

Rat Creek Press

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BY THE COMMUNITY—FOR THE COMMUNITY

WINTER 2025

Neighbourhood rinks on thin ice

How our coldest sports are having a tepid season opener



Steve Gower started the Parkdale Cromdale rink on Nov. 24 by pouring water on the asphalt to freeze overnight. | Karen Mykietka

JACOB ULICKIJ

“By my count, we’re seven days behind schedule,” says ice technician **Steve Gower**. “But we take what nature gives us.”

This year, many neighbourhood rinks — longtime winter anchors in our communities — are struggling to open at all.

Gower leans against his truck in the **Parkdale Cromdale Community League** parking lot as cool November air turns our breath to tiny clouds. Behind his long grey hair and dark working glasses is a cool disposition that rivals the mild start to winter that he and community leagues everywhere are adjusting to.

Despite 20 years of experience in laying ice for local rinks, he struggles with what the future holds for his work in creating and maintaining safe places where kids can experience the same opportunities that he and his children had. That uncertainty is felt across the city. The same can be said for **Eastwood Community League president Andrew Altimas**, as he announces the board’s decision to pause their community rink for the 2025-2026 winter season.

“Just because the rink lights were on, it didn’t always mean someone was there to supervise the space,” Altimas explains. “Not enough help, not enough engaged volunteers.”

Beyond staffing issues, rinks face new pressures from unpredictable weather, shifting demographics, and changing interests. All of it makes preparing for a safe, successful season more challenging

than it used to be.

“Skating is a communal activity,” Altimas remembers. “You meet up with a few friends and play hockey, or skate laps. It’s not as fun alone. It’s communal.”

Children with a stronger interest in screentime are less inclined to go outside and face the elements for fun. And, as Gower has learned through his decades of crafting ice, parents often get cold feet when it comes time to step up for volunteering opportunities.

“If it’s below 20, I’m going to be out here making ice. If it’s below 30, I’m going to be out here making ice” Gower says. “When a kid steps into my rink, they deserve to be happy.”

“Life is hard out there. But in here, it’s about giving them the best time possible.”

Through the years, Gower has watched generations slip, fall, and pick each other up. One thing he notes is that in addition to volunteers, there is an urgent need for paid roles in community-building.

“It’s more than just watching the ice,” Gower says. “You’re babysitting. Parents want a safe place for their kids, and that means stepping up and being a role model. To do that, you need them to trust you. It might not happen on the first day, but when it happens, you see it. Not just in the kids, but in their parents, too.”

“Just because the rink lights were on, it didn’t always mean someone was there to supervise the space,” Altimas explains. “Not enough help, not enough engaged volunteers.”

Instead of the stable, predictable winters that older generations remember, Edmonton’s ice techs (not to mention city crews) now face wild temperature swings.

In the eight winters since 2018, Edmonton recorded 27 lows at -30°C or colder — a number that once took nearly two decades to accumulate. Meanwhile, the **Understanding Edmonton’s Changing Climate 2025 report** shows winter precipitation down 31 per cent from the 1961–1990 baseline. Less snow and less moisture mean drought conditions, which make establishing ice on grass-based rinks — like Eastwood’s — significantly harder.

“You can flood it all you want,” says Gower, recalling his role at Eastwood rink. “But until you get permafrost, the soil drinks up everything you throw at it.”

Lastly, and most importantly to Gower, is the economic situation that many families face when deciding which hobbies they and their families can pursue. Not all community rink visitors have their own equipment, and not all facilities have rentals available. Skates, helmets, and even warm gloves can be expensive, and many lack the space to store them over the summer.

“The saddest thing about rinks like Eastwood closing down is how families are going to have to travel further for a

good experience,” he explains. “For a lot of people, that means more time hauling around heavy gear. What used to be a two-block-walk has turned into 10 or 12 if they need to head to Spruce Avenue or Delton instead.”

While Eastwood takes the winter off, Altimas and Gower are confident in a stronger season next year.

“Our rink will get new skaters every week, and so will Delton,” says Gower as he sweeps the ground in preparation for the first layer of ice in Parkdale. “When parents ask me what happened to their local rink, I’ll tell them, ‘Call your league and tell them you want to help!’”

“We don’t have the capacity this year,” says Altimas. “But, if people miss it, I’m confident it’ll come back better than ever with new volunteers.”

McCauley, Parkdale, Spruce Avenue, and Delton rinks remain open this coming season.

Parents with children aged 6-12 are encouraged to sign up for the ODR Core Free Learn to Skate Program: on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings at one of the rinks, for a family learning experience with all equipment provided.

Future Bus Rapid Transit: have your say

City of Edmonton proposes new solutions for traffic congestion



Photo: edmonton.ca

KAREN MYKIETKA

However you get around our city — car, bus, bike, scooter, or on your own two feet — you’ve probably noticed that the streets are busy! Gone are the days of COVID shutdowns where even major arterial roadways were deserted. It seems like any route you try to take is congested. Endless construction work everywhere is part of the problem, but there are more vehicles on the road as well. The combination of these two factors interact to worsen the problem of traffic congestion.

From 2022 to 2024, Edmonton’s population grew by over 100,000 people, putting the city at 1.2 million. According to the **Alberta Regional Dashboard**, Edmonton’s population has increased by 16 per cent in the last five years.

A third contributing factor is housing. As affordable housing becomes more difficult to find, people are commuting from the suburbs or neighbouring communities. More than 30 per cent of drivers on city roads do not live in Edmonton, according to a

2024 city council executive committee report.

To accommodate this and future growth, the city is planning and designing for future city-wide **Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)** routes as part of their Mass Transit Implementation project — a north-south route (B1) and an east-west route (B2). The BRT routes will complement the current bus and **Light Rail Transit (LRT)**. BRT is a planned network of high-speed, high-frequency bus routes with fewer stops using dedicated bus lanes to bypass traffic.

A segment of the BRT Route B1 (Castle Downs - Downtown - Century Park) needs to get from 111 Avenue to 118 Avenue through our Rat Creek community. Three possible routes for this segment have been identified and are currently being presented for public feedback. Residents and drivers along the chosen route may be impacted by changes to travel lanes for cars, turning permissions, and on-street parking. Existing mature trees and boulevards can also be impacted depending on the option selected.

The city is currently doing public and stakeholder engagement. They are hosting a public engagement drop-in event on Thursday, November 27 at the Alberta Avenue Community Centre from 5 to 8 pm, with a presentation at 6:30 pm.

There are two surveys running until December 5. You can complete them online at edmonton.ca/BusRapidTransit or pick up a paper survey on the south patio of the community centre.



Pick up a survey in front of the Alberta Avenue Community Centre. | Steven Michos

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Contributors

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.

Winter 2025

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.

Dustin D. Covey known artistically as Dook, is a western Canadian artist, illustrator, and author whose life spans pioneer prairie beginnings and the digital studio.

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.

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.

Maricarmen Copca is a visual artist who recently moved to Edmonton, she works with photography and illustration, both in analogue and digital forms.

Sherridon Routley is a friend of the community who enjoys urban exploring every corner of the city by bicycle.

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

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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.

Earth's Refillery Coop opens

Spices, staples, and so much more in the new McCauley location



If you're the type to keep a handful of reusable bags in your car, this new store invites you to take your sustainability to a new level.

Nestled among the familiar murals and shops of The Piazza YEG, **Earth's Refillery Coop** offers sustainable and packaging-free food, cleaning supplies, and personal care goods alongside their creative cafe creations.

"It can be shocking and confusing the first time," says founding member **Christine Neumann**. "But staff and customers around you are happy to help you."

A refillery means you may refill your used containers rather than buy

new packaging with every purchase. The intention is not only to reduce waste, but promote thinking about the things we keep and the things we throw away. Simply bring your clean empty containers and leave with them full of fresh staples.

"It's a little more complicated, maybe, but it's beneficial to slow down and have an intentional, slower-paced shopping trip in the week," explains Neumann.

Products are labelled with point of origin and their organic status. First-time shoppers will be excited to see just how many products — including sought-after herbs, teas, and vegan products — are sourced from right here in Alberta.

"We're locally sourced where possible, and locally owned by the same people you see working here," says Neumann.

As for the cooperative aspect of their business, they are pursuing a radical approach to business ownership, accountability, and community.



Founding member Michael Kalmanovitch during a moment of calm on opening day. | Jacob Ulickij

"From hiring, there is a candidacy period of six months," explains Neumann. "After that, if we're mutually excited about each other and the business, that employee can become a worker-member, which means buying and being equal with other owners."

"There is no boss at the top. There are no percentages taken out from sales. We take a look at the numbers and vote on how the income should be divided."

Customers can become **customer-members** through a one-time fee of \$5 and an annual \$20 subscription. Benefits of customer membership include a 2 per cent discount on refill and cafe goods, as well as rewards, voting rights, and opportunities for committee participation.

While initially slated to be a roastery, complications with the roasting equipment mean on-site roasting will be delayed until the machinery can be properly serviced. Until then,

Neumann remains excited and proud of the unique drinks and snacks provided by their cafe.

Earth's Refillery Coop is confident in creating a compassionate business to face a disposable world. Stop by with an open mind and an empty jar to enjoy competitive pricing on everyday goods, alongside a unique approach to how we can shop.



Opening day in McCauley. | Photo by Jacob Ulickij

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Local strongman wins big on world stage

Celebrating Rat Creek’s strongest man

JACOB ULICKIJ

At 53 years old, this Eastwood legend isn’t only lifting the bar for fitness at his age — he’s lifting it for Canada.

Darcy Morin is no stranger to showing off his strength on stage. Having lifted his way through local, provincial, and divisional competitions, Darcy’s double gold in his weight class and age division at the **2025 Canadian Powerlifting Union (CPU) Nationals** in Moose Jaw secured him a coveted place on Team Canada.

Recently, Morin returned from the **World Masters Powerlifting Championships 2025** in Cape Town, South Africa, where he helped secure Canada a 5th place in overall points.

“I’m savouring it a lot more now,” Morin says. “At first, there was a sting, maybe some unrealized potential. But you know, I went there, and I did it. I’m pinching myself because I can’t believe I went on this adventure.”

Beyond physical strength, powerlifting demands precise form, respect for judges’ calls, and the ability to adapt under pressure. Even more, it demands a level of mental flexibility that can throw off routines and upper weight limits that athletes have practiced for months.

“We took a conservative approach with our first squat,” recalls Morin. “We started at the upper limit of my training, but when that first unsuccessful lift was called, we had to adjust on the fly. Do we appeal? Or do we

press on to a new weight?”

Only two of his three lifts were deemed successful. But, as he left the stage after an impressive 255 kg squat, he missed an important announcement.

“To be honest, after the squat competition I was moping a bit in the back between warmups...” Darcy (often called ‘Darce’ by his nearest and dearest) explains. Christy [his wife] came around to get me some food, and I’m welling up with tears. I tell her how badly I wanted to bring something home. That’s when my coach walks in and tells me — Darce, you won a medal.”

Having settled back into life at home, Morin carries not just that bronze medal, but gratitude for the journey.

“One of the most profound experiences was at Cape of Good Hope, staring out at where the Indian Ocean meets the Atlantic,” Morin says. “It was incredible seeing the surf pounding the beach, feeling the enormity of it all, and sharing it with my wife, Christy.”

It is thanks to donations from family, friends, and encouraging strangers that the Morin family could share in the experience — and maintain Christy’s perfect attendance record for her husband’s competitions.

“The fundraiser was successful,” Morin says. “With that help, the amount we had to cover was within the budget, and we’re ridiculously grateful for everyone who was able to share.”

When asked what others could take from his journey, he reminds us that athleticism is a path we walk beyond the stage.

“It’s important to ask, ‘What kind of athlete do I want to be?’ When you pick, you make intentional choices about how you sleep, how you eat, how you train, or how you do anything. I don’t think people always see it that way, though. I believe it’s the same as picking what kind of artist you want to be.”

And for the kids and adults who follow his journey as an intercontinental competitor, Morin hopes they remember that strength starts with small, everyday choices — ones anyone in our neighbourhood can make.

“We’re physical beings, we’re spiritual, and we’re creative. We can be the athletes and artists we want to be. But we have to remember that we can make that choice for ourselves.”



Warming up. | Darcy Morin



Morin, bottom left, poses with Team Canada. | Darcy Morin



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Avenue of Champions is rebranding

A long awaited change comes to Alberta Avenue

SHERRIDON ROUTLEY

Avenue of Champions, established in the early 2000s to represent the winning nature of our city, has been overdue for a change. With the Oilers playing at the Coliseum and the Edmonton Eskimos (now named the Edmonton Elks) being a popular draw at the Commonwealth Stadium, Alberta Avenue seemed a logi-



The giant bat stands ready at the corner of 118 Ave. and the busy 97 St. | Sherridon Routley

cal choice for the designation. Over 200 figurines and a controversial giant bat were put up along 118 Avenue in an attempt to spruce up the street and overcome its reputation as an area plagued by crime, drugs and prostitution.

The Oilers’ legacy at the aging Coliseum came to an end with the last Oilers game on April 6, 2016, against the Vancouver Canucks (Oilers winning 6-2 with Leon Draisaitl scoring the final goal). In 2017, Arts on the Ave tried to continue the relevance of the ‘Champions’ moniker by celebrating the diverse business owners who immigrated and established themselves in the area through events and a documentary. However, with the Ice District cemented as the current home of the Oilers, the dated connection was confusing to the current generation of businesses and residents. Moreover, Alberta Avenue has come to represent a community spirit that celebrates togetherness and diversity through events, businesses, and arts.

But what happened to put the gears of change in motion? “The initial trigger was the need to remove some existing sculptures to make space for the public bathroom in Alberta Avenue,” explains **Erick Estrada**, the **Executive Director of the Alberta Avenue Business Association** (AABA). “From there, the Alberta Avenue Board directed us to

explore a plan to acknowledge the importance of the past brand while exploring an updated image for the district.”

In March 2024, at a meeting of over 40 people from organizations in the area, community partners, and neighbours, there was overwhelming consensus that the time for change was now and a committee was formed. “Since then, the committed group of volunteers has asked themselves what the best way is to engage with the community for this task, given the avail-

able resources, and which questions to ask to avoid being biased,” says Estrada. The group is made up of neighbours, community leaders, city staff, and business association board members and staff who will survey

area residents as to their thoughts on the transition. The group will then recommend the next steps to the AABA board of directors.

Details about plans for the existing sculptures are not yet formed, but the committee wants to ensure they “acknowledge the importance of sports in the area while also better reflecting the new ideas and communities emerging

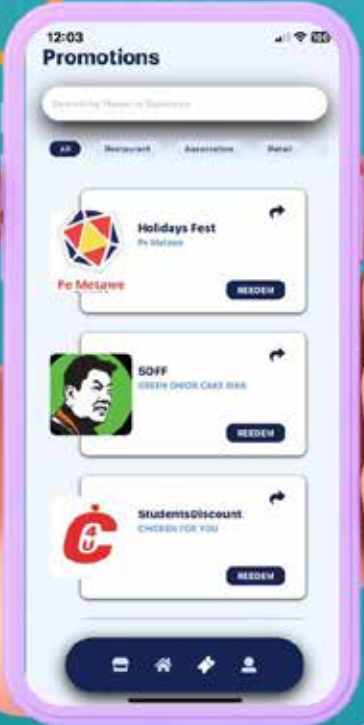


Even cycle sports got included in the metal cutouts that decorate the Ave. | Sherridon Routley

“The committee wants to ensure they “acknowledge the importance of sports in the area while also better reflecting the new ideas and communities emerging here.”

here.” Of note is the 50-foot-long metal bat that weighs about 2,500 lb. and cost \$80,000, which drew criticism from residents who questioned its garish nature and appropriateness in representing the area. In 2010, a petition was launched to bring down the bat, which residents complained didn’t represent the artistic spirit of the area. It is unclear if or how the bat will be removed or moved, but one logical option is to relocate it to the Re/Max Field, home of the Edmonton Riverhawks Baseball Club. Not everyone views the bat as an eyesore though, and there is already a petition online to “Save the Bat.”

The actual timeline of the project is not set in stone. The survey is the first step in the process, but the committee aims to begin work in 2026. What are your ideas for the future of Alberta Avenue and the legacy of the “Avenue of Champions”?





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TODAY

KinnArt Ravine Mural Project in its 10th year

Sixty-two new Free Arts murals grace Kinnaird Ravine



(LEFT) Young Leyland Augustine's cat Kiki is up against Godzilla in a witty mural. | Rauldon Augustine
(RIGHT) Painting 62 new murals at Parkdale Cromdale Community League during the summer of 2025. | Constance Brissenden

CONSTANCE BRISSENDEN

Weekend after weekend this past summer, volunteers arrived to paint. Their passion for the KinnArt Ravine Mural Project accomplished the incredible — almost impossible — goal of creating 62 new murals to replace an equal number of aging ones in the open-air “art gallery” of Kinnaird Ravine. Now in its 10th year, the mural project is a Free Arts Society not-for-profit activity that has survived and thrived. Once again, Free Arts (formerly CreArt) offered an accessible cultural activity open to all ages and abilities.

For founder and coordinator **Sebastian Barrera**, it’s a huge matter of pride. “Ten years is a big milestone for any community-based project,” says Barrera. “The community has never given up on it. This year their creativity blossomed. We had up to 50 volunteers involved from all walks of life. Some have been painting with us for many years. It is thrilling to see their growth as artists. For others, it was a new experience.”

Leyland Augustine was 10 years old when his father, **Rauldon Augustine**, painted his first mural in 2022. Rauldon’s painting was of textures and shapes, with the word “love” in bright colours. This year, Rauldon painted a fiery phoenix, with pride colours on its wings and the top of its head. MLA Janis Irwin described it as vibrant and colourful, and so it is.

Young Leyland helps his father paint and also does his own murals. His first subjects were his two cats, Kiki and Roxy. This year, now in grade 8, Leyland again created his own artwork, sharing a panel with a friend. His friend painted a towering, fire-breathing Godzilla. Leyland’s response was playful, including Kiki once again. The amazing cat now wields a weapon to eliminate Godzilla and save the world.

“I feel proud that I did a really good painting,” says Leyland.

His dad Rauldon is also proud, “Leyland has his unique way of doing art. He likes his cats and showcases his cats in a fun way.”

on September 20, Community League Day. The significance of this special day, marked throughout the City of Edmonton, was not lost on Sebastian Barrera. “The community collective made the project stronger.” He credits the ongoing support of Parkdale Cromdale Community League as a prime mover.

What started with Barrera, now reflects the commitment of dozens. “Through the years, more and more people have come to take over. I can now take breaks. They cover my back. The collective now moves the project forward,” Barrera says with heartfelt appreciation.

He doesn’t know the names of all volunteers. One couple, husband and wife, were newcomers who didn’t speak any English. They did two murals, both of black-and-white pandas. “The husband pointed to the pandas, and then to me,” laughs Barrera. “They saw a resemblance, and I agree!”

Consistency has translated into the spirit of “not giving up.” Estimating the number of project days and volunteer hours, with a monetary value of \$15 an hour, Barrera says the value to the city is \$56,000. The actual cost was between \$6,000 and \$8,000.

He gratefully thanks the City of Edmonton, Parkdale Cromdale Community League, Parks Edmonton, and the Edmonton Arts Council for their financial support. Volunteers joined from the Elizabeth Fry Society Edmonton, Newcomer Centre,

Solace, and Rachel John-West of Secret Garden Studio.

Access to the murals is by way of the public path from **Sherriff Robertson Park at 82 Street and 111 Avenue**. A few steps into the ravine open your eyes to the beauty and diversity of Edmonton’s KinnArt Ravine Mural Project.

Want to support Free Arts?

The KinnArt Mural Project is one of many art initiatives Free Arts opens for everyone to join.

To donate, call 587-879-7738 or send an e-transfer to freeartsociety@gmail.com

Sign up on the website and access more info: www.freeartsociety.org

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A fiery phoenix by Rauldon Augustine lights up the Kinnaird Ravine. | Constance Brissenden



Sebastian Barrera (front) and smiling volunteer painters celebrate a summer of creativity. | supplied

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RCP remains an independent voice

In a digital age, print newspapers best reflect the community



Publisher Karen Mykietka shares Rat Creek Press with Usama Omar, newly hired marketing coordinator for the Alberta Avenue Business Association. | Constance Brissenden

CONSTANCE BRISSENDEN

More than 27 years ago, local organizations created the Rat Creek Press (RCP). In late 2005, **Karen Mykietka** took it over and it was the launch of independent reporting in the Alberta Avenue area of Edmonton.

Over time, RCP has grown into a much-loved and influential local newspaper.

Two years ago, Mykietka called out to community members: “Do you want RCP to continue publishing? Does RCP have your support?” The answer was a resounding “yes.”

RCP continues to publish four times a year and distributes about 13,000 copies free of charge to houses and apartments in the Alberta Avenue, Delton, Eastwood, Elmwood Park, Parkdale Cromdale, Spruce Avenue, and Westwood areas. Every 18 months or so, RCP conducts a two-day casino fundraiser which requires 34 volunteers to step up. This is its major source of funding. Other funding comes

from advertising and smaller grants.

Seasonal grants open doors for writers, editors, and video news creators. **Rebekah Brunham**, for example, worked at RCP as a summer student in 2024. She is now contributing articles to the Edmonton Journal.

Community newspapers like RCP are becoming rarer by the year. The **Whitehorse Star**, Yukon’s long-running newspaper, was forced to close in 2024. After 120 years, its publishers could not afford to continue.

Alberta still has **The Macleod Gazette**, established in July 1882. Located in downtown Macleod, the office includes a mini-museum related to the weekly newspaper. Publisher/editor **Frank McTighe** and advertising manager (and wife) **Emily McTighe** proudly display several early press cameras and Underwood typewriters. The couple bought the newspaper in 2001 and continue to write, edit, sell advertising, and publish with Sharon Monical, their sole production staffer.

“We are truly independent, not part of any newspaper chain,” says Frank McTighe. “If we didn’t report the news for ourselves, Fort Macleod and our area wouldn’t get any attention.”

The town’s response to the newspaper is tremendous. Adds Emily McTighe, “They love us, because we cover local news.”

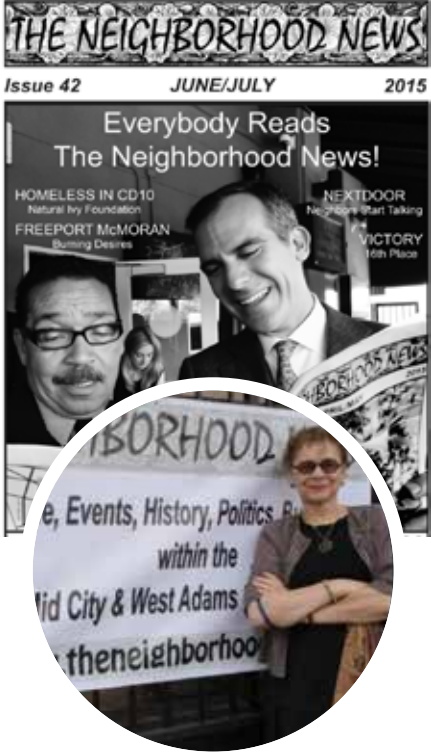
The RCP board recently had a visit from **Dianne V. Lawrence**, a Canadian-US citizen living in Los Angeles. A performer, painter, writer, animal activist, and dog trainer, Lawrence published **The Neighborhood News** magazine in her adopted city for 13 years, responding to the needs of her Mid City/West Adams community.

Back in 2008, during a US financial crisis, Lawrence saw a need for independent reporting. “I started the magazine to keep people informed, not only about our local politicians but also about everything else that was going on.”

Like RCP, she focused on what made her community stand out. “West Adams is an important community that has nothing to do with Hollywood. It has a really amazing and rich Black history.” With nowhere to distribute the magazine during the Covid pandemic, Lawrence closed it down. “People were really getting into their phones for news,” she told the RCP board.

Rat Creek Press bravely pushes forward with a new board chair, **Natasha P. Russell**, and a healthy array of contributors. Plans are being formed for new programs to connect with local businesses.

As the outgoing board chair, I applaud publisher Karen Mykietka’s commitment to RCP. More than anyone, she understands the pulse of the seven communities served. RCP is your place to learn about our people, history, businesses, programs, politics, trends, and activities. May it continue to thrive!



Dianne V. Lawrence began publishing to share local news and honour her Los Angeles community’s rich Black history. | Photo provided.

You can support RCP by buying a membership of \$50/year or \$5/month. Become a member by becoming a paid subscriber on Substack (ratcreekpress.substack.com). Subscribe (paid or free) and receive RCP articles and video stories as they are published digitally. If you don’t receive RCP at your door, pick up a copy at the Alberta Avenue Community League (9210 118 Ave.).

Please Join us for a

Parkdale Cromdale Community League

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Are homes a right or a privilege?

How access to housing became more difficult than ever



Image | Adobe stock

GAIL SILVIUS

Our family’s first house was a two-room “shack”, which provided shelter while my father and our neighbours built our home. In the following weeks and months, these same men gathered their tools and went off to frame up a neighbour’s house and put on a roof. Although incomes were modest, home ownership in our post-war, heavily immigrant section of the city was possible for working class families.

Now we are looking at a very different reality for those families.

Jim Gurnett, former MLA and member of the **Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness**, told me in an interview last January that the “catastrophe of homelessness has its roots in the mid 1990s when the federal government stopped funding affordable housing. This has resulted in a deficit of tens of thousands of units each year.” With the exit of the federal government’s support for affordable housing, most development was underwritten by the private sector and, instead of housing being seen as shelter, it became a financial investment. Years of low interest rates made real estate a commodity, rather than an essential service. In the 1960s, home prices were on average three times a typical annual salary. Presently, that ratio is closer to 10 to 1 (for example, \$700,000 home to \$70,000). The **Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation** (CMHC) reports

that between 2001 and 2022, housing prices have risen 300 per cent. All other costs, groceries, utilities, fuel has risen about 43 per cent over that same period. The CMHC further estimates that 3.5 million new homes will be needed by the end of the decade, in addition to the 2.3 million already projected. Reliance on the free market to provide housing leaves many, especially the very low-(under \$20,000 annually) and low-income (under \$45,000) populations outpriced in the rental market. The estimate is that a single, very low-income person can afford about \$500 in monthly rent. A recipient of **Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped** (AISH) in Alberta has a monthly income of around \$1,900. A senior on Old Age Security/ Guaranteed Income Supplement receives about \$1,700 a month. An accepted notion is that housing costs above 30 per cent of income are not affordable. Housing for the poor has always been precarious. There is often a tradeoff between affordability and decent conditions, like insulation and working appliances. Landlords often maximize their returns by simply ignoring maintenance and upkeep, knowing that there are few alternatives for low-income tenants. When housing costs are too high a percentage of monthly income, families are forced to choose between rent or food. The **Alberta Living Wage Network** estimates the minimum hourly wage a full-time single worker needs to make in 2025 to afford a rental in Edmonton at \$22.30. Today’s housing crisis has expanded

beyond the poorest, to include what is called the “missing middle,” as even people with so-called middle-class incomes are priced out of the private market. Many two-income families are paying more than 30 per cent of their income on rent or their own home mortgages. The **City of Edmonton’s Affordable Housing Strategic Plan for 2023-2026**, using Government of Alberta data, states that at least 1,500 people in Edmonton are accessing emergency shelters on a nightly basis. Civida, the city’s largest non-profit housing provider, has a wait list of 10,000 applicants, some waiting up to seven years for access to adequate, affordable housing.

Addressing the crisis

Several non-profit organizations in Edmonton provide supportive housing. This housing philosophy, in addition to supplying physical housing, provides support to tenants who face challenges such as mental health or addictions. This requires heavy operational funding for support staff. It is not embraced by the private market. Without subsidisation, these types of housing cannot operate. Advocates argue that the societal savings to health care — and often to the criminal justice system — offset these costs. Harder to quantify is the human cost of homelessness to individuals and families. None of the solutions to a lack of housing are simple. There is a strong culture promoting detached single family homes as superior to multiple-family homes, and home ownership over rental

housing. As the city grows, pressures on land and infrastructure may make those cultural biases shift. For many young people, there is little opportunity to enter the home ownership market without help from family co-signing mortgages or giving cash infusions for down payments. Infill housing, which will primarily increase rental stock, is often opposed by other homeowners. From a land use perspective, housing six to eight families on land that formerly would house only one or two is more sustainable. Gregor Craigie’s 2024 book *Our Crumbling Foundation* is a well-researched resource for those interested in housing solutions. He looks at Canada, as well as some international examples. His book offers ideas about co-op housing in Germany, modular housing construction in Mexico, and other approaches like land leases, which can result in a 30 per cent lower building cost, as land purchase price is not a factor. The housing crisis and its human cost is not going away soon. Climate change is making insurance costs and coverage more expensive. There is pressure on infrastructure and agricultural land as cities sprawl into the countryside. November is housing month, and the search for actions and solutions continues. The fundamental question we face is whether housing is a right that is a collective responsibility or a privilege for the few.

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Supportive Housing with heart

Inside NiGiNan Housing Ventures - McArthur Place



Support staff and residents gather in the cultural space | Sherridon Routley

SHERRIDON ROUTLEY

With November being **Edmonton Housing Month** and November 22 being **National Housing Day**, I was privileged to view one of the flagship examples of supportive housing for Indigenous people. The **NiGiNan Housing Ventures** “is an Indigenous-led, registered charity, serving individuals with complex medical and social needs who are often described as the ‘hardest to house’,” says the official website. Indigenous people make up approximately 5 per cent of Edmonton’s general population, yet they account for an estimated 55 to 65 per cent of those experiencing homelessness.

The impressive **McArthur Place** is located on the edge of the Wellington neighbourhood overlooking the route to St. Albert. As I walked into the clean and sunny atrium entrance I already had a sense of community, with residents sharing games, karaoke, or watching TV shows. I was directed to the ceremonial meeting and crafts room that looked out onto the communal space through a glass wall. It was clear that many ceremonies and native crafts were performed here, as sage was drying from branches above and many completed paintings decorated the walls.

Maria, an overseer for the Homeward Trust’s funding and support for the facility, welcomed me and about 10 others, mostly support and placement staff from the Mustard Seed. **Suzie Bad Eagle** introduced herself and other on-site staff in attendance and, after a group smudge and prayer, gave us a summary of what the NiGiNan Housing Ventures property offered to its residents.

Meeting them where they are at

The NiGiNan Housing Ventures focuses on housing and recovery from an Indigenous perspective — they meet

those in crisis where they currently are in life with their addictions and abilities. Part of that is showing residents trust with open doors to amenities and no on-site security, instead preferring to use de-escalation techniques to address conflicts. Aside from a nurse and counsellor being there 24/7, all staff are trained in Red Cross First Aid, Psychological First Aid, and Verbal Crisis Intervention Training. McArthur Place is proud to now have a house doctor that visits residents on site to avoid the past trauma some Indigenous people have experienced navigating the medical system. The

broken people, and that’s the way I’ve always viewed them. They have a void that they’re trying to fill, and we have to recognize they are all human.” Although no illicit substances are allowed on the premises, there is a managed alcohol and cannabis program that allows those with severe drug and alcohol disorders to reduce their consumption at their own pace. This helps prevent symptoms of withdrawal and provides alternatives to street-level drug abuse. Shared public spaces are monitored via camera surveillance for staff and resident safety. There are security protocols, such as a pocket check before using the elevators, a door-to-door wellness check every couple hours, and a perimeter check that extends off site to make sure the communal members are safe.

Communal involvement is key

Leonard, from the Alexander First Nation, spoke about his cultural team duties and how they try to reconnect people to their Indigenous culture as part of rehabilitation and healing: “I use natural laws in my teachings that I’ve received and used in my life every day. It’s the same values that our people carried a long time ago.” Leonard facilitates a meeting called “Well-briety” which is like an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, from an Indigenous perspective. During that session, which involves a sharing circle, smudging, and song, they share stories from the heart that helps the team and the residents connect with each other. Field trips are arranged through the summer: picking medicine on the land, cutting wood, and collecting rocks for sweats. **Gabe**, another member of the cultural team, spoke about the Indigenous-led

hunting trips where they get to experience the preparation of hides and game animals. “We try to get people away from their addictions by connecting with their culture again and connecting with themselves, with their own spirituality,” said Gabe. Although Indigenous teachings are at the heart of the recovery practices, all views and religious beliefs are honoured. On-site staff participate in the cleaning of the facility and residents are encouraged not only to keep their space tidy, but help with the building maintenance. Staff members also facilitate trips for the residents to the grocery or mall, so they can use their own budgeted savings to get snacks and other treats.

A welcome home

McArthur Place houses 50 units on six floors (including 10 accessible suites) for those with long-term support needs including mental illness, addiction, chronic health conditions, or cognitive problems. After viewing a few staff areas, we were directed to the heart of the building — the kitchen. Residents are provided three meals a day from a professional full kitchen that makes healthy meals from scratch, keeping their needs and likes in mind. Some residents are encouraged to cook for themselves if they want, and receive support through that process as well. After viewing the shared balcony and laundry facilities that are available on every floor, we were invited to view one resident’s unit that represented “a great success story” of recovery to the staff. It was much like any modern apartment you would be happy to live in, with all the amenities including television, internet, and phone. The bathroom and bedroom were well designed and, in the small living area, you could see that the occupant cared about their space and valued the environment they lived in.

What we can learn from this housing venture

After visiting the program, I am left with a feeling that culturally-led Indigenous housing implemented this way can be one important step towards truth and reconciliation. The process of harm reduction through dignity, trust, and Indigenous knowledge seems a fitting way to heal the harms of colonization. Not only do those with complex needs benefit from his approach, but the programs and techniques that are developed and tested here are a pathway forward to address the current Indigenous housing crisis. Find out more about NiGiNan Housing Ventures on their website.

Suites are modern, compact, and cozy | Photo Sherridon Routley



staff also training in-house from an Indigenous perspective that helps them address their ancestry, generational trauma, cultural practices, and teachings. “They’re broken, and you see them out in the community, they’re not bad people,” Suzie says regarding those who newly arrive at the program. “They’re

deliver developed an Indigenous perspective that helps them address their ancestry, generational trauma, cultural practices, and teachings.

Rat Creek Press

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Beauty in everyday life

A photo essay of neighbourhood walks by Maricarmen Copca



Spring looks white too, taken with phone camera, Spring 2025.



Face, taken with phone camera, Fall 2025.



Caterpillar, taken with phone camera, Summer 2025.

This photographic series captures the quiet beauty of walks around my neighbourhood: the curves of tree trunks, interesting shadows, and the accidental faces formed by windows. In these moments, the ordinary turns interesting. Mundane landscapes, when closely observed, reveal beauty in everyday life.



Organic patterns, taken with phone camera, Summer 2025.



A tree, taken with phone camera, Summer 2025.

Maricarmen Copca is a visual artist who recently moved to Edmonton, she works with photography and illustration, both in analogue and digital forms, and has collaborated in different countries. She wants to share her work with Edmontonians!
You can check more of her work on her IG account: @_keiiii

Now hiring? How about now?

Technology could be both a tool and an obstacle for job seekers



Word-of-mouth and your network connections are an important part of finding work. | Pixabay.com

KEVIN BLAKEMAN

Finding steady work used to be about effort. Application, even — if you excuse the pun. But it seems as though the application process is changing

Over the past few months, I've sent out hundreds of resumes for jobs which appeared to be a good match. From office and operations roles to entry-level positions. Anything to get my foot back in the door. I've fine-tuned my cover letters, customized my experience, and applied for everything that made sense (and sure, probably a few things which were a bit of a stretch). The result? Mostly silence. Once in a while I'll get a polite, usually automated rejection email. But most of the time, nothing at all.

I'm aware that looking to change careers at 45 is probably not helping my situation, but speaking to others in our community leads me to believe this story

is part of a trend other Edmontonians can relate to, and it concerns me. The job boards are full, but between automated systems, high competition, and employers who never follow up, it can feel like nobody's really listening.

A 2024 survey conducted by resume builder company **MyPerfectResume** indicated that 81 per cent of recruiters have admitted to posting jobs which were fake or already filled. This includes so-called 'ghost jobs' which, as the name suggests, do not really exist. Then automated, AI-powered systems screen resumes long before a human ever sees them.

So up to 36 per cent off job adverts are fake and, if the job is real, there's a good chance a human will never lay eyes on your application... but each tailored resume and sculpted cover letter takes an emotional toll. All that application fine-tuning takes time you don't have. Every ignored application chips away at your confidence a little more. You start wondering whether you're doing something wrong. Or has the system itself simply shifted in a way that leaves people like you behind?

I've worked in quality assurance and project management for over 20 years. A solid career in the software industry. When I decided to change paths, I expected the process to take time. What I didn't expect was how impersonal and uncertain looking for work would be in 2025.

Most of the work I've actually found hasn't come through job postings at all. It's come through people. A friend who knew someone hiring for a short-term

industrial coating job in Fort McMurray, a neighbour who needed someone to walk their dog, a friend who just needed some help around the house. Those word-of-mouth opportunities are what have kept me working, learning new skills, and meeting new people.

It's gig work. Flexible, but unpredictable. One week you're busy, the next you're not. You might fill those gaps delivering food with one of the apps, but whichever way you look at it there are no benefits, no paid days off, and no guarantees. There is, however, a certain resilience that comes from it. You start realizing how many people around you are in the same boat. Smart, skilled, and willing to work, but caught

"What I didn't expect was how impersonal and uncertain looking for work would be in 2025"

You now apply for most jobs online and often AI-powered systems screen the resumes | Pixabay.com

in a job market that doesn't seem to place as much value on personal interaction.

Every conversation, every recommendation, and every small job still matters. In a market driven by algorithms, human connection has opened more doors for me than any online application. It's somehow through friends, neighbours, and community networks that opportunities seem to actually develop. Technology has made applications easier, but technology also seems to be making it harder and harder for people to make connections. Until that changes, a lot of us will keep delivering, walking dogs, doing odd jobs... and hoping the next conversation leads to something steady



EASTWOOD COMMUNITY LEAGUE

RINK EVENTS

Sorry no ice at Eastwood Rink this year. Watch for other winter events at the rink over the winter/spring.

FUN!

NEED HELP?

COFFEE WITH MARTHA

Mondays, 6-8 pm at the hall (11803 86 St)
Talk, emotional support, connect to resources

CASINO VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

April 27 & 28, 2026 @ Yellowhead Casino
Email: engage@eastwoodhub.org

HELP US!

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Eastwood Community League

WE ARE HIRING!

We are looking for a local resident for the role of **Neighbourhood Connector**

Part-time contract position around 10 hours/week for 6-9 months. The hours are highly variable and primarily self directed.

The purpose is to develop and promote vibrant neighbourhood life in Eastwood.

The Neighbourhood Connector is responsible for identifying, mobilizing, encouraging and supporting residents to get involved with each other and the community league.

Interested? Contact us to learn more:
engage@eastwoodhub.org

Bill 9 and young lives

A trans perspective from within the community



Photo by Hakeem James Hausley | Pexels.com

If passed, Bill 9, the Protecting Alberta’s Children Statutes Amendment Act, invokes the notwithstanding clauses in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Alberta Bill of Rights, and Alberta Human Rights Act to ensure certain new laws cannot be struck down by the courts.

These laws include prohibiting both gender reassignment surgery for children under 18 and the provision of puberty blockers and hormone treatments for the purpose of gender reassignment to children under 16.

Additionally, it amends sections of the Education Act that require schools to obtain parental consent when a student under 16 years of age wishes to change his or her name or pronouns for reasons related to the student’s gender identity, and require parental opt-in consent to teaching on gender identity, sexual orientation, or human sexuality.

Rat Creek Press interviewed a fully-transitioned volunteer from our community to discuss her perspectives on how legislation, culture, and access to medicine enabled her to live a fulfilling life:

When did you know that you were a trans person?

Basically my whole life. The earliest I realized was when I wasn’t allowed to do the same things my girl friends were doing, like pool parties and sleepovers. I was different.

The first time I heard the word transgender, I was 12 and in an online chat-room. Someone was talking about their transgender sister. I googled it and read the page, crying, realizing there were other people like me.

What led up to this realization?

I wasn’t allowed to do girly things because it would be gay. But I wasn’t gay. I didn’t know there was another option. I felt like I didn’t want to be with girls, but I wanted to be them.

Did those feelings change over time?

I realized as I got older, I was forced into a life I didn’t agree with. I was different. My mom was supportive, but older men would harass me. All my friends would wear bikinis with their tops covered, but I was forced to uncover, even if it felt wrong. I was screaming and crying as people forced clothes off me, but that didn’t matter. I learned I wasn’t allowed to be myself around adults.

As I got older, I wouldn’t look at myself naked. I wouldn’t touch myself. I didn’t want to be touched. I felt like it wasn’t my body.

What took this from a sense of confusion to a medical intervention?

I always knew I was different, but I didn’t know if there was anyone else like me. It wasn’t about masculinity or sex or attraction. I wanted to wear dresses, have long hair, and wear pink — even if I was punished. But puberty changed things.

What did puberty mean to you?

As a kid, people said if I ate vegetables, it’d put hair on my chest. So I didn’t. Puberty meant becoming a brute, bearish, hairy person who I knew I wasn’t.

Were you afraid of puberty?

I was terrified. Without blockers, I don’t think I’d be alive.

Bill 9 is preventing access to puberty blockers. What did puberty blockers give you in terms of your life and future?

It gave me patience and hope. Even if everything felt difficult and painful, I was on a path. I had resources online, but otherwise I was figuring everything out. Blockers gave me time until the next step, like hormones. They gave me safety.

Tell me about those steps.

My male teachers were bullying me so hard that I was taken out of school in sixth grade. I tried again in seventh, but gave up again by eighth. Even then, you had to get a psychological and psychiatric evaluation before you were referred to a specialist who could prescribe blockers. Then, you had to live as your preferred gender for two years before you were even considered for hormones.

What did those two years look like?

Being out of school, I was able to transition socially without being accountable to a social group. I got away with calling myself a new name since I had been calling myself that since childhood, but pretending it was an imaginary friend.

Those two years meant everything to me. I was able to present as I wanted to and wear the clothes I wanted to. People had always asked if I was a boy or a girl, but now I was able to lean into everything. People didn’t ask if I was a boy or a girl anymore. I was a girl.

Do you feel you were supported by the medical community when you started working with a doctor?

Yes. It wasn’t easy, and there was a lot of challenge in finding resources. But once I found them, they were extremely supportive of me.

Was this provincial health or online?

Provincial Grey Nuns. Doctor [Lorne] Warneke was a psychiatrist who specialized in trans lives.

So you lived as your chosen identity from age 13 to 15 on blockers. When did you get approved for hormones?

I started hormones at 15.

Was there ever any doubt during this period?

Zero. It is the only thing I’m sure of, and it was the only thing keeping me going.

So you start taking hormones. Then what?

My body stabilized. You’re not able to get surgery until you’re 18. When I turned 18, I applied for surgery, and was put on a two-year wait list.

Eighteen is a confusing age for anyone, especially a trans adult. What does life look like as you’re growing up and navigating the world like other young adults?

It was complicated, since socially, no one knew but my mother and my sister. Nobody knew. I wasn’t ashamed, but I didn’t have community. Dating was hard. Otherwise, I was trying to figure out what I want to do with my life, what my hobbies are, and who my friends are.

Life was confusing, but everything except what was in my underwear felt like it belonged to me.

What else about life? IDs, applications?

Socially, it was difficult. I’d go to get my IDs changed and sometimes I’d luck out and the secretaries would think someone made a mistake and simply change my gender. Other times, it felt like there was nothing for systems or training since the people working wouldn’t know what to do.

How did you feel when you received the call for surgery?

I broke down crying. My mom held me. I knew everything would be alright.

Who performed the surgery, and was it covered?

The surgery was covered by Alberta health care. I was flown to Montreal to see Dr. Brassard with a one-week stay for recovery. They paid for everything.

Your surgery was completed in 2010 under federal and provincial conservative governments. Given your lived experience, were you surprised to grow up and watch trans lives become politicized?

They always have been, but now it’s in the open. I don’t understand why these people are so obsessed when none of them know transgender people or have

trans friends, family, or coworkers. They speak online like we’re boogeymen, but we live normal lives alongside them.

Do you think it’s right for people, both pro-and-anti trans, to focus on this issue?

It’s great that there is more awareness and representation, but trans people just want to live their lives and not be so politically charged all the time.

You don’t identify as trans, but as a woman. Is there a difference?

I identify as a woman, but I don’t think “trans woman” is a dirty word either. I am a woman. If others want to make labels and categories, they can do so if they want.

How do you feel about Bill 9 and those it will affect?

It’s not right. Trans people have been around long before me, and they’ll continue to exist long after. The good thing is that there are resources online, even drugs. You have to have your wits about you, but if I had to transition today, it’s a risk I’d be willing to take.

Do you think Bill 9 will stop people from transitioning?

People are going to transition regardless. Only now, you’re forcing them to do it under more dangerous circumstances, like ordering drugs online or pursuing sex work to get people with credit cards to help them. One day, their parents will have to ask why they don’t know their kids, and that will be why. You’re forcing kids to live double lives, and there will be consequences to that.

Adding obstacles doesn’t stop transitioning people. It only makes it more dangerous.

How would this bill have affected you as a child?

It probably would have killed me. It’s harmful to ban puberty blockers for children under 16 because that’s when it’s needed most. If you change your mind, the decision is reversible and your body will continue producing the hormones it would have anyways. But banning surgery for minors makes no sense to me since children aren’t eligible for the surgery anyways. It’s virtue signalling.

Because of timely access to blockers, hormones, and surgery, I get to live life as a normal woman and no one would guess any differently. I own a business, work in the community, and pay taxes. My past is no one’s business — even to most people who are close to me. That’s a privilege from having blockers at the right time, and I’m sad for others who won’t get the same chance.

If you could sit down with the current administration and tell them anything about your life, your journey, and your humanity, what would you want to say?

I’d tell them I’m a girl. I have my own life. I’m not some deviant. I’m not in a cult. I want to eat pizza with my cat. I want hobbies and to go to work. I’m just trying to get by day to day living the only life I have in a way that fulfills me. Let me live it.

“I’m a girl. I have my own life. I’m not some deviant. I’m not in a cult. I want to eat pizza with my cat. I want hobbies and to go to work.”

“I surround myself with people who don’t know I’m trans, and when they speak out against trans lives, I realize they don’t know what they’re talking about. They don’t understand who or what they hate, because I’m right here in front of them”

Paris, mais non

My travel bucket list had a hole in it



The Eiffel Tower (left) from the roof of Galeries Lafayette, a spectacular department store. Constance Brissenden (in hat) enjoyed this free view. | Angela Brady



Angela Brady walks past Paris graffiti. | Constance Brissenden



Parks of all sizes dot Paris. Constance Brissenden explored many. | Angela Brady

CONSTANCE BRISSENDEN

Many of us have a travel bucket list. Mine included the great city of Paris, a place I last visited 55 years ago. I was set to retire. Why not re-visit the **City of Love**?

My friend, Angela Brady, agreed to join me. I jumped on the computer and booked B&B Hotel Paris Porte des Lilas in the 19th arrondissement. How easy it is to travel these days, I thought. Easy to book, easy to pay. We would be far from the city centre, but only a five-minute walk to a transit hub. What could go wrong?

As it turned out, a lot.

This article is a warning to travellers. Be ready for nasty surprises. In my case, they came in the form of no-see-um biting insects. I had prepared myself for getting lost, for pickpockets, and for being overcharged in cafes. Not for one moment did I think of 37 painful insect

bites. They ranged over my body, from my ears down to my toes. I was told that vicious mosquitoes were flying in from Africa to dine on unsuspecting tourists. I was one of them.

Other than a one-day Big Bus Paris tour at a cost of under C\$100 (book online for discounts and options), I was determined not to spend a penny on historic sites. The city’s parks, shady havens in June, were easy to access and free to visit. Perhaps it was the parks and their insect denizens that were



An insect store in Paris. Something to think about. | Constance Brissenden

my downfall?

Ironically, I’d looked at my can of insect repellent back home in Edmonton. Not needed, I recall thinking. I’m going to Paris, after all. I never thought of bugs in Paris.

Three trips to French pharmacies were required. I slathered on anti-itch lotions and took anti-histamine pills. I stayed in the hotel for 48 hours, covered in cooling wet towels. Lucky for me, friend Angela left to visit a friend in Toulouse. I had the room to myself, where I could moan and groan in peace.

That wasn’t all.

Before flying to Paris, I spent a month birdwatching with my sister Julie and her husband. Julie, an avid birder, had researched walks in Edmonton, Fort McLeod, Grand Forks, Chilliwack, Vancouver, and Seattle. Off we went, daily, over hill and dale.

My right knee was aching when I got back to Edmonton. I never thought it would get worse in Paris, a great city for walkers. Oh, but it did. On the fourth day, I was hobbling. Back to the pharmacy for a knee brace and the French equivalent of Voltaren.

Public transit in Paris saved me. I bought a week-long Paris Metro transit pass for C\$118. One of the oldest

train systems in the world, it connects with buses to take you everywhere. The only drawback, to a hobbling Canadian, were multiple steps down and up at the Metro. My knee got worse.

Here is an important travel tip. Always go with an understanding friend. Dear Angela fit the bill. She waited at the bottom of Metro stairs; she walked slowly for my sake.

At the Porte des Lilas transit hub, we hopped on buses for round trips to mystery destinations. We rode past bustling outdoor markets, ancient stone buildings, magnificent parks, and gentle suburbs. We saw more graffiti than in all Canadian cities combined. A stop to visit a boulangerie for delectable pastries was always on the cards.

There’s something funny about travel. Back in Edmonton, I thought, “Never again.” But the lure is strong. After a week back home, I was already planning another trip. Atlantic provinces, here I come!

My best tips? Head out! Take a smaller bag. Expect change until the last second. Go with the flow. Find cheaper ways, like public transit, to be a tourist.

Check your bucket-list travel destination off the list. The memories, bliss or bust, make it all worthwhile.

The Lark’s
Choir
Mondays
7-8:30 pm
fee applies

youth drop-in
Thursday 4-6 pm

Bellydance
class
Tuesdays
7:30-9 pm
10 weeks starting Jan 20
for details and
registration email
info@albertaave.org

Community
Night
Thursdays
6:30-8:30 pm
A variety of activities
check calendar on website
AlbertaAve.Org

JOIN THE FUN!



ALBERTA AVENUE
community league

Connected and engaged neighbours.
Resilient community

Order meat
&/or produce
WECANfood.com

Senior’s Lunch
Tuesdays
12-2pm

A retrospective on Growing Together

What I learned in the heart of a busy season



Preparing for the plant starter fundraiser.
| Jacob Ulickij

JACOB ULICKIJ

“Plants know how to make food and medicine from light and water, and then they give it away.” - Robin Wall Kimmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass

It’s fitting that a project rooted in the beauty of abundance began in part with such a simple observation. My aunt shared the quote with me, having been herself inspired by a seed company that gave up their profit motive to instead give away seeds for free.

I struggle with statements that sound too sweet to be true, yet some are. There is much in this world that is, in fact, free: kindness, aid, sunlight and rain, and the inspiration of people doing so much with so little.

As much as my name is pinned to it, Growing Together was much less about me than it was about honouring what land can be and what it means to steward it. Even now, I don’t think of it from the perspective of a gardener. I think of it from the perspective of a swaying sunflower stalk, standing defiantly upright with a season of effort behind me. Drained, wind-chafed, and hoping our neighbourhood is a little better off for it.

Growing Together is an initiative that took place from February to October of this past year. With the help of volunteers from inside and outside of our com-

munity, a large section of land inside the Alberta Avenue Community League grounds was converted into growing space for a sizeable market garden. Trellising structures, greenhouse shelves, raised beds, and turned patches of soil housed over 1,000 food-bearing plants, whose crops were hand-packaged and donated to community pantries.

There. It’s easy to describe, even if the effort involved was anything but. From seed starting in April to seed saving in October, every week was a new challenge. I balanced these learning opportunities against a handful of other “real” jobs, stressing every month over my unreliable income. The irony isn’t lost on me. In practice, I was poor, but rich in what mattered most to those I was helping — I was awash in healthy food.

Credit is due to the many volunteers who helped at every turn. Strangers tilled unbroken soil, wrapped tomato vines, cleared weeds and harvested endless bunches of greens. My family and friends showed up in spades, always surprising me with the lengths they were willing to go to keep the project alive (quite literally).

There were highs, like waking up to find the 20-foot trellises had stood their own through early morning windstorms.

There were lows, too, like losing patch after patch of pole beans to flea beetles. I was surprised at times by the resilience of tender greens and

by my own abilities. On other days, my failures hung heavy, and I spent late nights in the kitchen as if washing the dirt off leaves might wash my shame away with it.

It sounds melodramatic, but so does anything you own up to fully.

By August, donations began in earnest, and the scale of what was happening set in. Box after box of roots, leaves, stems, and seeds found their way to donation partners who were working just as hard to serve their communities. Bethel Food Pantry, AAWEAR, Wecan, and St Jehoshaphat Ukrainian Chapel were our biggest partners, and each accepted food with the same grace it was grown with. What began as a few sparse bags of lettuce became hundreds of pounds of



what-ever could be cut from the ground that week. News outlets caught on, and I felt a genuine surge of pride in our corner of the city. It wasn’t enough to talk about food insecurity any longer. Some of us were doing something.

When you look at the phrase “free food,” you begin to see how contradictory it becomes. The labour wasn’t free, nor was the packaging. The land isn’t free — it’s granted by the city and supported by our taxes. But, even deeper, the abundance

Mixed greens, kale, swiss chard, baby potatoes, and turnips. | Jacob Ulickij

Next year is already on my mind. I want to run this project again and run it better. I want to take advantage of willing hands and not feel like a burden. I want to show strangers I love them, yet be fairly treated in return. I want contradictory things — an easy ticket and the satisfaction of hard work. Heavy rain to wet the soil and blazing



Tomatoes, beans, and squash for our local food pantries. | Jacob Ulickij



My loving and supportive partner, Julia. | Jacob Ulickij

of plant life isn’t free. The soil must be tended and the seasons respected.

There is a dance between sustaining others and sustaining ourselves. Squandering the energy of nature is no different than squandering our own personal wells. There is no such thing as a free lunch, but making peace with this balance may be as close as we get.

sun to dry it. I want to do a great deed while recalling how minor I am in the short blink of time we share. I want to prove that anyone can do this, even you.

Above all, I want to honour my mentor, Maryann Borch. A woman who taught me how to make food and medicine from light and water — and then give it away.



A friend visiting Alberta for two days spent the first washing and pulling greens. The next, her father joined her to do it all over again. | Jacob Ulickij



Beans and peas were among the first to greet us. | Jacob Ulickij



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