructed, after picking us up at 7 am for a day of birdwatching in Cuba’s Cayo Coco island and nearby mainland.

When I forgot, he winced at the slam. From then on, he opened and shut the doors of his red and white classic vehicle.

“That’s the reality of Cuba, we have to treat our cars well,” he said. “It’s hard to fix anything if it gets broken.”

Paulino toured us almost 200 km from our fancy resort, Vila Galé Cayo Paredón. Often, the narrow, paved road was empty. Service vehicles, taxis, antique cars, and staff buses were sometimes

Although I felt that the tourists had little awareness of Cuban reality, I was wrong.

This January, 43 years after my first visit, I stayed at Vila Galé, a newly built Portuguese-funded resort. On offer are more than 638 rooms with four swimming pools. Buses arrive every few hours to drop off or pick up visitors.

The resort is a sleek array of poured cement, ceiling-height glass windows, and gleaming floors. The staff are all Cuban. Young, smiling Cubans. You would be hard put to understand their lives, where they live, or what challenges they face.

I’ve visited Cuba nine times since 1972. The first time, I stayed in the then-developing tourist town of Varadero, a two-hour drive northeast of Havana. My Varadero hotel was new but simple, and food was limited. I saw the poverty of the people and their struggle to make their economy work. I admired their resilience.

an apartment in the colonial town of Moron. He has four adult children, and a wife who almost died from COVID.

As he recalled, “Cuba could not afford to buy the vaccine. We had to develop our own. That’s the reality of Cuba.”

A fascinating stop was Martires de Bolivia, a village featuring a farming collective and a school. Paulino approached a farm building and called inside. One of three women came out to the front step. Inside, the group rested while their lunch cooked on the outside grill. We donated a bag of drugstore medicine, received with laughter and smiles. When I suggested that we also give to the small school, I learned that schools no longer accept donations.

Before leaving the village, Paulino bought a bag of green tomatoes for one dollar. Buying on the side of the road from a local farmer was a way to save money, he said.

Travelling together, we saw multiple birds. A short way from the resort, more than a thousand flamingos flew overhead. We saw a colourful trogon, the official Cuban bird. Deep in a forest, our guide spotted a Cuban pygmy owl. Needless to say, we were thrilled.

By late afternoon, we were back at the resort, welcomed with the smiling faces of the Cuban workers.

Although I felt that the tourists had little awareness of Cuban reality, I was wrong. There were many, like my family,

who brought medicines and clothing to give away. “When I come to Cuba, I leave everything behind,” said Dale Kennedy, a retiree from Halifax, Nova Scotia. On his last visit, he noticed a grey-haired man working as a gardener. His sandals were tattered. Dale gave his



Paulino, our birdwatching guide, with my sister Julie (left) and myself (right). His 1956 Chevrolet Bel Air is behind us | Photo Joel Mercer



Sign for Martires de Bolivia, a farming collective reflecting the days of the Revolution. | Constance Brissenden

seen. We started to notice horse-drawn carts, even one pulled by oxen.

“That’s the reality of Cuba,” Paulino said. “Gas is expensive and hard to get.”

here and there. I walked Havana streets, awed by century-old apartments, beautiful and crumbling.

Like most Cubans, Paulino worked for 15 years for the State before being given

own sandals to the man. “He burst into tears,” Dale recalled.

We heard stories of youth who have left the country by various means. Some did not make it safely. Paulino is happy that his four children are still in Cuba. Due to his Spanish ancestry, the birdwatching guide has dual citizenship. He could live overseas. But, he said, his life and destiny are in Cuba, a country that he loves.

In spite of all adversity, Cuban pride remains strong.



LEFT The gleaming lobby of the new resort, constantly swept by Cuban staff. RIGHT One of four poolside areas at the Cayo Coco resort. | Joel Mercer

Dearest Kenny

Tribute to volunteer who didn't let cancer stop him from pitching in

BRENDA CURREY

I am a proud resident of Westwood. My neighbours are some of the finest you will find in Edmonton. I am a disabled person, living life using a wheelchair. An electric wheelchair for the most part. Helpful and generous with their time, my neighbours will often help me out — sometimes without me even asking for it — with things such as grass cutting and snow removal. I have limitations, but also have a lot of abilities that you wouldn't think I would have. But this story is not about me.

Every spring, Westwood has its neighbourhood cleanup. Every resident is encouraged to meet at our community league, pick up a clean-up kit consisting of a garbage bag or two and a trash picker (provided by the City of Edmonton), and take any route they want to pick up any waste they see on public property.

After the jaunt around the neighbourhood, a free burger, pop, and chips are provided at the well-kept hall.

In July of 2021, I met a man named Kenny Smith and we hit it off very well. He was a great supporter of my interests and participating in the Westwood Earth Day Community Clean Up was definitely on my list so he was more than happy to help and join in. He was quite community minded. This past spring, 2024, after having been diagnosed with cancer the previous September, he still gladly participated despite being in a stage 4. In and out of the hospital most of the year, sometimes in severe pain, he found the energy and the will to once again, for the third year in a row, participate and help clean up the Westwood community after another long Edmonton winter.

Sadly, he succumbed to his aggressive stage four cancer (nearly a year after being diagnosed), on August 21, 2024.

I just want people to know that Kenny was not even a resident of Westwood but still knew and felt the need to participate for the greater good. So, may I encourage many more people, residents of this or any other community to answer the call to help make their area a little bit cleaner and more livable for yourself and the enjoyment of the people around you this year? Litter, or the lack of it is such a reflection of a neighbourhood. Cancer or other ailments may be a stopping point for many and that's understandable but the point being, of course, is that **it just takes spirit and a little effort to make a big impact for all to enjoy and reap the benefits of a cleaner and healthier environment.**



Check labels, buy Canadian

continued from page 8



Packaging will always state the country of origin, but you can also check resources such as madeincanadadirectory.ca, which will allow you to search for products made in Canada with options to view by province and city if you want to narrow your search.

Once you start paying attention to all this, it's surprising how quickly you figure out what is and is not Canadian. As a recent *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* sketch pointed out, "New York Fries, Boston Pizza... basically if there's an American city in the name, it's probably Canadian." And when it comes to products, "if it sounds English or French, it's probably Canadian."

Canadian products may cost more in some cases — understandably, people have to buy what they can afford. But in the long run, buying locally should help insulate from fluctuating prices in what is likely to be an uncertain global economy over the coming years. Keeping that money within our local economy makes it stronger and more resilient to external forces.

Data from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business suggests that only a small fraction of a dollar spent at a foreign-owned company stays within the local economy (11 cents per dollar), while a much larger portion stays here (66 cents per dollar) when shopping at a locally owned business. Ordering online is a part of modern life, but supporting local businesses has never been more important and we have such a rich variety of options available for us to take advantage of.

“New York Fries, Boston Pizza... basically if there's an American city in the name, it's probably Canadian.” - *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*

EASTWOOD GARDEN COMMUNITY TEA AND SOCIAL

Attention Gardeners and those wanting to learn more...we have 2 events to put in your calendar!

11803 86 ST NW

SATURDAY MARCH 8
2-4 PM
INFORMATION

SATURDAY MARCH 22
2-4PM
PLANNING SESSION

Indigenous Perspectives in Focus

Exhibit at Ociciwan Contemporary Art Centre runs until April 19



A person explores the artwork during the opening reception of *Through Their Lens*. | Gail Silvius



Kavyaktok's portraits were described as 'ethereal' by a gallery visitor. | Gail Silvius

GAIL SILVIUS

This article was previously published on BMCnews.org on February 17, 2025.

Ociciwan* Contemporary Art Centre began in 2015 as an artist collective. A key aspect of the mandate is to support and uplift living Indigenous artists. The work of three artists is on display at the gallery until April 19.

In her curatorial essay, Alberta Rose W. writes, “. . . for thousands of years, the dominant culture in these lands has been rooted in the traditions of the original custodians, Indigenous peoples.” She writes of a reclamation of photography that takes the camera out of the hands of colonizers and returns agency to us.

Cora Kavyaktok, originally from Iqalukuutiaq, Nunavut, was the lead photographer of the Inuit Tattoo Revitalization Project. Kavyaktok created photos for her *Inuit Gold Series*, a nod to The Cranberries’ music video “Zombie.”

Her subjects are dusted in gold and the backgrounds are deep and moody. One visitor to the opening called them ethereal. Kavyaktok spoke of her project: “We [Inuit women] went through three generations where we did not get tattoos. Recently I took a photograph of four generations of women who have reclaimed this cultural practice. I took a photograph of one of our Elders who had been taught to feel ashamed of her tattoos. I want us to be proud of ourselves.”

The photo colla ges of Nahinni Mckay depict her home of Banff on Treaty 7 territory. The collages show the stunning backdrop of the mountains, along with crowds and consumerism. Her work invites us to look at the relationship of the human impact of commercialization on the natural environment, and the role of the National Park System.



Ociciwan is an inanimate Plains Cree noun relating to current or river, translated to mean the current comes from there. The name references the North Saskatchewan river that has brought many people to the region over time. It conveys an energy of engagement with Indigenous contemporary culture, linking present with the past and the future.

From website: <https://www.ociciwan.ca>

The third featured artist is Seth Arcand. He used drones to photograph his home near Sandy Beach and used mirrored images set vertically to create reflections.

Arcand is a Cree filmmaker from Kipohtakaw Cree Nation (Alexander). The triptych explores shorelines that Arcand frequented as a child, and is a lament for the loss of territory that is no longer a source of food and sustenance for his people.

Overall, the exhibit invites viewers to reflect on our own understanding of land and culture — not as a disappeared past, but as a living relationship.

Exhibit
Through Their
Lens: Indigenous
Perspectives in Focus
Starting April 19
Ociciwan Contemporary
Art Centre
10124 96 St.
Open Wednesday through
Saturday from 12 to 5 pm.

COMMUNITY LEAGUE SWIM & GYM

SATURDAYS 3-5 PM & SUNDAYS 1-3 PM

CHECK WITH YOUR LEAGUE

League member discounts on rec centre passes
15% on multi pass or 20% on monthly/annual

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