



Ben Rappaport /// The Observer

NDP Leader Thomas Mulcair reads a Robert Munsch book to children at the Boulton Avenue Child Care Centre, where he also discussed his plan for a national daycare plan.

Childcare a 'priority,' Mulcair says

Opposition leader talks about NDP's national childcare plan during visit to local daycare centre

By **ARIFA RATTANSI**
The Observer

Federal NDP Leader Tom Mulcair visited a daycare centre in the East York area last week to repeat his call for a national childcare plan.

The present government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper has priorities above addressing the need for affordable daycare,

he told media at the Boulton Avenue Child Care Centre on Jan. 20. "Mr. Harper's priority... since the fall has been to give billions of dollars of money from the middle class to the richest 15 per cent in Canada," he said.

Mulcair, who is also Opposition leader in Ottawa, says his party has different goals.

"We are going to be working hard so that Canadians understand

that after 30 years of promises from the Conservatives and the Liberals, it's high time that we made it a priority in our country to have a national childcare plan," he said.

Mulcair launched his initial affordable daycare plan this past October and declared the party will maintain "one million childcare spaces" in Canada.

"The goal is to ensure that par-

ents don't pay more than \$15 a day for a childcare space," he said.

Noting many parents in Toronto are struggling to find quality, affordable childcare, Mulcair said the majority of them are living below the poverty line.

"We don't find that acceptable for a country like Canada," he said, "so we want to bring in a \$15 federal minimum wage."

Budget garners mixed review

By **ERIC PEMBER**
The Observer

Mary Fragedakis has some reservations about Mayor John Tory's first budget, but she likes it generally.

"Overall, it's a far better budget than previous budgets under Mayor Ford," the councillor for Ward 29/Toronto-Danforth told the Observer, "so I'm happy to see that we're working in investing in our future."

The budget, unveiled on Jan. 20, comes in at around \$11.5 billion overall. On the income side, there's a 2.75-per-cent property tax increase, and a multi-million line of credit opened with the province.

The expenses side includes boosts in funding for the TTC, for emergency medical services, and for the homeless in the form of increased shelter capacity and other supports.

Fragedakis said she approves of Tory's reversal of service cuts made to the TTC under Rob Ford. She said those service cuts severely impacted the ability of the people in her ward who don't work standard 9-5 jobs to get to and from their workplaces.

"For people who are working multiple shifts at multiple jobs, that's very difficult," she said, and cited examples: "Late at night, in the dead of winter, the Mortimer bus doesn't run after 10, or the Leaside bus from Donlands station stops at 10."

But Fragedakis said she's disappointed by the way in which the budget was balanced. She said she would have preferred the city get money from the province to balance the budget, no strings attached. She added that she's frustrated the city isn't doing that, but instead using a provincial line of credit to make up the \$86-million shortfall.

"I'm concerned about borrowing money to balance the operating budget, and I'm waiting to hear, as I'm sure many people are — members of council and the public — about the details of the discussion that the city's been having with the province," she said.

When it came to East York's other city councillors, neither Janet Davis (Ward 31/Beaches-East York) nor Jon Burnside (Ward 26/Don Valley West) responded to Observer requests for comment on the budget.



■ **FRAGEDAKIS**

Stollerys demolition reignites E.Y. concerns

By **CAMERON AXFORD**
The Observer

On the coffee table of Geoff Kettel's Leaside home sits a catalogue of neighbourhood development plans, an architectural timeline of the area. He's concerned about the survival of the Durant Motors Company building on Laird Avenue.

"I think where we want to go should be reflective of where we've come from," he said.

Though the car and truck manufacturing business existed only 10 years in the area, Kettel believes it stands as a testament to East York's working-class heritage.

The Durant Motors building is

currently a government office, but there is a proposal to demolish it to make room for an eight-storey retirement home.



■ **KETTEL**

as (being) just too big, too dominating in the neighbourhood," said Kettel, a former developer and current chair of the North York Heritage Panel.

Earlier this month, crews began demolishing Stollerys clothing store at Yonge and Bloor streets in downtown Toronto. Kettel

said that demolition has raised concerns about architectural conservation in East York. He believes mass development disrupts communities where people have lived functionally for generations. He and others have campaigned on this issue before.

In 2012, a developer wanted to dismantle the Thomas G. Elgie house in East York to create three new homes. Kettel and others in the community petitioned the city of Toronto to have it designated as a historical site.

Activist Renee Jacoby served with a mediation team to find a compromise, to preserve the oldest wings of the Elgie home, while allowing extensions of

the building to be demolished to make room for new, smaller houses.

"We are waiting to see this property be restored, the portion that is heritage," Jacoby said. "But we are watching to see the portions that are being taken down that aren't designated."

Such development compromises give Kettel hope. Recently, the North York Heritage Panel petitioned Toronto city council to make an assessment of the Durant building. Kettel said the government is considering preserving the structure.

"Let's build in a way sympathetic to the past, rather than destroy stuff," he said.

WHAT'S UP IN E.Y.

'Tis the season (for valentines)

The Todmorden Mills Heritage Site is offering families a chance to celebrate Valentine's Day early with a card-making workshop on Feb. 8 from 1 to 4 p.m. Participants will create their own personalized Valentine cards, while learning about the history of Valentine's Day. Refreshments will also be provided. The event is geared for ages six and up and children must be accompanied by an adult. Tickets are \$15 for adults and \$8 for children, plus tax. Pre-registration is required. Call 416-396-2819 to register.

Sharing about FoodShare

The Leaside Garden Society is hosting a presentation by James Davis on Thursday, Feb. 12. Davis will talk about FoodShare, the not-for-profit organization that works with communities and schools to improve the way people eat and grow food across Toronto. The presentation begins at 7:30 p.m., with refreshments at 7. It will be held at the Leaside library branch, 165 McRae Dr.

Fly the Family (Day) flag

Todmorden Mills is hosting a Family Day Weekend celebration on Feb. 13-16 from noon until 4 p.m. The event will celebrate Family Day, Valentine's Day and the 50th anniversary of the Canadian flag. Participants will explore winter on a guided tour of the wildflower preserve and then move indoors to play parlour games and create their own unique family flag to take home.

~ Roy Herron



Akorede Amosun // The Observer

Flipping for pancakes

Centennial College teachers Malcolm Kelly and Debbie Gordon joined forces with other staff at the East York campus on Jan. 21 to cook up a pile of pancakes for students as a semester kickoff.

Scott 'overwhelmed' by support

By ARIFA RATTANSI
The Observer

MP Craig Scott has been given the nod by the NDP riding association in Toronto-Danforth to run for re-election.

Noting the possibility of an early election, the association nominated him on Jan. 17.

"Toronto-Danforth is a flagship for the NDP and it's a riding that kind of anchors Toronto," Scott said.

About 200 party members were at the nomination meeting and Scott, a former law professor at Osgoode Hall, said he was overwhelmed with the support he received.

"There has been a gradual but steady transition with Jack (Layton) having laid the ground that I have been build-

ing on," he said.

Layton was the Toronto-Danforth MP — and federal leader of the New Democrats — until his death from cancer in 2011. Scott became MP for the area after winning a special byelection in March 2012.

"It's a riding where there's a lot of leadership within the riding itself," he said. "It isn't just from me, but from within the community too."

It was for this reason, Scott said, that current NDP Leader Thomas Mulcair visited a daycare centre in the Toronto-Danforth area last week.

"It is another indicator that we know that this is where people listen," he said.

There are only two childcare centres in the southern part of the riding that take infants,



■ CRAIG SCOTT

forcing parents to use private facilities.

"The lack of spaces is huge," Scott said. "When you add affordability, it is an actual crisis."

This is an issue that he says affects other parts of the Greater Toronto Area, regardless of people's philosophical or political views.

"(The NDP) is assuming the leadership on it because

we believe so deeply in it," he said. "We believe people will look at it as this is deserving to be a top priority."

Another issue that Scott has continued to champion is the disproportionate representation in the House of Commons.

"People need to know that when they vote for a party, it directly impacts the number of seats the party gets in the House," he said. "So the voice actually counts."

Referencing an electoral system that the Germans use, Scott would like to see a system of voting in Canada where there would be a local MP, as well as an MP elected to represent the region.

In anticipation of Harper favouring an earlier vote, he's gearing up early too.

Target closures claim two E.Y. outlets

By RYAN CHATTERJEE
The Observer

The closure of Canadian Target stores will hit East York particularly hard.

Not just one, but two outlets are shuttering locally: at the East York Town Centre and at Shoppers World Danforth.

An average of about 130 employees are being laid off at each of the 133 Targets across the country.

In addition, the malls where they're housed could suffer — not only from the loss of rental income, but from diminished customer traffic that often accompanies the closure of a mall "anchor" store.

Edyth Karwecki, general manager of the East York Town Centre, which is owned by Morguard Investments Limited, declined to comment, but did say everything is business as usual right now.

More information will be released in the weeks and months ahead.

Mall customers such as Nazaneen Baqizada, who likes to shop for bargains, would like to see a Walmart move into the Town Centre when Target moves out.

"A lot of people I know who go to that mall also go to Walmart.... It will be a great success there, especially with the low prices," Baqizada said.

RioCan Real Estate Investment Trust, which owns Shoppers World Danforth, did not respond to requests for an interview.

GoodLife Fitness has said it is interested in taking over at least some of Target's space. GoodLife wants to expand to 400 fitness clubs by the end of this year.

"The former Target locations provide spacious and convenient locations that would be an excellent space for people to achieve their fitness goals," said GoodLife Founder and CEO David Patchell-Evans in a statement.

In 1999, when department store Eaton's filed for bankruptcy, GoodLife acquired 12 of its locations.

Other shopping centres that had similar experiences when Sears closed, such as the Toronto Eaton Centre, attracted high-end American retailer Nordstrom.

Target Canada has not yet confirmed when specifically its stores will close. It is currently proceeding on a case-by-case basis, which may take 16 to 20 weeks to unfold.

Festival celebrates art of telling stories

By VALERIE MCDERMOTT
The Observer

The Mosaic Storytelling Festival re-premiered in East York this month, with the next instalment due this coming Sunday, Feb. 1.

Trish O'Reilly-Brennan, an East York actor and musician, worked with the co-ordinator of a storytelling festival in downtown Toronto

to create something similar for her community. It started here five years ago, and "premiered" for its new season on Jan. 18.

The venue is the hall at St. David's Anglican Church, on Donlands Avenue near Danforth.

The idea is simple and the name is really self-explanatory. People with a gift for telling stories are invited to regale the

audience with their tales.

O'Reilly-Brennan speaks fondly of the festival and its success.

"We have gotten so much great feedback from the community," she said. "Storytelling is so magical. We live in a reality of 3-D movies and helicopters falling from the sky.... We have become alienated from what matters — the story."

The festival incorporates tales from many multicultural backgrounds — "a potpourri" of culture, as O'Reilly-Brennan puts it.

Performance time is 3 p.m. every other Sunday until March 25.

It's a pay-what-you-can system, but co-ordinators are requesting a minimum donation of \$5 for people wishing to attend.

Sweden may offer transit fixes

The 'Stockholm Solution' is a system that helps eliminate traffic congestion

By NINA RAYNARS
The Observer

Are traffic fees the solution to Toronto's traffic woes?

It's something that seems to be working for Sweden, according to Lars Henriksson, and our city may want to consider following suit.

Henriksson, an honorary consul for Sweden in Toronto, recently explained the "Stockholm Solution" to those attending a meeting organized by the Rotary Club of Toronto Eglinton and held at Leaside United Church.

Basically, he said, the system imposes traffic fees on vehicles in the Swedish capital in an attempt to eliminate traffic congestion.

"The three primary reasons for the program established by the local governments for the new Swedish traffic system were improvement of the environment, reduction of autos in the city centre and raising funds for further public trans-

port," he said.

Vehicles coming in and out of Stockholm pay a congestion fee depending on the zone they're entering — and fees go up or down depending on the number of vehicles trying to enter the city centre at a given time.

To avoid the congestion fees, Henriksson said, travellers can opt for public transportation.

George Heintzman, former president of the Rotary Club of Toronto Eglinton, agreed that Torontonians need to think seriously about ways of resolving traffic issues.

"What we really need is people to get together and discuss the objectives, discuss where we want to go, the vision for Toronto," he said.

However, Fatih Stanley, a former recipient of Rotary Club youth sponsorship program who also attended the talk, said Toronto needs to rebuild its credibility before starting any major projects.

"When we talk about the reduction in traffic, I have commuted in and taken public transit. I think the idea to reduce traffic is number one," she said.



Lars Henriksson, honorary consul for Sweden in Toronto, spoke about the "Stockholm Solution" to traffic congestion during an event held at Leaside United Church.

Nina Raynars // The Observer

"The current system we have, if you have ever been on it, you can count on it to let you down every single day, multiple times a week."

According to Stanley, whenever big changes come

to Toronto they impact roads, people and lifestyles — and a lot of people can't justify the time versus expenditure.

"So I think it's about time to start by doing small things that build credibility, focusing on

projects that are on the ground and making a difference," she said.

But Alan McCartney, who was also a guest at the event, said Toronto has a disproportionate amount of income and

it plays a key role in the city's future advancement.

"Try a congestion fee," he recommended, "and use that to build a tunnel and a subway stop in one priority area at a time."

Students seeking that perfect academic fit

Reputation, availability and location all play a role when choosing university or college

By SIDRA SHEIKH
The Observer

It was a lunch hour at Danforth Collegiate and Technical Institute back before Christmas. A representative from the University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT) was putting up a sign outside of the second floor presentation room and organizing pens, notepads and catalogues.

Prasad Srikugathasan, 17, a Grade 12 student, walked into the room trying to look nonchalant, but his hands were trembling when he signed in. He was nervous about where he will spend the next four years of his life.

"I want to become an architect so I hope to major in architectural studies. But I also enjoy human biology, so I hope to major in that as well," he said. "Currently, my top choices are the University of Toronto for architecture and McMaster for life sciences."

Approximately 221,132 Ontario Grade 12 students have been considering post-secondary applications since the fall — a stressful season that came to a head on Jan. 14, when the first deadline arrived for actual school and program choices.

The way students select certain colleges and universities can be more amorphous than scientific.

"I just think it's more of a rep thing," Srikugathasan said. "You could go into any program, but it depends on the university."

Farwa Mumtaz, 17, a senior student at

Monarch Park Collegiate Institute, said she's applying to the University of Toronto and OCAD University, but hopes the University of Toronto accepts her for architecture.

"Just because it has a really good ranking in the world and it's very well-known," she said.

Many Ontario students have chosen post-secondary options based on reputation and rankings and friends' and family's opinions. Then they apply based on the program and lastly, on proximity, according to George Granger, the executive director of the Ontario Universities Application Centre (OUAC) in Guelph.

"Generally, the top two reasons are... the availability of the program they want and the academic reputation of that program or that university," he said. "The remaining two or three of the top five become location and size."

Alex Bowers, a guidance counsellor at Monarch Park Collegiate, agrees that location definitely plays a role.

"A lot of it's the proximity of the school," he said. "Some kids want to have a university experience away from home, whereas other students find it's too expensive and so they live downtown."

Granger said it's fine for students to initially choose a university or college based on the factors he listed, but suggests that should just be a part of the initial planning. It should

not influence which school a student ultimately chooses because that is not enough information to go on. Much more research is required, he warns.

"So I would never say to people, 'Don't read those rankings,' but be careful of what important choices you make based on such things," he said. "Don't let

them take the place of your own first-hand primary research."

Amber Vibert, a

student recruitment officer from UOIT, said the goal of information sessions is to help inform students about what is offered at different universities.

Reputation does matter at first, but students must do research to come to a decision on where to study.

"It's not until someone does their own research that they're going to realize exactly what each university has to offer," she said.

For Mumtaz, reputation was a factor when she chose UofT, because she said it plays a role in how well she will do after graduating.

"It kind of reflects whether you are going to get a job in the future," she said.

The University of Toronto continues to be ranked as the top university in Canada and among the world's best universities.

Based on personal experience, Granger thinks that although university ranking is important for students, they give it too much weight in their decisions.

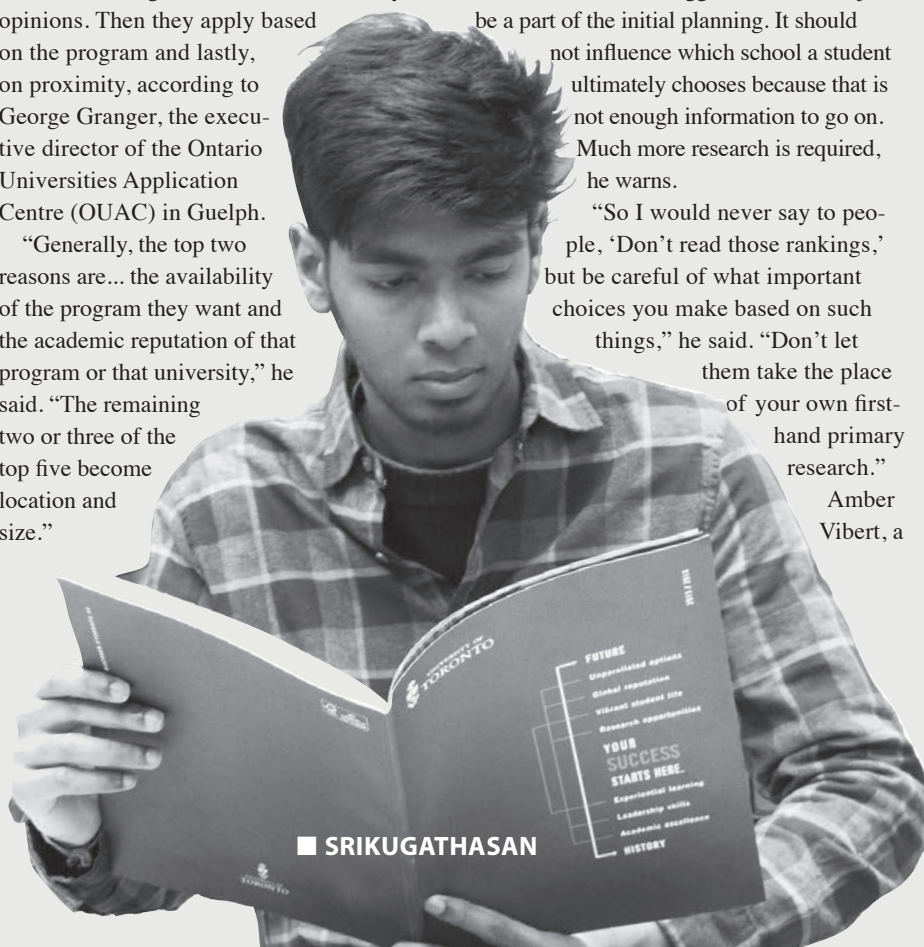
"In my 40-plus years in the workforce, I have never seen, nor have I ever, as a manager, hired on the basis of where the student's degree was done," he said.

For those students who are confused, Granger said it does not matter which university or college Ontario students choose because there are no bad ones to choose from.

"By world standards, in Ontario there is no such thing as a bad university," he said.

Meanwhile, student Srikugathasan's applications are done, but his worries aren't over.

"Although I have a solid idea about what sorts of things I want to do, I am just concerned about making the right choice of university that works best for me," he said.



Creating a love of reading in the digital age

By **BRITTANY CAMPBELL**
The Observer

ABC Life Literacy Canada celebrates Family Literacy Day on Jan. 27 every year to help bring awareness to the importance of literacy among children.

Since 1999, ABC Life Literacy programs and initiatives have been encouraging parents and children to read together so that reading can be enjoyed as a family.

The national awareness day is intended to highlight the importance of literacy among children and to participate in fun activities as a family. This is said to help entice children to want to read for leisure.

Now in its 16th year, the national awareness campaign is encouraging local communities programs to celebrate literacy with a modern twist. The theme this year is "15 minutes of fun," where families are encouraged to engage not only in reading, but other literacy activities as well for at least 15 minutes a day.

One of these programs is offered at the Pape-Danforth branch of the public library, where literacy programs not only consist of traditional live readings, but also of interactive entertainment.

Mariam Scribner is the children's services specialist at the Pape-Danforth branch. She is one of the organizers in charge of establishing programs there.

This year, Scribner has helped develop a new aspect to Family Literacy Day that is meant to engage parents and children to read together more often.

"This year the system has produced a booklist which we have on offer for parents and also a bingo game challenge that families can take home," she said.

"There are a variety of activities on the card that they can complete and return to the branch by Jan. 31 and they have a chance to win a prize."

Heather Cosentino is the communications specialist for ABC Life Literacy. She said incorporating modern ways of learning may be more effective than sitting your children down and reading to them.

"Reading, people still think about in a traditional aspect," she said. "Kids now are learning in a digital age and they need to have high literacy skills to be able to use technology, so when we talk about literacy skills we try not to focus just on reading.... There's more to it than just being able to sound out words in a text."

Although the branch had special events in celebration of Family Literacy Day, Scribner said the importance of increasing literacy among children is something that the branch encourages all year long.



Veronica Agudelo/// The Observer

Lenny Graf poses for a picture with six-year-old fan Hassan Zia. Graf performed and met with fans at an event celebrating Family Literacy Day.

Literacy with Lenny G.

By **VERONICA AGUDELO**
The Observer

Tuesday was Family Literacy Day, but kids and their families celebrated the event a few days early last Friday, at the Danforth/Coxwell library branch — with children's entertainer Lenny Graf.

"The program today was an anticipation celebration of Family Literacy Day," said Jorge Riveras, the librarian and co-ordinator of the event. "The idea was to get parents and children to get involved with an event that makes them feel good."

The participants met in the community room from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. The children got some exposure to various kinds of music, which included a wide selection of musical instruments. Graf, a star of the children's television network Treehouse and a versatile musician, charmed the room with songs carrying irresistible titles such as The Bicycle Song, I'm Glad I'm Still a Kid, Unstable Tables and Macaroni Song.

He played the saxophone, flute and a small four-string guitar.

Later on, Dalia Zia, one of the moms at the event, performed her own version of The Bicycle Song along with her six-year-old son, Hassan. He and the other kids also created their own song with words like glass, house, mouse, table and — of course — banana.

"Music is a language of its own, even if it's in a different language. It is universal," Graf said. There are also lyrics to the songs which are also important aspects of literacy as well."

Then came the magic show, in which Graf played a secret agent and made a small ball in a cup appear and disappear.

Zia said she tries to promote literacy at home by reading with her son each day.

"When a family reads a story together, it bring the family together and encourages individual readiness," Riveras said. "In this occasion, I saw community engagement and social interaction. Grandpar-

ents met other grandparents and kids had the opportunity to collaborate with other kids."

"The message that I wanted to project in this presentation was that literacy and music can be fun," Graf said. "There are many ways to present literacy, ranging from songs that have words in them, such as my Macaroni Song — which has 20 different food words." Another approach, he explained, is "making up a song and composing. It is a creative aspect."

Riveras, meanwhile, extolled the virtues of old-fashioned reading.

"Reading paper-based books is actually beneficial for the synapses of your brain," Riveras said.

Graf agreed.

"It is important that we maintain libraries because there is a wealth of information in books," he said. Reading makes it "much healthier to relax on the beach, on a patio or in a comfortable chair — rather than at the screen."

Legislation would ban teenagers' use of e-cigarettes

By **LUCY QI**
The Observer

The Ontario government is planning to ban the use and sale of all vapourizing electronic cigarettes for those under 19. The legislation will also prohibit flavoured tobacco products — including menthol. The government says it's a move to reduce smoking among youth.

Associate Health Minister Dipika Damerla announced late last year that the bill will also ban the use of e-cigarettes in most public places. Currently they can be used where normal cigarettes cannot, such as restaurants, bars and shopping centres.

"We have designed the legislation in such a way that it's flexible, and through regulations we can change it so that electronic cigarettes will be available in pharmacies," Damerla said. "We want to make sure our kids don't start to 'vape' when we don't know whether it's good or bad."

Penalties for anyone selling e-cig-

arettes to minors could be as high as \$100,000 for storeowners and \$300,000 for corporations. The fines for selling flavoured tobacco could be even higher.

"We're not banning it," Damerla said of e-cigarettes. "All we're saying is we want to regulate it and there's absolutely nothing in this legislation that would stop an adult from using it." She also said that flavoured tobacco products could be construed as a means to create the next generation of smokers among the young.

The pending legislation has created little stir on the Danforth, where there are several lounges and bars where customers can use water pipes or "hookahs."

Younes Regragui, the owner of hookah lounge and restaurant The Desert Rose at the corner of Pape and Cosburn avenues, said he supports the proposed law.

"I respect that very much. I'm a father myself. I have teenagers and I wouldn't want to see them consume the flavoured hookah. I think it's very fair, and it's a

great thing to do this for the minors," he said. "But for the adults, we need something clear on this, too. Our store is actually tobacco-free, because we were under the impression that serving actual tobacco here was already illegal."

Regragui said hookahs are part of Arabic culture, where women and men normally enjoy it to relax after dinner.

"We don't want to take away the freedom in adults to choose whether or not they smoke flavoured tobacco, so we would like for someone, or some guideline to explain to us exactly what we can and can't do," he said.

"We have called the ministry a few times, and checked the websites too, but we couldn't find any straight answers at all. Maybe this new law will be able to give all the hookah businesses equal opportunities and a fair ground to compete in."

If the bill passes, the new law will come into effect on Jan. 1, 2016.



File photo from Fotolia

E-cigarettes will be more heavily regulated by the government with proposed legislation.

A walk on the wild(flower) side



Roxana Chiriac/// The Observer

The Todmorden Mills Heritage Site hosted an outdoor guided walk through its wildflower preserve on Sunday. Adults and children learned about various birds, animals and plants and how they survive winter's harsh weather conditions. Historical interpreter Evan McMurtry shared his knowledge about fresh muskrat tracks, freeze-tolerant or resistant insects and the rich history of the heritage site.



E.Y. Greeks optimistic about new prime minister

By **KELSEY G. CHENG**
The Observer

It's been a new era since Monday for some residents in Toronto's Greektown, who are anticipating a better future for their families back in Greece.

"People are waiting for something better. When you're starving, how worse can you go?" asked Peter Hadjis, the owner of the Palace restaurant at Pape and Danforth avenues. His sister and brother are living in Greece.

The newly elected prime minister, Alexis Tsipras, was sworn in by the president of Greece, Karolos Papoulias, on Monday after winning 36 per cent of the votes on Sunday — more than anyone else.

Tsipras is a member of SYRIZA, a left-wing party that has been gaining favour with the public since Greece's deep recession began five years ago. The party ended up on

Sunday with 149 out of 300 seats in the Greek parliament. SYRIZA has since then reached a coalition agreement with the right-wing conservative party, ANEL.

Some denizens of Greektown said it's too soon to know whether the election results are good or bad for their homeland.

But Chris Christodoulou, owner of Pan on the Danforth, holds an optimistic view of the newly elected prime minister.

"It's time for a change, and I am happy that they finally voted for a different government than the traditional (right-wing) government. He's a young fellow. He has new fresh ideas," he said.

He added that his cousins and uncles in Greece are very happy about the election.

"In three days, they managed to form the (new) government, which is unbelievable for Greek tradition," he chuckled. "Usually things

take a long time. At least we started good."

He hopes that the new government will stop the decrease in pensions for his family — part of Greek government austerity that's been imposed in return for financial support from Europe. The unemployment rate in Greece still remains extremely high: 26.7 per cent. For youths 15-24, the unemployment rate is as high as 50 per cent. Wages have fallen by 16 per cent since 2009 in the private sector.

According to the Bank of Greece, gross external debt stood at \$580 billion as of 2014. That is 174 per cent of the Greek GDP.

In his victory speech, the new prime minister of Greece pledged changes.

"The new Greek government will be ready to cooperate and negotiate with our partners, for the first time, a fair, mutually beneficial and

sustainable solution for Greece to escape the vicious circle of excessive debt and for Europe to return to stability, growth and the values that were its founding values, like democracy and solidarity," Tsipras declared.

Between 2010 and 2015, Greece has been issued a \$355-billion bailout by a "troika" consisting of the European Commission, the European Central Bank (ECB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Tsipras referred to the bailout issued by the troika as "agreements of austerity and disaster."

"The verdict of the Greek people renders the troika a thing of the past for our common European framework," he said.

Back on the Danforth, Christodoulou's customers — some of them also from Greece — occasionally come in and discuss politics with him; and from what he

knows, everyone is pretty happy with the election results.

"(We are) very optimistic, very excited. We hope that things are finally going to change to the better," he said. "Enough is enough. It's a matter of time. We are all hoping for a better day tomorrow."

According to the Eurozone forecast issued by Ernst and Young last December, Greece has shown signs of economic recovery, but "is still vulnerable." Statistics show that in the third quarter (July-September) of 2014, Greece had the fastest-growing economy in the Eurozone, with an anticipated 0.9-per cent increase in GDP for the year.

In a brief statement issued by Christine Lagarde, the managing director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), she said the IMF will "stand ready to continue supporting Greece and look forward to discussions with the new government."

EDITORIALS

It's not just a dime

Transit hike will take a toll on less affluent

The temperature will not be the only thing rising this spring, as transit fares are scheduled to increase once again. East York residents will have to start paying an additional dime for a ride on the public transit system effective March 1.

Toronto Mayor John Tory has announced that children under the age of 12 will be allowed to board the transit system for free — but for everyone else, there will be a 10-cent increase on all non-cash fares. This contradicts candidate Tory's fall campaign promise of freezing TTC fares. Now Mayor Tory says the raise will help generate an additional \$43 million for the TTC.

A portion of the money is projected to go toward increasing the number of buses on various routes to ease congestion during rush hour.

Currently, a single token costs \$2.70, and that will change to \$2.80. In turn, the price of an adult Metropass will climb by \$7.75 to \$141.50. Now \$7.75 doesn't seem like a lot — just the average cost of a lunch combo at McDonald's — but over the course of a year, it will add up to \$93.

Like other communities, East York is home to a range of affluence. For example, according to the latest census data, Ward 26/Don Valley West has an unemployment rate of 12.3 per cent, which is higher than the Toronto rate of 9.8 per cent.

And Ward 26 includes the neighbourhoods of Flemingdon Park and Thorncliffe Park, where 55 per cent of the population are immigrants — many struggling to establish themselves financially and otherwise. That makes them more likely to be transit users.

Immigrants come to Canada to make a better life for themselves and their families, and the steady increase in TTC fares over the past five years makes it difficult to achieve financial stability. Although many adults will save on child transit fares, it will not matter in the long run because most of the elementary schools are within walking distance and do not require a bus trip.

So with the municipal government apparently determined to increase transit fares, the federal and provincial governments may now have to do more for low-income families, with measures like improving child tax credits and increasing the minimum wage.

~ Sayada Nabi

COLUMNS

Keeping East Yorkers safe

We're told that the crime rate in East York is on the decline. But the drop is mainly in the property crime category — and when it comes to crimes against persons, some categories actually show an increase. Like the homicide rate. And sexual assaults.

The East York community needs to work together to become more active in making the area a safer place for work and play. That means more than just a heightened police presence.

Just ask people who travel on foot in our community. They feel vulnerable, even afraid. Unfortunately, the real estate affordability of some neighbourhoods seems to go hand-in-hand with heightened anxiety.

Type "East York" into Google News and your screen will be bombarded by

media coverage of attempted murders and break-ins. In many situations, the suspects are still wanted criminals, such as a 25-year-old man accused of attempted murder in a high-rise in the St.Clair-Victoria Park area this past fall.

So how can we make people feel safer in our community?

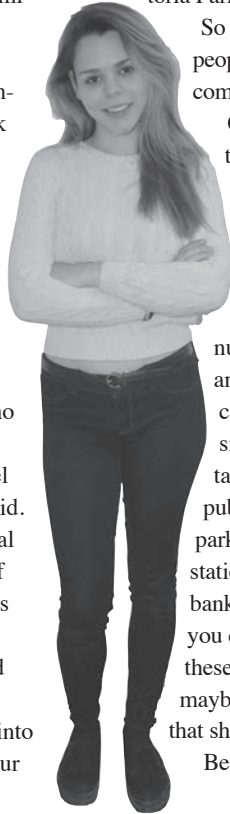
One way would be through promoting a more visible police presence in specific troubled areas, such as the Victoria Park Avenue and Dawes Road area. Perhaps police could even be assigned to patrol certain small, enclosed public spaces, such as parking garages, TTC stations or areas with bank machines. Do you ever see police in these spaces? I don't. So maybe this is a change that should be made.

Beyond this, attacking the root causes of crime

is going to have to involve helping people at a young age — by creating community programs to help them better understand how to keep their homes a safe place, along with how to avoid violence and illegal substances.

Personally, I feel the most vulnerable while walking to and from TTC stops, especially at night. Another simple solution to feeling personally insecure while walking alone to catch the bus could be to add more streetlights. Other measures: more security and police around places with nightlife, and more night buses so people don't have to stand alone outside at late hours. In turn, these problems can be identified by community-requested police audits and lobbying through our city council members.

But ultimately of course, we, as a community, need to create a stronger sense of connectivity. People need to speak up and help others to safety — and the only way this can happen is by getting to know the people you're surrounded by: your neighbours.



Samantha McArthur

Expression before faith

It's within your right to share your opinion

People come to East York from all around the world. The result is a rainbow of backgrounds and interests in this community.

Fortunately, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms cites fundamental rights applying to us all. The right to freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression — including freedom of the press — is a liberty that shapes our lives.

Those freedoms parallel constitutions across the western world, including France.

On Jan. 7, 12 journalists were killed in a terrorist attack against the Parisian satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo*. The gunmen murdered these people for the supposed sake of their religion — replying with bloody vengeance because of cartoons depicting their Islamic prophet.

Whatever our feelings about the appropriateness of the cartoons depicting Muhammad, any reasonable person has to come down on the side of the rights of the journalists and the broader civilization that journalists speak to.

It may almost seem like a technicality now, but this massacre was a violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that France and Canada and the other members of the United Nations are supposed to adhere to.

The right to freedom of opinion and expression is enshrined there, especially in regards to journalism.

Every day, people wake up in the morning and make choices. Those choices reflect who we are, as free citizens. We value those choices, they define us, they allow us to express ourselves.

The fact that French journalists were killed because of their choices in the name of religion is wrong almost beyond comprehension.

Of course, everyone also has a right to their religion. That too is enshrined. But religion should never be used to commit murder; nor should it be allowed to so violently trump other human rights.

True, in the past, religion has been regularly employed in this way... up to and including waging wars in religion's name. Mary Tudor, Queen of England, commanded that Protestants burn at the stake for their faith. But it's no longer 1516. And yet religion is still used as a battle cry.

It's long past time that we consigned that thinking to history.

~ Stephanie Backus

Freedom of expression, eh?

Is freedom of speech always real?

Our planet is buzzing with discussions and stands in the name of free speech and press rights following the recent attack against the Parisian satirical publication, *Charlie Hebdo*.

Interestingly enough, the publication fired one cartoonist in 2009 after accusations that he was anti-Semitic — following his penned ridicule of Judaism.

So at what point do we draw the line... and cartoons are all about lines... between double standards?

First, let's ask ourselves if freedom of expression stems from honest, genuine desire or a forced image, fabricated by the need to prove any point.

As soon as we realize we don't have to prove anything to anyone, our expression will find freedom in genuine free speech, action or being.

It may be good, evil or somewhere in-between, but for all intents and purposes, authentic.

In a Cherokee folk story, an old man tells his grandson

there is a battle between two wolves inside us all. One is evil, he explains, while the other is good. When the boy asks which wolf wins, his grandfather reveals it is the one he feeds.

Look at the world and tell me what we need more of.

The story lists evil as anger, jealousy, greed, resentment, inferiority, lies and ego; good is described as joy, peace, love, hope, humility, kindness,

empathy and truth.

What are we willing to add to society?

The choice is ours, but it doesn't mean it will be practical.

All things

are permitted, but not all are useful. We can build the world up or tear it down.

Love breeds love. Hate breeds hate.

If we're too busy tearing ourselves apart, there won't be enough of us left to rebuild. We are too distracted

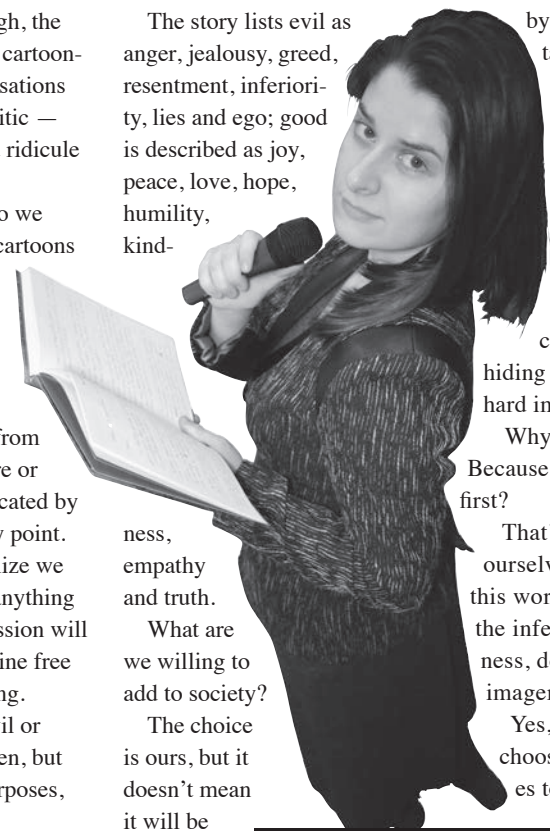
by personal entertainment to be the change that grows, heals and builds.

As already hurting, broken people, it's easier to continue a vicious cycle in an unspoken communal accord, hiding ourselves behind a hard image.

Why? To prove a point? Because others hurt us first?

That's not healing ourselves or changing this world, but spreading the infection of brokenness, despair and false imagery.

Yes, we are free to choose — but our choices today will benefit or degenerate society at large, tomorrow.



Roxana Chiriac



Photos courtesy of City of Toronto Archives

East York's rural roots

The Observer resumes its look back on East York history through photographs from the City of Toronto Archives. This pair of pictures reflects East York's rural atmosphere almost a century ago: On the left is a photo of spectators at a plowing match in East York on Nov. 6, 1929; on the right is a picture of a stable under construction at the Sunnybrook Farm sometime before 1928, when the farm's ownership was transferred by owner Alice Kilgour to the city for the creation of a park. Fifteen years after that, during the Second World War, the city in turn transferred the land to the federal government for a veterans' hospital — now the Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre at East York's (now very urban) northwest corner.

■ TRANSIT SAFETY

TTC hoping to curb assaults on employees

By **KELSEY CHENG**
The Observer

It has been years since Bob Kinnear received the anonymous telephone call, but he says the memory still “brings a tear” to his eye.

Five years ago, the president of the Amalgamated Transit Union, Local 113, received a call from a 12-year-old girl. It turned out to be the daughter of one of the 10,000 Toronto Transit Commission employees that Kinnear represents. After ensuring confidentiality from him, she told Kinnear that her mother was assaulted on the job, and begged him to protect her.

“She was afraid to tell me her name; she didn't want her mother to know that she is scared when her mother went to work,” Kinnear recalled. “I don't think a lot of people realize the impact (of assaulting an operator), not only on the individual, but even on the family.”

According to the TTC, there were 355 incidents of assaults on their employees in 2009. As of late last year, the number of recorded incidents in 2014 was 160. Kinnear attributed the progress to the security system that was implemented in 2006, after TTC employees initiated a one-day wildcat strike on May 29, 2006, over operator safety.

“The members were just absolutely fed up. We shut the city down,” Kinnear said in a telephone interview.

The TTC immediately began rolling out its new security system, installing surveillance cameras and protective barriers on buses and streetcars in East York and the rest of Toronto. It launched a marketing campaign and an employee assistance program; as well, it formed an Employee Assault Task Force. It also appointed a court advocate to help the operator get through the court system and lobby the Crown for a heavier sentence against the perpetrator.

“The security system is unequivocally a direct result of the walk-out,” Kinnear said. “(TTC management) has now become very reactive, and proactive at times.”

TTC spokesperson Danny Nicholson ex-



Kelsey Cheng /// The Observer

Customers and TTC managers gather for “Meet the Managers,” an initiative started by TTC CEO Andy Byford.

plained the new security system.

“Except for Line 1 (the Yonge-University-Spadina subway line), the rest of the (trains), our entire bus fleet, and entire streetcar fleet are now equipped with security cameras,” he said. “So when one of our operators or a customer is assaulted, the police can request a download of that video.”

While things are getting better, assaults have not been completely eliminated.

“(The assault) can be anything from being sworn at — which we consider a verbal assault — to throwing coffee or being punched at,” Nicholson said. “A lot of our operators had people spit on them, which is terrible.”

Jennifer Fedak, 18, witnessed a dispute between a passenger and a bus driver on an east-end bus on her way to school in October. The passenger, in his mid-40s, was screaming and swearing at the bus driver, complaining that the bus was too cold.

“We all thought, ‘This guy is nuts,’” Fedak recalled. “The bus driver was like, ‘You need to calm down — [the system] switches over automatically and I'm not in control of it.’”

The passenger continued yelling in the bus driver's face that it was ‘no excuse.’

But no one did anything, despite witnessing the abuse happening right before them.

“Everyone just sat there,” Fedak said. “I would probably just put myself in danger doing anything.”

It was 7:30 a.m. on a recent Wednesday, and six suited TTC managers were already standing beside the gates of the Sheppard-Yonge subway station, smiling and welcoming riders on their morning commutes. A big red sign read “Meet the Managers,” an initiative that TTC CEO Andy Byford started in 2012, allowing direct communication between customers and TTC management.

“Most questions we get are about how come buses are all bunched up. But we are getting more commendations than complaints. (The public) appreciates that the managers are available,” said Mary Darakjian, who is in charge of the TTC's pensions.

Between 2008 and 2011, St. Michael's Hospital, CAMH and the TTC collaborated on a study to discover the best treatment for assault victims. TTC operators now receive a team approach and what's called a behavioural intervention, where a psychiatrist, psychologist and occupational therapist are present at consultation sessions to provide support.

Despite the TTC's efforts to provide support for its operators, money is still key to this and other issues within the transit system. The incoming administration of new Mayor John Tory may provide some relief, with its proposed fare restructuring, increased funding and other measures.

According to Paul Millett, who works in the engineering construction and expansion department, the TTC has been waiting for budget approval from the city to start tackling under-serviced, overcrowded subways, as well as increasing capacity of new trains and buying more buses.

“I'm going to use the F-word,” Kinnear said. “Funding!”

Among transit systems in North America, the TTC receives the least amount of funding from upper levels of government. For every ride on the TTC, the city subsidizes only 25 per cent of it. That is close to 75 cents per \$3 ride.

Transit in other big cities like New York and Boston receives 40- to 60-per-cent subsidies from both federal and state governments.

The public seems to agree that more money is needed. Founded in 2011, TTCriders is a public transit advocacy group established by citizens to represent the voices of 1.7 million commuters for a better public transit system.

TTCriders launched its #grumpyrider social media campaign in November, calling on elected officials and the city to understand commuters' frustration and to provide more funding to TTC operations. They advocated for 10 minutes-or-less bus services and a two-hour fare transfer system.

“Ninety-nine per cent of the assaults stem from fare disputes and inadequate service,” Kinnear said. “The passenger takes it out on somebody else.”

What Kinnear thinks the TTC needs is to increase communication and educate the public that, as an employer, the TTC does not tolerate any kind of abuse to their operators.

“Rules have to be consistent, so people don't get confused,” Kinnear said. “Assert penalties to crime, look at multi-offenders and ban them from the property.”

The young and the homeless

Situation getting worse for youth, advocate warns

By DENICE RAAGAS
The Observer

Andres Gil is proof of the proposition that street youth aren't just an abstraction. They're individuals, with individual backgrounds that have somehow led them to a common circumstance.

Gil, 21, recently took up temporary residence at Kennedy House, a shelter for homeless young people on Pape Avenue in East York. A student from Venezuela, he studied English in Toronto. He had no job. He became homeless, with little legal status or proper documents.

Gil would like to stay in Canada and is trying to apply for refugee status, but he is unable to afford a lawyer if his application is declined.

"I'm afraid they (the Canadian government) might say 'No,'" he said.

Gwen Atkinson, a Kennedy House shelter donor, said youths like Gil need help to move forward.

"Some of them are just stuck," she said.

Then there's a young woman named Amanda. One recent cold night, a reporter found her sitting on the sidewalk alongside a busy street with her Rottweiler. She had a backpack, and she was holding an empty cup and a sign asking for spare change. It was -3 C shortly after rush hour. People did not glance at her. They were busy getting on streetcars to go home.

"I have been homeless for five years," Amanda said. "I just haven't

made any money today."

Amanda is 19, and from Vancouver. She is in Toronto to meet up with her husband. They just broke up. She was raised by foster parents and was sent to group homes because she was not very good with rules. When she was 14, she decided to leave group homes and turned to the streets. Now, a bit dirty with disheveled light brown hair, Amanda survives by panhandling.

According to a study conducted by Shout Clinic, a health service for homeless youth, 36 per cent of youth in Canada earn money by panhandling or "squeegeeing."

Gil and Amanda are among the 10,000 who are homeless in the GTA. Bruce Rivers, a child welfare expert and advocate who now runs Toronto's Covenant House, said that the problem of youth homelessness is only getting worse.

"It's a huge challenge every year," he said. "A number of issues need to be addressed. Not the least is prevention."

Covenant House, the largest homeless youth shelter in Canada, is just a 10-minute walk from Amanda's sidewalk stakeout. Its biggest annual event, "Sleep Out," was held late last year. Business leaders from across the country slept outside all night on cardboard boxes, in their sleeping bags. Covenant House raised nearly a million dollars at the event.

Amanda chose not to stay at Covenant House that night due to previous unpleasant experiences with troubled youths in other homeless shelters. She has met homeless kids who were forced to commit crimes. She also said she has two homeless friends who sell their bodies, just to survive.

"They weren't happy about it," she said, "but for them, there was no other way."



Denice Raagas /// The Observer

Andres Gil, 21, recently stayed at Kennedy House on Pape Avenue.

Studies conducted by Shout Clinic show that over 10 per cent of the homeless youth in Canada have participated in sex trade work.

Other studies by Raising the Roof, a supporter of long-term solutions to homelessness, show that the plight of street kids is largely misunderstood. Some of the causes of youth homelessness are abuse, neglect, insecurity, shortage of good jobs and affordable housing, which ultimately hinders adolescents from moving forward.

"It's certainly a significant issue that we battle in the city," city councillor Mike Layton said in an interview. "There is no easy solution."

According to Layton, who has been

opposed to past cuts to homeless shelters, immediate housing should not be the only thing focused on. It's also important to look at how to establish a plan for the youth to progress and to become independent.

The new administration of Mayor John Tory is making more resources available for the homeless — and that includes yesterday's announcement that the city will work with Covenant House to create a shelter for young women in danger of sexual exploitation.

But Layton said municipalities also need the federal government to show leadership.

"We have to demand it. They have

the biggest share of taxes collected, and the city is very small by comparison," he said. "They need to start stepping up to the plate."

Although Canada is one of the wealthiest countries in the world, youth homelessness has become a serious issue. And while it's clear to Gil and Amanda that something is being done, it's not enough.

"Why the f**k would Stephen Harper care about me?" Amanda said.

When she was asked what her one wish would be, she fell silent and looked off into the distance, thinking.

"To have a house, just to have a house," she finally said. "You know, one that is mine."

Making a connection with local psychic

By NAZANEEN BAQIZADA
The Observer

Walking along the Danforth on a Friday evening, I spotted a printed sign on a duplex that said, "Psychic Sonya, come in."

As I was about to open the door, I spotted another note that said to ring the doorbell before coming in. So, I did. A blonde woman appeared at the top of the stairs and ushered me up. I felt nervous, especially when my jacket brushed along strings of bells hanging from both sides of the wall and set them ringing loudly. Sonya, who declined to reveal her last name, motioned for me to wait in her kitchen while she talked to another client. I started to look around. On the shelves I saw family portraits, crucifixes, tarot cards, bells and an actual crystal ball.

Fortune-telling goes back to ancient times, and the practice continues to be popular in Toronto today. Sonya's is one of close to 100 psychic shops open for business in the GTA, which advertise online. Last April, there were 60 exhibitors for the Toronto Psychic Fair. Many other psychics set up signs outside their houses and do not advertise themselves in any other way.

"I had premonitions when I was young and they were very strong.... I was 13 or 14 when

my mother finally sat me down and explained that I have the same psychic powers she does," Sonya said.

Psychics have always usually been portrayed negatively in the media. In an episode of the TV show Seinfeld, the main character, Jerry, pokes fun at psychics and his friend George for cancelling his vacation because a psychic told him something bad would happen.

Despite the stigma surrounding psychics, many people continue to go and even depend on them. They also sometimes have an influence on organizations and companies. In November 2014, Brazilian airline TAM changed one of its flight numbers after a prediction from a renowned psychic that the plane would crash. It did not end up crashing and got to its destination safely.

Meanwhile, after a few

minutes of waiting, I sat down at the dining table. Sonya asked me what kind of reading I wanted to do.

She offers tarot, palm, psychic and crystal ball. I chose the basic palm reading, because it cost only \$20.

"Close your hands, make two wishes, and tell me one," Sonya said.

I told her one wish: to be successful in what I do. She then proceeded to read my palm. She told me about my future love, health, wealth, career, and family. Sonya also told me I was "stubborn," which is very true.

Something inside me started believing that all her predictions might happen.

"With the palm, all the lines mean something. It's an art that anyone can learn," Sonya said.

Not all psychics are simple fortune tellers. A lot of them do tarot card readings. Tara Greene, who has a shop at 1792 Dundas St. E., along East York's southern border, has been doing readings for the past 22 years.

"The tarot cards can be used as a psychic tool; they are a medium, an interface between the con-

scious and the unconscious world," she said in a telephone interview.

Anna Livchits has been a client of Greene's for the past two years. She says she seeks her advice for important choices and has even become a little dependent on her.

"I usually go for psychic services when I am making big life decisions and during emergency situations," Livchits wrote in an email.

According to City of Toronto's Municipal Licensing and Standards section, there are no regulations in place for psychic services.

When it comes to finding a psychic you can trust, Livchits suggests doing a lot of research, like she did before finding Greene.

"I have people that come to me and tell me they've spent thousands of dollars on a fake psychic and I tell them they have every right to take them to court, but they are too embarrassed to admit they've done that," Greene said.

After my session with Sonya, I thought about everything she had told me. I didn't feel any differently or make any rash decisions in my life. I simply listened and gained a new experience from it.

"There is a reason to be skeptical. It isn't scientifically proven that there are real psychics, but just keep your mind open, and if you ever get a chance to do a reading, try," Sonya said with a smile.



■ SONYA