



Brandan Kajioka /// The Observer

East York schools added to hit list

By **AZIZA IBRAHIM**
The Observer

Some East York families are feeling blindsided after the last-minute addition of their neighbourhood schools to a list of potential closures.

At a meeting on Tuesday night, the Toronto District School Board added 10 schools to an already widely circulated list of Toronto public schools up for consideration because of low enrolment or other issues.

That list had originally excluded East York-area schools. But now included are: East York Collegiate, East York Alternative, Danforth Collegiate, Eastern Commerce, Monarch Park, Eastdale, Greenwood, Riverdale, School of Life Experience and Subway Academy 1.

But both of the East York school trustees representing

■ See **DON'T**, page 2

Who says winter's no fun?

Katie Lee, Isabella Kraay and Lauren Pankratz (l-r) illustrate the difference between children and some adults when it comes to enjoyment levels experienced on another cold, snowy winter day in East York.

■ HOARDING

When collecting becomes a health hazard

After living in a world of scarcity, woman held onto everything she could find

By **MARWA MOHKAM SHEIKH**
The Observer

Even when Linda Peters' 1,000-square-foot basement suite was stacked to the ceiling with furniture and 11 animals lived in the same space with her, she didn't recognize that she had a problem.

"I would drag couches four times bigger than me for blocks down the street home," she said, "stuff (them) through the front door and stack (them) all up.... I didn't even realize there was a problem."

Her landlord finally put his foot down and asked her to leave.

The contents of Peters' Delta, B.C., apartment filled 17 trucks. As she paid an additional \$1,000 to her landlord to cover the damage to the suite, Peters realized she had a problem: hoarding.

Hoarding hit home in East York last November, when a house on Withrow Avenue burned down killing an elderly woman inside.



File photo from Fotolia

On Nov. 21, Andrew Kostiuk, a division commander with Toronto Fire Services, reported to CBC News that fire crews on the scene had found no solid evidence the woman was a true hoarder, only that she likely "collected stuff."

Carol O'Neil, the owner and manager of Next Step Solutions, in Toronto, offers hoarding support services.

"We never use the word hoarding. It's

extremely disrespectful in our minds," O'Neil said.

The phenomenon became popular via reality TV shows such as *Hoarders* and *Buried Alive*, in 2009 and 2010 respectively.

"On the TV show everybody is a dirty hoarder so people feel they're being painted with that same brush," she said.

Peters, now a student in Vancouver, learned that such TV programs stigmatized her previ-

ous activity.

"(*Hoarders*) characterizes (people) as kind of Looney Tunes. I don't think it humanizes them," she said.

Linda Peters has tried to determine where her tendency to hoard came from. She said she grew up on a farm in an extremely poor family. She became a ward of the foster care system, "where you don't really have a home."

At 18 she was on her own and moved into that 1,000-square-foot basement.

"When you've lived in a world of such scarcity, you tend to hang on to the things you have and that can rapidly spiral out of control," she said.

When it came to acquiring things for her new home, she remembered thinking, "I will never have the opportunity to get something like this... again."

She said once she carried home a cardboard box full of used Mason jars covered in spiders and cobwebs; she thought the jars might be useful someday.

Next Step Solutions' O'Neil, currently working toward a master's in psychotherapy, said this is a very common story.

■ See **DEALING**, page 5

WHAT'S UP IN E.Y.

Politician Prue to be honoured for public service

Longtime East York politician Michael Prue will be celebrated at an appreciation night being held on Feb. 26 at the Palace Restaurant, 722 Pape Ave. near the Danforth. The festivities run from 6 to 9 p.m. The community is invited to come and acknowledge Prue's quarter-century of public service in East York — as a hydro commissioner, borough councillor and mayor and MPP. In lieu of gifts, please consider making a donation to the "Michael Prue Art Award," which will help the East York Foundation acquire more local art. Cheques can be submitted at the restaurant on the night of the event, or can be mailed to the foundation at 50 Merritt Rd., M4B 3K6. Tax receipts will be issued to those making donations.

Speaking in tongues at local theatre

The East Side Players open their latest production, Australian playwright Andrew Bovell's award-winning "Speaking in Tongues," at the Papermill Theatre at Todmorden Mills on Thursday, Feb. 19. Then the play runs through Sunday, resumes Wednesday, Feb. 25 through Sunday, March 1 and concludes with a Wednesday-through-Saturday run, March 4-7. Tickets are \$22 and \$15 for students and are available at the door or through the telephone box office at 416-425-0917. For more information, go to eastsideplayers.ca

~ Observer staff



Patrick Rail // The Observer

What goes up...

...must come down, which is what makes tobogganing one of Canada's favourite winter sports. Children and parents recently enjoyed some uphill climbs, and downhill thrills, at East Lynn Park.

Don't overreact, local trustees advise

Cont'd. from page 1

the area say that families shouldn't overreact. Jennifer Story, the newly elected trustee for Ward 15/Toronto-Danforth, said that there is a range of alternatives to closure.

"This happens every 15

years," said Sheila Cary-Meagher, TDSB trustee for Ward 16/Beaches-East York.

"Almost every high school in the city right now is suffering from the enrolment drop."

And she added: "Under no circumstances is East York

Collegiate going to close, but it is going to participate in the larger discussion of the enrolment and the cost of the other schools in Ward 16."

TDSB chair Shaun Chen has made it clear that no schools will be closing immediately.

Dag gummit - Wrigley's plant heading south

Consumers choosing power mints over chewing gum, which is bad for business

By BRIA JOHN
The Observer

Wrigley's Canada has announced it will be closing its East York-area plant by March 2016 and moving production to Gainsville, Ga.

The plant, located at Leslie Street and Eglinton Avenue East and open since 1963, has employed 383 people.

"We reviewed a number of considerations for the Toronto factory but after careful analysis, we believe that our long-term business needs are best met by operating our two facilities in the U.S.," Wrigley's spokesperson Michelle Lefler said.

Since 2010, while gum prices have gone up, sales have gone down. People are just chewing less gum.

Market researcher Euromonitor ties the decline to the recession and the preference for power mints.

Euromonitor says gum companies have not been reaching young audiences. It also reports that the decline is mainly due to parents not allowing their children to chew bubble and sugarized gum.

"There is not one specific cause of the declines in gum and of late, we are seeing improvements in the category that are promising and the core of our brands are growing," Lefler said.

Wrigley's released a micro-pack of Excel in 2013, six sticks for 69 cents, in an effort to increase sales.

The miniature trend is also taking hold in the sugar confectionary category, where sales have stayed flat since 2013.

Some might remember Chris Brown's hit song "Forever" from 2008. The song is actually an extended Doublemint jingle.

It features the Doublemint tagline "double your pleasure, double your fun."

According to the Wall Street Journal, the song was produced and paid for by Wrigley's in an effort to increase its appeal to a younger market. The campaign also featured singer Ne-yo and Julianne Hough of "Dancing With the Stars" fame.

World warming to the charms of whisky

By STEPHANIE HINDS
The Observer

Unlike wines and spirits typically known to pair well with food, whisky has yet to make itself known as a pairing beverage. But last week, the executive chef at The Forth restaurant on Danforth Avenue teamed up with beverage expert Emily Pearce to change that.

The World of Whisky Lounge took place on Feb. 5 at the 629 Danforth venue and featured craft whiskies like North American Basil Hayden Bourbon and Gentleman Jack Rare Tennessee whisky, Scottish Aaran Malt and Laphroaig Scotch and Canadian Lot No. 40 Rye.

The food menu featured exotic and vibrant dishes of eccles cakes, tuna tartare, and grilled lamb to match each whisky set up at the sampling stations.

The event also featured a Japanese whisky, Nikka Taketsuru. The popularity of Japanese whisky has been growing tremendously. It's even a topic of discussion and debate in the Wall Street Journal — about whether it's better than scotch. And according to The Forth chef



File photo from Fotolia

Zachary Albertsen, it just might be.

"It's my favourite," he said of the Asian whisky.

The event, an environment welcoming to experts and newbies alike, set out in part to change attitudes about whisky.

"It's really approachable, because

there's such a variety of categories. You can go from something that's subtle and sweet to something that's really strong, smoky, smooth, a bourbon or whisky," Albertsen explained.

At the event was Mark Bylok, author of Amazon's best-selling Whisky Cabinet.

"I think it's kind of the next natural step," he said. "People love their wine, they love their beer, they love their coffee. Whisky has a lot of that character and a lot of that flavour but it just takes a little while to appreciate."

But that's just part of the reason the beverage is becoming more appealing. The drink, typically known to be a "man's drink," is being consumed by more and more women.

Jamie Johnson, who runs whisky events strictly for women in Caledonia, says whisky culture is changing.

"It's a powerful drink," Johnson said. "It's always been associated with masculinity."

'Women of whisky' events are helping to make the process of learning whisky culture less intimidating.

"It's only women. One of the brand ambassadors from Glenfiddich hosts the evening and it's just a nice atmosphere for women to ask questions," Johnson said. "You feel better about asking questions and a little better about ordering it. It's a lot like when you first learn about wine."

■ COMMUNICATIONS

Internet regulation not in the forecast: CRTC

Commission will 'remain passive' for now: Shoan

By THEMISTOKLIS ALEXIS
The Observer

The CRTC has no plans to regulate the Internet anytime soon.

Raj Shoan, Ontario commissioner for the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commis-

sion, spoke to students and faculty at Centennial College's East York campus on Jan. 28.

He offered general comments about the future of the commission and the Canadian media marketplace. Then he answered questions from about 100 audience members. He was asked if the CRTC planned to regulate Internet content.

"I don't see the commission really getting into regulating online content in any mean-

ingful way," he said.

As an example, he said that broadcasting mainstays such as cable and satellite have not been hurt by the emergence of online content.



■ SHOAN

Until an Interweb giant such as Netflix affects the bottom line of Canada's traditional broadcasting outlets, Shoan said the commission will re-

main passive.

"My perspective is that if you're going to argue that Netflix is destroying your ability to do business, you'd better have some good evidence," he said, "and right now, I just don't see the evidence."

A former law student at the University of New Brunswick, Shoan was appointed Ontario commissioner at the CRTC last July. He had previously led both the CBC and Astral Media in public CRTC hearings as director of regulatory

affairs. Shoan was also a member of the commission's legal counsel from 2004 to 2008, as a senior policy analyst.

The CRTC was founded in 1968 in Gatineau, Que., to replace the Board of Broadcast Governors. Its functions include enforcing Canadian broadcasting and telecommunications policies and granting, renewing and amending broadcasting licences.

"Satellite and cable companies are not losing money," Shoan said. "People are con-

suming more broadcast content than ever... an average of 26 hours a week."

The commission receives its mandate from the federal government and its commissioners are appointed by Parliament.

Shoan was asked about CRTC autonomy, when all of its decisions go to cabinet for approval. Shoan maintained that the CRTC is arm's-length from Parliament.

"I do not report to the government," he said.

Students can stretch their stress away

Yoga helps participants develop a balanced lifestyle, instructor says

By MATT GREEN
The Observer

Now that the winter semester is well underway at Centennial College's East York campus, the homework and assignments are starting to pile up. As the weeks go on, students often struggle to find a way to cope with all the stress.

Yoga may be one solution. So a yoga class is being offered each week at the Carlaw Avenue school.

Every Monday and Wednesday, Jenny Foster Vaya from Prema Yoga Toronto is teaching a yoga class in the new campus fitness centre.

"I'm offering yoga classes here... to support students having a balanced lifestyle," she said.

For 45 minutes, Vaya guides the students along in various stretches and poses, relieving them from the stress and anxiety that comes with school work.

Originally, Vaya taught yoga in the classrooms, but she found it difficult "moving all the desks."

"I love it. I'm so happy," she said. "The new facility is beautiful. It's been really nice to have a dedicated facility that the students get to use to make a real yoga class."

Vaya said the students have been "very enthusiastic" in their response to the yoga. "The students are lovely, super-friendly and super-nice."

According to Vaya, yoga has several benefits for students.

"It can help you become more flexible, relieve pain in your spine, in your back, and in your joints," she said. "It just brings a level of calmness and relaxation in to your life."

Centennial College student Erin Kelly has been to the first two classes and plans on taking the class again.

"It is directly after my class on a Wednesday, and being the middle of the week, I feel as if that is a good time to schedule in some relaxation," she said.

Kelly, who took yoga for two years at the University of Toronto's Scarborough campus, said she was motivated when she saw the poster for the class.

"When I saw that this campus would offer it too, and for free, I was all in," she said.

The classes have been a positive experience for Kelly. "The instructor is very easy to approach and informative when you ask her questions," she said. "I think also that she gives good alternatives to different poses, and pays careful attention to each student to help them improve their poses."



File photo from Fotolia

Breastfeeding is an organic source of nutrition and provides immunologic protection to help ensure healthy growth and development for infants and toddlers.

Mothers know 'breast'

Baby-friendly East York hospital encourages new mothers to breastfeed

By AZIZA IBRAHIM
The Observer

Up against Ekram Johar's chest, as she swayed back and forth, was her six-day-old baby girl, Nuria.

Johar breastfed all three of her previous children and is continuing this practice with the newest addition to her family.

"It's good for the baby's development, good for bones and teeth, helps get rid of pregnancy fat and postpartum stress," she said. "The list goes on."

In March 2013, the World Health Organization released a report recommending and encouraging a variety of practices. Encouraging mothers to breastfeed their newborn babies for at least the first six months of infancy was one of the recommendations laid out in the report.

Now, Toronto East General Hospital is

one of the three hospitals in Ontario designated as a "Baby-Friendly" hospital.

"We have a breastfeeding culture where we support practices that we know will promote the best possible outcomes for mothers and babies, while in their stay with the hospital," said Kristina Niedra, Baby-Friendly Initiative (BFI) strategy project manager.

TEGH was asked to lead the BFI strategy — an investment that was made by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to promote breastfeeding across Ontario.

"The project is aimed to provide hospitals and community health organizations in the province with training tools, guidance and resources to help achieve the World Health Organization Baby-Friendly Initiative designation," Niedra said.

BFI implementation workshops are held regularly to educate healthcare providers from hospitals, community health centres and other organizations about the steps to becoming baby-friendly.

"We spend a lot of time talking about change management," Niedra said.

"Build baby-friendly into your culture so it sticks and it's our new norm as to how we care for moms and babies."

TEGH meets a set of criteria set out by the Breastfeeding Committee of Canada.

One quality that separates direct care providers in the maternal and newborn unit at TEGH from many others is that staff are required to undergo 20 hours of breastfeeding education — a two-day course.

"We don't market formula, where a lot of other hospitals have formula contracts with big companies, where they actually accept free formula and then pass that formula on to moms," Niedra said.

Breastfeeding doesn't only benefit babies, but it also has its perks for mothers.

"We know that breastfed infants are healthier and that breastfeeding reduces incidents of certain cancers in some mothers," she said.

For Johar, breastfeeding is cheaper and more nutritious. It also "saves you from the hassle of preparing formula," she said, "and there's nothing in this world that's more precious than time and the gift of life."



Photo reproductions by Nicole Dawe // Observer

East York's 'Group of Sauriol'

For the month of January, the Leaside branch of the public library hosted a showing of paintings belonging to the East York Foundation. The foundation maintains a large collection of art created by Canadian artists. Last month's featured artist, Jack Pepper, was born outside Ottawa and later moved to East York. Many of his paintings and watercolours are of the Don Valley. The painting on the right depicts the cabin that was built in the mid-1940s and owned by Canadian naturalist Charles Sauriol. Local artists created a club and would hold meetings in the cabin. Pepper joined the club, and captured the cabin on canvas. He also painted a bridge over the Don, shown at left.

■ HOMELESSNESS

Seeking shelter from the cold

Toronto's emergency shelters are experiencing the highest nightly occupancy average since 2011, city manager says

By **AZIZA IBRAHIM**
The Observer

On the corner of Greenwood and Danforth Avenue stood Wilfred Clausen Mohr, 72, with a smile on his face and an empty cup in his hand, grateful for every bit of money dropped in it.

Mohr panhandles to support not only himself with basic necessities, but also the pet cat whom he loves dearly.

As a well-dressed, middle-aged woman passed by and slipped a \$20 bill into his cup, Mohr's eyes filled with tears.

"This alone is more than I see on most days," he said.

Mohr is well-known among residents of the area, where he is usually seen standing outside the local LCBO, sporting a long white beard, his worn-out green winter jacket and dark denim jeans.

Colder temperatures have come with a vengeance to Toronto, and the freezing weather is suspected in the deaths of four men over a two-week period last month.

One man, in his 50s, was found in a bus shelter located on the corner of Yonge and Dundas streets. Another, a 59-year-old man, was found in an abandoned truck located in a shipping yard.

Upward of 5,000 homeless people depend on city-funded shelters to keep warm during bone-chilling winter nights, accord-



File photo from Fotolia

An estimated 5,000 homeless people depend on city-funded shelters to keep them warm during the fall and winter. John Clarke of OCAP says the "level of overcrowding is clearly severe and life-threatening."

ing to the City of Toronto website.

There has been a steady increase, by 1.6 per cent, in the homeless population since 2009.

Emergency shelters are experiencing the highest average for nightly occupancy since 2011, accommodating more than 4,000 homeless people every night in all 57 city-operated shelters.

Patricia Anderson manages the shelter, support and housing administration for the City of Toronto, and acknowledged that the average nightly occupancy in shelters was about three per cent higher this past fall compared to a year ago.

But now, with John Tory as the new mayor of Toronto, Anderson said in an email interview that her department plans to work with the new council to "free up

beds by assisting long-term shelter users into housing, as well as the creation of additional emergency shelter beds."

"The taxpayers are paying for all this, to help the guys like me, but the city is too busy and overwhelmed by everything else," Mohr said.

The new Tory administration at city hall is making more resources available to the homeless. Still, the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) has held protests demanding more beds in shelters for the homeless population of Toronto. OCAP is an anti-poverty organization that campaigns "against regressive government policies as they affect poor and working people," as their website states.

A demonstration two years ago "led to the city adopting a policy of keeping shel-

ter occupancy at no more than 90 per cent," John Clarke, organizer for OCAP, said in an email interview.

But then-mayor Rob Ford insisted that there were more than enough shelter beds to accommodate everyone who was in need, and the policy wasn't implemented.

A total of 29 shelter clients died in Toronto in 2014, the highest toll since 2008. That brought the total of reported deaths to 171 since 2007. Between 70 and 80 per cent of these deaths took place outside of the shelters.

"The level of overcrowding is clearly severe and life-threatening and the shelters will fail to provide any kind of safe space option unless enough additional space is opened for all shelters," Clarke wrote.

The City of Toronto believes that the solution to homelessness is "permanent, affordable and appropriate housing, along with the necessary supports," Anderson said.

OCAP has already taken steps to lobby the new city administration to solve the bed crisis. The city has promised OCAP a 24-hour drop-in space for women and for transgender homeless people. Both are scheduled to open in late 2015.

Mohr rotates between a local church and a shelter located in the neighbourhood during the winter.

"If 10 people show up and there are only two beds, then that leaves eight people without a bed for the night," Mohr said.

Shelter occupancy exceeded 90 per cent every day during the month of December. As the situation steadily worsens, Clarke warns, "the immediate fight we're taking up is just for enough shelter beds to prevent people dying on the streets."

■ OBITUARY



Photo courtesy of Aldred family

Jack Aldred (front right) marched regularly in East York's Remembrance Day parade.

Jack Aldred: A life of service

By JASON SUTCLIFFE
The Observer

The intersection of Carlaw and Mortimer avenues is safer because Jack Aldred cared enough about people to fight for a crosswalk.

Aldred, 91, died in his home on Wednesday following a heart attack.

"He is a great example of civic engagement," said Mary Fragedakis, councillor for Ward 29/Toronto-Danforth. "He gave us all a sense of the problem at the intersection and how it impacts the kids."

Aldred worked as a crossing guard for 23 years, and understood the dangers. After nearly 10 years of petitioning, Aldred finally convinced the city, of what he already knew,

and a lit, overhead crosswalk sign was installed at the corner.

"I feel that I've done something for the community... something positive, something that will affect other people rather than just something that I will enjoy," Aldred said.

Looking out and caring for others is something Aldred has always done. He was a naval veteran of the Second World War, and the pain of others often bothered him.

"We were there to see the ships come in," said Aldred. "Right away you are fearful of how many of the guys went down with the ship... how many were saved."

Aldred published the book *Tales of Todmorden Veterans*. He shared anecdotes from

more than a dozen veterans of the Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 10. Again, he showed as much of an interest in everyone else's story as his own.

His son, Jack Aldred Jr., recalls the feeling of growing up as his father's namesake.

"I hated my name when I was a kid," he said. "One of my regrets is that my generation didn't have any respect for veterans or what they did.... That realization came in my 20s.... When I learned about them, I found I was proud of dad — and my name."

The funeral will be held at the McDougall and Brown Funeral Home, 2900 Kingston Rd., tomorrow, Feb. 14. Visitation is at 2 p.m., with a service to follow at 3 p.m.

Dealing with hoarding a 'continuous struggle'

Cont'd. from page 1

"Hoarding is about control," she said. "You take control wherever you can and don't let go of items because you don't know when you will obtain something again to fill that void."

Both Peters and O'Neil consider hoarding an addiction. As someone who actively hoarded for over 10 years, Peters explained that the biggest misconception about hoarders is that they are "completely in control, that they are making a choice to hoard."

Peters admitted, as well, that cocooning herself among her belongings gave her a sense of security.

"There's a feeling of being kind of enclosed, like in a nest, and that can feel very nice," she said. "There is a comfort that you feel."

Peters said to put the problem behind her, she used a service much like Carol O'Neil's, called Good Riddance, to help her de-clutter her life. The service helped her channel her belongings to charities and other people. O'Neil's support service employs the same method. "We work directly with women's shelters,"

O'Neil said. "We work with elder reviews, animal shelters, soup kitchens, after school programs. ... So we're able to tell (clients) a story about where their things could go."

Peters said the practice helped her make the transition more smoothly.

"It allowed me that half-step between the wasteland, the blackness of just getting rid of the thing," she said. "I don't know if it ever would have been really possible for me to get rid of all those things ... if the service hadn't offered that."

Peters admitted that she still struggles with her past, that hoarding isn't something people choose to do. It's a continuous struggle because there's always a tug, she said.

"The stigma of mental illness bothers me," she said. "We've got this idea that we've all got to be the same way and we don't."

O'Neil emphasizes that the transition away from hoarding is a slow step-by-step process.

"I can't stress enough that this is not about going in and making it good housekeeping," she said. "This is about making their (hoarders) home safe and functional."

ARE YOU A HOARDER?

Experts say hoarders share some common traits. Here are a few of the telltale signs that you, or a loved one, may have a problem:

- The common factor among hoarders is depression. People who hoard suffer from some degree of depression.

- This depression is usually accompanied by one other disorder such as ADHD, OCD, anxiety, etc.

- Hoarders are always wary of letting people into their homes because they are self-conscious about all of the 'stuff' they've accumulated.

- Figures of authority, such as landlords, are feared the most and kept away from the house at all costs.

- According to Linda Peters, "This could be useful!" is the catchphrase of the hoarder.



Marwa Mohkam Sheikh // The Observer

The last hurrah

Shoppers line up to pay for discounted items at the East York Town Centre Target store. The company is winding down its Canadian operations.

Benefits of immunization outweigh side effects, pediatrician says

By SAYADA NABI
The Observer

Pediatrician Hilary de Veber has recently found herself administering explanations as often as vaccinations, particularly if parents are uncertain about their effectiveness.

"I listen to their concern," she said at her practice on Coxwell Avenue. "Some patients are very far away from vaccination."

In the wake of Toronto

Public Health's confirmation of eight measles cases in Toronto, de Veber has strongly advised parents to vaccinate their children.

According to de Veber, some parents have hesitated to vaccinate their children because of a false link made between the vaccine and autism.

An article published 10 years ago by medical researcher Andrew Wakefield "linked the vaccination to

autism, but it has been disproven since," de Veber said. "(The parents) immediately don't trust you," she said. "You need to allow these things to take time."

Two of the Toronto measles cases were found in infants, while the others were found in adults.

Lenore Bromley, a spokesperson for Toronto Public Health, said three of the four infected adults were not vaccinated with the two required

doses of the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine.

Toronto East General spokesperson Sharon Navarro noted the problem associated with immunizing "pregnant women and immuno-compromised people (with) weakened immune systems."

She said they cannot be safely vaccinated because MMR is a live vaccine, with an active virus in it.

Even though the measles cases are located GTA-

wide, Toronto Public Health spokesperson Lenore Bromley pointed out that the affected individuals could well have travelled across the city and that the virus remains highly contagious. That's why it's important for others to be vaccinated, she said.

"This is the importance of herd immunity," she said, "to protect individuals who can't be vaccinated, or in situations where the vaccine was not as effective."

Pediatrician De Veber agreed.

"Herd immunity protects society and ensures the virus won't go crazy like wildfire," she said, adding that the benefits of immunization outweigh the short-term side effects such as a high fever.

Symptoms of the disease include a high fever, rash, cough and a runny nose.

Toronto Public Health has initiated a Measles Hotline at 416-338-7790.

EDITORIALS

Compare the fare

The TTC's flat-rate system is behind the times

A trip to the supermarket down the street: \$3. A trip from East York to Etobicoke: \$3. Paying the same fare no matter how far you travel: unfair.

The fact that a person taking transit to the doctor's office a few blocks down the road pays the same price as a person travelling from one end of the city to the other end is not fair.

With the recent news of yet another TTC fare increase, people with a stake in Toronto transit can't help but wonder: Is there another approach to setting fares?

According to the group Transit Toronto, the City of Toronto established the flat-rate fare system in 1921.

And that approach hasn't changed since.

But it is now 94 years later, and there is a desperate need for a change. Toronto isn't the Toronto it once was. It has grown in size and population. But our transit system hasn't adapted by rethinking the basics of fare structure; it has merely multiplied the fares many times over.

This city needs a new transit solution that ensures fairness for all transit riders.

Other major cities around the world have taken up a distance-based fare system — a system that charges based on distance travelled. Major cities like London, Tokyo, New York and Singapore all use this system.

Toronto should consider something similar, and it doesn't even have to look far for examples. GO Transit operates a distance-based fare system using Presto cards, where riders tap on and tap off using their cards and the fare is calculated based on their distance of travel.

To this day, only 15 of 70 subway/RT stations accept the Presto card. The agreement between TTC and Metrolinx to have Presto service on all TTC vehicles was signed in 2012. TTC's website says that the Presto rollout will be complete on all stations in addition to the bus and streetcar fleet by the end of 2016.

Hopefully, the TTC will start taking a serious look at its fare collection system — making it an equitable ride for all commuters.

The elements for this system are there; all that needs to be done is resolve to put it in place, so transit can be fair, with distance-based fares.

~ Jeffrey Sze

A 'ridiculous' debate

Anti-vaxxer movement is alive and well and exposing children to a preventable disease

Human nature teaches us to always protect ourselves, so why are some leaving us vulnerable to what can be so easily prevented? The anti-vaccination movement is putting us all at unnecessary risk.

Anti-vaxxers, as they are known in slang, stand opposed to compulsory vaccination practices put in place by public health authorities.

Organizations such as the "Vaccine Resistance Movement" seek to restore what they describe as self-sufficiency in the human body, and they put forward the view that all vaccines play off each other in a sort of chain reaction, triggering further infections and disorders. But there is no scientific evidence for these claims.

In fact, according to Toronto Public Health, vaccines have saved more lives than any other health intervention in the last 50 years. And any risks from receiving immunizations are much less than the risks from the disease itself.

Now, with several confirmed cases of measles in Toronto, how can anti-vaxxing be justified? Is it not fair to say the anti-vaccination movement is allowing preventable diseases to make a comeback?

Measles is a highly contagious disease. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), it is spread easily through coughing, sneezing, and close/direct contact with those who are infected. Viruses remain active and contagious for up to two hours in the air and on surfaces.

Those who either actively or passively adopt this anti-vaccination stance make themselves available as carriers, and contribute to the possibility of an epidemic.

Any non-immune person is at risk of becoming infected and then spreading the infection.

According to Health Canada, the most-at risk group for measles and its complications are young children.

So what can we do to protect ourselves? Get vaccinated. Get our children vaccinated. And convince our loved ones to do the same.

As federal health minister Rona Ambrose has said, continuing to have a debate on immunizations in this day and age is "ridiculous."

~ November Chernick

COLUMNS

Podcasting is the future

It seems that the way we consume things is always changing. Just as music has moved from vinyl records to CDs to iTunes and television has moved from over-the-air to cable to Netflix, so is radio programming transitioning — to podcasts. Radio is no longer confined to the coverage area of a local transmitter and the availability of a certain time slot. In this age of digital technology, you don't even have to listen on an actual radio. A smartphone will do in a pinch.

The term "podcast" was coined just over a decade ago to describe a way of distributing audio programming



Akorede Amosun

over the Internet.

Radio shows can be stored on servers and downloaded from the Internet for later listening on smartphones or laptops or whatever — at the convenience of the shows' fans. With a growing audience (now sitting at nearly 40 million listeners), podcasts have carved out an impressive niche. (In December, this very newspaper carried a story about some students at Centennial College's East York campus who are producing a new series of podcasts at the college's Internet radio station.)

Last year may have been a watershed for this new medium — with the cult-like popularity of a podcast called "Serial." The show was a spin-off of This American Life, a program produced at a public radio station in Boston and carried on other stations across the U.S. (as well as podcast itself). Production of Serial has concluded for now, but the episodes

are still available and concern the murder of Hae Min Lee, a Baltimore high-school senior, and the subsequent conviction of her ex-boyfriend, Adnan Syed.

Upon its release, Serial broke the iTunes record for the most downloads in the shortest period of time.

It's a compelling story, a classic whodunit, told in a conversational style. Listeners can hear it unfold gradually, episode-by-episode, or they can binge-listen if they want to.

They can listen in the car, at the gym, on the bus. And that's the beauty of podcasts: they're tailored for the fast pace of today's society.

Listeners can start, pause and resume whenever and wherever they want — and they can multitask while they listen.

Serial has raised the popularity of podcasts, but it's also raised the bar when it comes to editorial standards.

In turn, let's hope this new means of delivering radio will be a boost for the traditional medium of radio — both in quantity of listeners and in quality of programming.

Not enough love for TTC

On recent wintry days, commuters have been facing a slow ride into the city. As the streets became covered and high winds blew through the downtown core, many people contemplated whether it was a good idea to even leave their houses.

But even with all of the delays and confusion that last week's "snow day" brought to East York and the rest of the GTA, sometimes it helps to remind ourselves of the benefits of commuting and why, even in the winter, the public transit really is "the better way."

First, getting out of your car and onto a subway is just plain healthier. Walking, taking the stairs — and especially trudging through the snow — are all forms of moderate physical activities that get your heart pumping.

Not to mention that sitting in an automobile stuck in traffic increases your exposure to the fumes that your car and the surrounding cars are chugging out.

Getting out in the fresh air and walking a few blocks gives you at least some buffer

from all those gases.

And when it comes to environmental impacts, taking public transit lowers the amount of gas emissions that come from motorized vehicles.

It reduces the pollution in the air that contributes to smog... and, ultimately, climate change.

But there are also social benefits to commuting. You never know whom you are going to meet on the bus. The love of your life, a possible new friend, maybe even your next job opportunity.

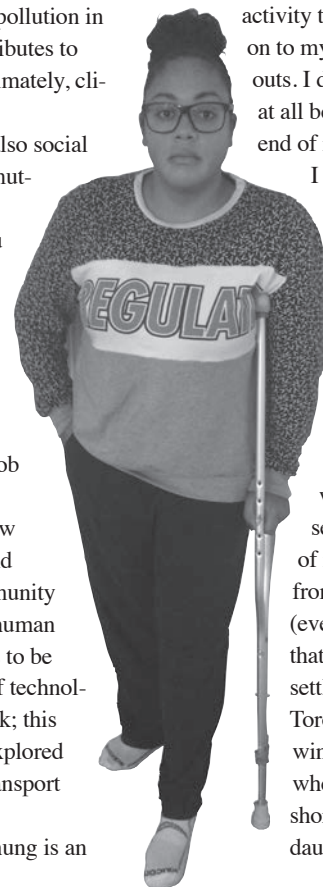
Getting to know the people around you builds community and adds to the human touch that seems to be lost in a world of technology. (Don't smirk; this idea was even explored in a study by Transport Canada.)

Dominique Chung is an avid runner and sport therapy stu-

dent at Durham College who doesn't mind commuting in the winter months.

"I look at it like this," she said. "It's like an additional 30 minutes of physical activity that I can add on to my daily workouts. I don't mind it at all because at the end of my commute I feel like I've already challenged myself for the day."

For Chung, this activity, especially during the winter months, serves as a kind of immunization from the malaise (even depression) that seems to settle on many Torontonians in winter months when the days are short and it can be daunting to step outside and brave those elements.



Brittany Campbell



Marcus Medford // The Observer

At left, three of the participants in the weekly open drawing studio at Centennial College's East York campus concentrate on capturing a model's likeness on paper. Chris Nagai, an art student at Durham College, attends the sessions for extra practice. At right, he touches up a sketch.

The naked truth about life drawing

Model finds posing nude to be a 'super-liberating' experience

By **MARCUS MEDFORD**
The Observer

Scott Koza sits on a stool in the corner of the room, completely still. He's wearing only his socks and his briefs. It would be some time before he spoke; he was busy posing.

"I'm an observer," he said. "When you're naked and you stare at people, no one will ever question it."

Koza's work posing gives art students and members of the public a chance to learn life

drawing at Centennial College's East York campus. David McClyment, a Centennial fine arts teacher, leads the open workshop.

"(Life drawing is) code for drawing people naked," he said.

McClyment explained that life drawing helps artists sharpen their hand-eye co-ordination by drawing a model who is posing in front of them.

Koza, 27, modelled for the first time when he was 17 because the original model didn't show up.

"It was completely terrifying," he recalled. "I was super red.... It was embarrassing."

He pointed out that most people who become life models are artists themselves or dancers or

musicians who become comfortable with it after repeat sessions. Koza was a fine arts student himself for five years and did life modelling part-time to help pay for school.

He admitted that at first he was very conscious of his body and curious as to what he looked like to other people. Becoming comfortable with one's body is a "process," he explained.

"(It's) super-liberating," he said. "Just learning to love yourself and really accept your body."

McClyment recognizes the intensive effort required for modelling.

"What most people don't recognize is that it's rigorously physical and rigorously mental,"

he said.

Koza agrees.

"If I work three classes, that's like nine hours of yoga Pilates a day," he said. "I learned more in two years of full-time modelling than I ever did in four years of art school."

McClyment thinks that life-drawing studios can also help artists retreat into their own minds. He described it as "totally Zen," and said that it allows artists to "draw like no one's looking."

McClyment said that while the sessions are open to the public, students enjoy them too — because there's no evaluation.

"The hardest thing about drawing is turning your brain off," he said.

Tree team wants you to get planting

By **PAT RAIL**
The Observer

A Toronto arborist believes that the tree canopy needs attention in Toronto-Danforth, the southwest third of East York.

In 2009, the city used remote sensing equipment to examine the condition of Toronto's tree population.

The resulting report, called "Every Tree Counts: A Portrait of Toronto's Urban Forest" (updated in 2013), said that Toronto is home to some 10.2 million trees. It also said the city needs to "increase and maintain a sustainable urban forest."

Forestry expert Steve Smith sees particular evidence of that need in Toronto-Danforth.

"We're in a part of this city that doesn't have many trees," he said. "We need to keep as many of them as we can."

Historically, Ward 29/Toronto-Danforth was farmland, meaning that the canopy coverage was lower than in other areas of the city to begin with. But Smith doesn't consider this a constraint.

"We actually have opportunities that other parts of the city don't," he said. "We have



Pat Rail // The Observer

Leigh Davidson wants residents of Ward 29 to plant more trees.

this beautiful, deep... soil in this part of the city that is nicely suited to species that don't do well everywhere else."

Resident Leigh Davidson wants her neighbours in the East York community to take

up the challenge. She, along with other local residents, started MoreTrees29, a group that encourages homeowners to take advantage of the city planting program. They also provide tips on how to protect

existing trees.

"You go out and knock on doors and talk to people, and explain to them that the city provides free trees to homeowners for their front yard," Davidson said.

After finding interested homeowners, MoreTrees29 provides a list of possible tree types residents can plant and then shows residents what kinds of trees would thrive in the area.

The organization helps homeowners order the trees and keeps track of the saplings' progress.

"We can email them if, say, there is a drought and remind them to water their tree twice a week," Davidson said. "I'm answering lots of emails from residents about stuff like tree protection, ice-storm recovery (and) preventive pruning."

MoreTrees29 currently has 18 volunteers who have spent the past year canvassing East York, connecting with homeowners and explaining the city's tree planting program.

"It's a concept of social marketing, neighbours talking to neighbours," Davidson said. "We don't work for the city. We don't work for any organization. We're just residents."

Coxwell Station to get a facelift

By **FATIMA TEXIWALA**
The Observer

Over the next few months, the TTC will begin making improvements to many subway stations, including Coxwell Station.

These improvements are expected to change the station's lack of accessibility by adding new elevators and automatic sliding doors, along with other changes. The big change will be the elevator.

"Anybody disabled, pushing a stroller, or (if) you need an elevator, the station will be beneficial," said Lito Romano, TTC community liaison officer, in an interview during the construction update open house held on Jan. 21.

The work will also involve "state-of-goodrepair" improvements, which will upgrade both the interior and exterior — such as a repaving of the bus loop, better lighting and a new landscape design.

During the construction, commuters will have to "get off at the corner of Danforth and Coxwell and walk to the station," Romano said, but "any passengers who are actually travelling north-south through Danforth — it's actually convenient because we are interlining the route."

Construction will begin this spring and is expected to wrap up in late 2017.

To add some colour to Coxwell station, a handful of young artists have helped paint murals that will be hung in the station at the end of its construction.

"They worked for several months, including consultation. We took ideas from the community, on what they envisioned in the community, and based on that they worked with a professional artist," Romano said.



Veronica Agudelo /// The Observer

Putting heart to paper

Alan Sagel, 5, and Guinevere Pura were among those who spent Sunday afternoon creating personalized valentine cards for their friends and family at the Todmorden Mills Heritage Site. Alan also made special cards for his teachers.

■ ECONOMICS

Helping you save a buck is big business

Valentine values just the latest line of goods to keep customers congregating

By **MARWA MOHKAM SHEIKH**
The Observer

Glitzy red streamers, bright pink floral decorations and heart-shaped everything as far as the eye can see. That's what will greet you if you walk into a dollar store this weekend. The aisles of Valentine's Day-oriented displays are a reminder to us all that we are at the climax of 'the season of love' and that, if we want to stock up on everything in time and with little expense, there's only one place to go: the dollar store.

Whether it is Dollarama, Dollar Tree or one of the independent dollar stores spread across East York and the rest of the city, the dollar store is a retail approach that inspires loyalty among some and avoidance among others. What started as a cost-effective form of retail in times of economic distress has gradually turned into a powerhouse sector of retail.

Recent figures show the industry is booming, now more than ever before, with Dollar Tree operating over 200 stores and Dollarama operating over 900 stores in Canada, with strong plans for expansion.

Which is not to say that these are flush times for every dollar store network.

Shahid Ali, the owner of a Dollar Blitz franchise store on Pape Avenue, said that his store is doing well, but the Dollar Blitz chain is actually retrenching after a strong start in 2007.

"When I started my business with this branch, there were 77 Dollar Blitz stores across the GTA, and now there are only two," Ali said during an interview in his store. In between tending to customers and working the cash register, he thought about why some chains seem to be thriving and others aren't.

"The main problem, I think, is the economy, and the idea of a 'name' for people," he said. "Dollarama has become a household name now, so it is doing better."

Fortunately, Ali added, "My business is doing well, actually, and has improved in the

last eight years.... I get everything in my store locally and it costs more than importing, but it's of great quality."

So relatively independent dollar stores can be successful for the same reasons that popular chain stores are: for the variety and quality of products sold.

Karen Ho, a business reporter for Canada's Business News Network, agrees with Ali's perception that Dollarama is now an established brand name, but in an interview, she analyzed the different aspects of the dollar store industry and shed some light on the context of the company's success.

"I think the growth in transaction size and traffic is due to their strategic expansion in inventory as well as significant growth in brand awareness in the last five years," she said. "The Dollarama name has become very familiar to consumers, not only as a shopping place that simply exists, but one they can reliably and regularly go to for lots of different kinds of items they think they need or want."

As an outlet that was initially created for the financially strained, the dollar industry has come a long, complex way. While the Christmas and valentine seasons are definitely a period of victory for the trade, it is apparent that the dollar store's star is on the rise generally. East York's Dollar Blitz-owner Ali said he's happy being a part of the industry, because of the pride he feels in selling such a wide variety of products. Meanwhile, with

plans to expand even more in 2015, adding up to 80 more locations in the country, the people who run Dollarama are grinning over their retail empire's steady climb.

And why should we, as consumers, be happy? Because we have access to items from a range of retailers at a range of prices — and that's a win-win. Ho thinks one of the reasons the dollar industry is so appealing to the public is because "more people are budget-conscious following the great recession; not just students and low-income earners."

As the leading dollar-store retailer in Canada, Montreal-based Dollarama was founded in 1992 by its CEO Larry Rossy, and is an example of how the concept has expanded over the years. Even though Dollar Tree is originally an American company, it opens about 40 new stores in Canada every year, competing with Dollarama, which opens about 80 stores across the country each year.

If the sheer number of dollar stores spread across the nation isn't enough to portray the industry's dominance, then Dollarama's most recent annual sales — just under \$590 million, almost 12 per cent more than the previous year — clearly indicate that the dollar store is here to stay.

In a December conference call to announce its third-quarter fiscal report, Michael Ross, Dollarama's CFO and secretary, revealed that both retail sales and revenue have increased in the past year and store transactions and traffic are both

significantly up. Retail and business analysts explain that this means that not only are more people now buying items from dollar stores, but they are buying more of these items, and the amount that they buy in one trip has increased noticeably.

Some dollar store shoppers, who started out going there only for the savings, now form an enthusiastic online community of supporters. From Facebook posts and tweets to customized blogs, the digital sphere is brimming with devotion to the dollar store.

American blogger A.J. Finsand, who likes to describe herself as a self-taught designer, re-vamper and blogger, runs the blog "The Dollar Diva." She has been teaching people creative ways of purchasing and using items from dollar stores for more than seven years.

"I honestly think that a good percentage of shoppers are still stuck in that stigma that dollar stores must sell all 'cheap crap.' But I think it's because they have never really looked around the whole store to see what is available," Finsand wrote in an email interview from her home in Oregon. "Most of the time, I find that dollar store items are of the same quality as the same items at other, more expensive stores."

The notion that dollar stores are now thriving despite the economy having improved and Canadians having the purchasing power to shop at stores higher up on the retail scale is not lost on Finsand.

And it isn't just the prices that make dollar stores stand out. It's the ever-expanding variety of products, too, it seems.

It is now an expected sight to walk into a dollar store weeks before a holiday and see the displays brimming with the relevant decorations, from hearts and chocolates before Valentine's Day to clovers and leprechaun trinkets near Saint Patrick's Day.

"Our sales this quarter were fueled also by very strong Halloween season sales, as our customers responded positively to our compelling range of Halloween products," Dollarama CEO Larry Rossy said in the December conference call.

He and the rest of his sector are hoping for similar results once the romantic dust settles after Feb. 14.



File photo from Fotolia