



A mother's anguish

Stefanie Rengel's mom takes stand on Day 1 of trial

By MONIQUE PLESSAS

Patricia Hung, the mother of a 14-year-old East York murder victim, took the stand this week and a packed courtroom listened to emotional testimony that contrasted sharply with the accused's cool demeanor.

As the first witness in the trial of a 17-year-old girl accused of pressuring her boyfriend into murdering Stefanie Rengel, Hung, who is also a Toronto police officer, struggled at times to retain her composure on the stand while recounting the events leading up to her daughter's murder.



HUNG

The 17-year-old girl, who can be identified only as M.T., faces first-degree murder charges. The victim, who was a student at the Rosedale Heights School for the Arts, was killed on New Year's Day in 2008 near her home on Northdale Boulevard.

The trial started on Tuesday morning with opening statements from Crown prosecutor Robin Flumerfelt at the Ontario Court of Justice.

The accused and her boyfriend cannot be identified under the Youth Criminal Justice Act. The boyfriend, known only as D.B., is also charged with Stefanie's murder, and will go on trial later this year.

In his opening statement, Flumerfelt recounted events that

allegedly occurred on Oct. 20, 2007.

Before the knife attack, the Crown prosecutor alleged, D.B. went to the victim's house to confront her. He told her that the accused wanted him to stab Stefanie. He then threw his cellphone down on the driveway.

"When she calls, tell her I tried so she'll stop pestering me to kill you," D.B. allegedly told Stefanie.

Hung testified that her daughter called her after D.B. left and told her what had happened. Hung rushed home, and after speaking with Stefanie, allegedly called D.B.'s mother to let her know what he had done. Both mothers agreed Stefanie and D.B. were not to have any further contact.

Hung then called the accused to confront her and explain to her that Stefanie was not interested in D.B. She further explained that her daughter was trying to help her by warning her of D.B.'s cheating behaviour. Hung alleged that the accused was "rude and belligerent" on the phone.

"Your daughter just has to stop spreading rumours about me," the accused, M.T., allegedly told her.

Hung warned M.T. to stay away from Stefanie and assumed the incident was now behind them.

But Flumerfelt alleged that the accused still harboured jealousy that escalated to obsession. The Crown prosecutor alleged that MSN messages

See MOTHER, page 8



Observer, Rahul Gupta

PRETTY IN PINK: East Yorkers of all ages laced up their skates on Feb. 22 for councillor Janet Davis' sixth annual skating party at East York Memorial Arena. From left, five-year-olds Sophia Roy, Bianca Barakett-Grossi, Michaela Roy and Olivia Barakett-Grossi show off their skating moves and their smiles.

Brother last to see slain girl alive

By RYAN SANG

The younger brother of Stefanie Rengel took the stand on the second day of the trial of his sister's accused killer.

Ian Rengel, 13, told the court on Wednesday that he was watching television when he heard his sister's cellphone ring on New Year's Day 2008.

Court heard that Stefanie answered and seemed unsure of the person who was calling. Ian said he heard the person on the other end say, "Meet me..." Stefanie then put her boots on.

"She said she's only gonna be two seconds," said Ian, who was 12 at the time, "and she leaves."

According to Ian's testimony, Stefanie then walked outside.

"I looked out the window to see where she was going," he said.

He watched her until she was no longer in sight. That would be the last time he saw his sister alive.

Another witness, 34-year-old Gavin Shoebottom, also testified during Wednesday's proceedings. He said he was heading home from his wife's dance studio the day the victim died. He told the courts that as he was driving through East York, he saw Stefanie stumbling near a snowbank with a cellphone in her right hand.

"I rolled down my window and asked if she was OK," Shoebottom said. "(Stefanie) said, 'No, I need help.'" According to the witness, she told him that she had been stabbed, and then she collapsed into the snowbank.

The court heard that while

Shoebottom was on the phone with a 911 dispatcher, Stefanie mumbled the name of her alleged attacker and pointed out the direction in which he'd been heading.

"She was saying, 'It hurts so much. It hurts so much,'" Shoebottom said.

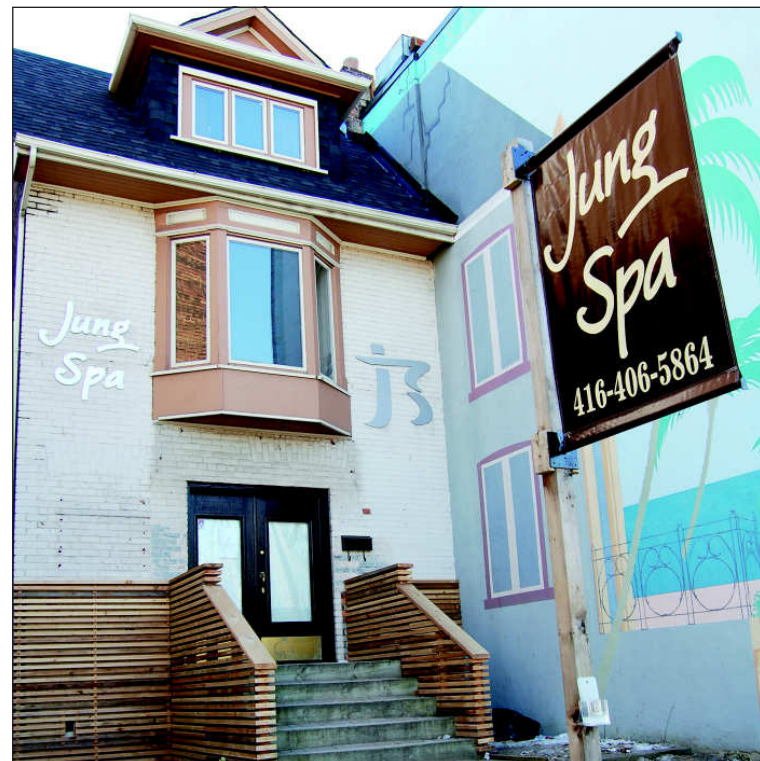
He said he tried to comfort the teenager, telling her it would "be OK," and then he wrapped her in a blanket he found in his car and tried to cover her wounds.

According to testimony, paramedics arrived shortly after and found Stefanie Rengel with no pulse.

The Crown also showed the jury the eight-inch knife believed to have been used by the alleged killer in the act.

The trial continues.

Toronto fraud case linked to spa on Danforth



Observer, Omar Mosleh

JUNG SPA RAID: Located at 257 Danforth Ave., the spa opened on Feb. 8 and was raided by police on Feb. 19. Four people now face more than 100 charges in connection with allegations that interior renovations were financed through credit card cloning.

By OMAR MOSLEH

A recently opened Danforth spa was forced to close after a massive police raid connected to allegations that the spa's furnishings were paid for with fraudulent credit cards.

The Jung Spa, located at 257 Danforth Ave., opened on Feb. 8 and was raided by over 48 officers on Feb. 19. Four people now face a total of more than 100 charges in connection with the raid.

Const. Todd Hall, of 11 Division's major crime unit, is one of the leading detectives investigating the case – one of the largest he says he's ever worked on.

The charges' specifics relate to much of the spa's interior, Hall said, including renovations, but also "massage tables, TVs, down to the sheets, robes, towels and stool chairs." The total dollar amount is about \$500,000, he said.

An investigation into a credit card cloning ring began last June, involved another spa in Yorkville, search warrants, and tips from banks about suspicious credit card activity.

Referring to the Danforth shopping district, Hall said: "A lot of the activity using the cloned credit cards occurred in that area.... They were actively using cloned credit cards in the Danforth area, whether it be at the Home Depot, Shopper's Drug Mart, or a local coffee shop."

Some neighbours of the Jung Spa expressed surprise at the raid and charges.

Brien Smith is a partner in Martaugh Smith Financial, an insurance broker located directly behind the spa. He said he was in the process of providing the spa owners with insurance for their business.

"They were very knowledgeable about their business, pro-

fessional and courteous," Smith said.

But others, like graduate student Cindy Lessard, thought something might be amiss.

Lessard is a book and magazine publishing student at Centennial College's East York campus on Carlaw Avenue. The students produce profiles of business owners for their magazine "On The Danforth." Lessard interviewed Julia Sung, one of the accused, and said her behaviour was odd.

"She was very evasive," Lessard said. "She wouldn't tell me her age, she wouldn't tell me where she went to university." Lessard added that she was even wary of having her photo taken.

See CHARGES, page 8

Your link to NDP convention

East York will be heavily represented at this weekend's NDP provincial leadership convention in Hamilton. MPPs Michael Prue (Beaches-East York) and Peter Tabuns (Toronto-Danforth), along with Gilles Bisson

(Timmins-James Bay) and Andrea Horwath (Hamilton Centre) are running to be the NDP's next leader. Log on to torontoobserver.ca this weekend for convention updates.

See NDP, page 8

Police beat

Six arrested in East York drug bust

Six people have been charged with a number of drug-related offences, after an investigation into illegal drug distribution led police to a house near Danforth and Woodbine avenues.

Two men were originally arrested and charged after coming out of the residence in question, at 1059 Woodbine Ave. Following the execution of a search warrant on Feb. 25, four additional arrests were made and further charges were laid.

Michael Bonear, 22, and James Scullion, 27, have both been charged with possession of marijuana and possession of marijuana for the purpose of trafficking.

Anthony Napolitano, 29, has been charged with possession of marijuana and possession of hashish. Matthew Claridge, 22, has been charged with possessing the proceeds of crime.

Richard Crimp, 30, and Michelle Cannarella, 27, were charged with eight drug-related offences and with possession of a prohibited weapon, possession of property obtained by crime and several counts of failure to comply with a recognizance.

—Monique Plessas



Observer, Alexandra Kazia

CLOSE CALL: A woman trapped in her basement as flames engulfed her home was rescued and rushed to Toronto East General Hospital, where she is reported as recovering from smoke inhalation. The two-alarm fire badly damaged the semi-detached homes at 17 and 19 Woodrow Ave. on Monday afternoon, March 2.

What's on

Workshop for caregivers at the CNIB

Personal caregivers are invited to join representatives from the Canadian National Institute for the Blind and Canadian Hearing Society on Monday, March 30, for an interactive workshop aimed at those who work with individuals with vision and/or hearing loss.

Included in the session:

- Information on how to access CNIB and CHS services
- Presentations by CNIB specialists and CHS counsellors
- Interactive activities such as "sighted guides and unfair hearing tests"

The workshop will be held at the CNIB Centre, 1929 Bayview Ave., in conference room 118. Admission is free but donations are welcome. The workshop runs from 6-8 p.m., with registration at 5:30 p.m. Parking is free at surface level.

For more information or to register, contact Randy Firth at randyfirth@cnib.ca or 416-486-2500, ext. 8282.

March madness at Science Centre

Spend your March break at the Ontario Science Centre: From March 14-22, the centre is offering loads of entertainment for the whole family.

Programs include Fizzical Fizzicks, Cool Science, Science Magic and Xbox 360. Sultans of Science: 1000 Years of Knowledge Rediscovered, Space Hall, KidSpark and the Weston Family Innovation Centre are showcased exhibitions.

The OMNIMAX Theatre features films such as The Alps, Mysteries of the Great Lakes and Journey to Mecca: In the Footsteps of Ibn Battuta inside the domed theatre.

Hours of operation for the March Break are 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. March 14-21, and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on March 22.

Admission: adults (18-64) \$18 /children (4-12) \$11/youth (13-17) and seniors (65+) \$13.50.

For event times and a full list of admission prices, visit www.ontariosciencecentre.ca.

Learn to cook curry, Victorian style

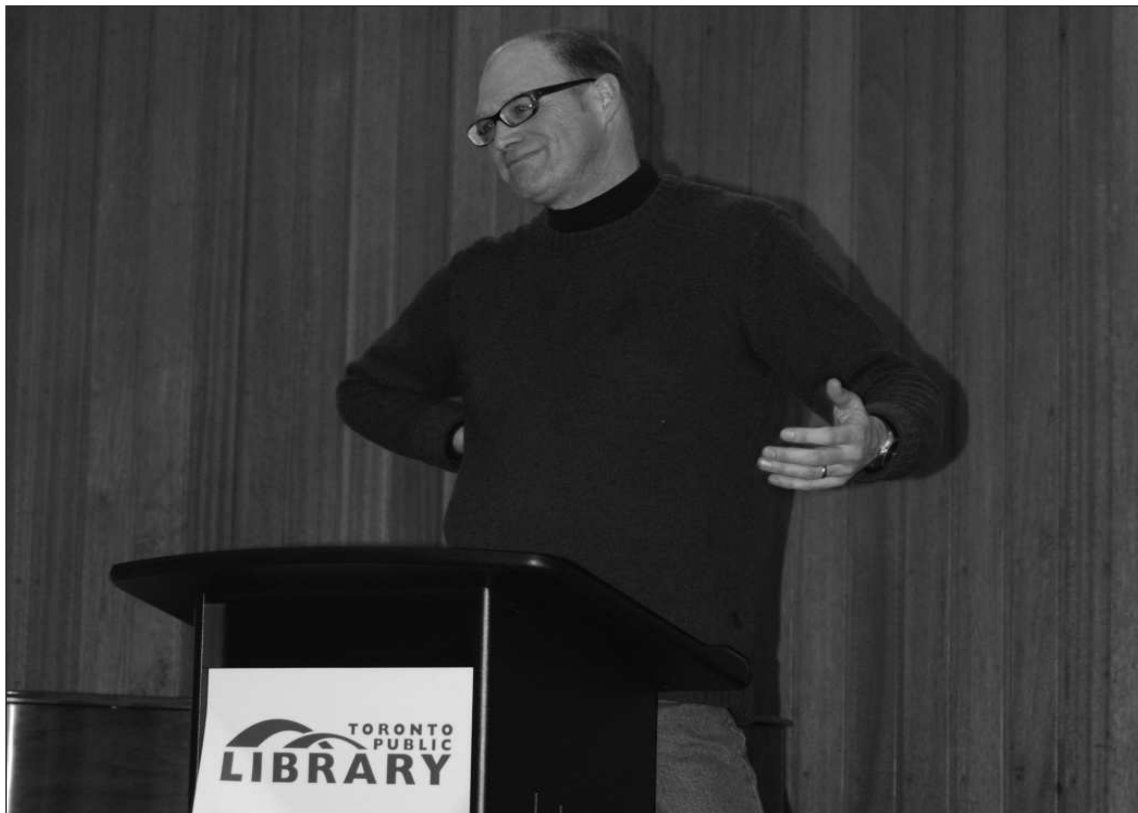
Learn how to cook like the Victorians cooked: Todmorden Mills Heritage Museum and Art Centre presents "Victorian Curries," the next in its Cast Iron Chef: Historic Cooking series.

Victorians enjoyed exotic Eastern spices and this workshop will introduce you to a world of their curry dishes. "British cookery is more than just boiled beef and potatoes!"

The workshop takes place on March 8, from 1-4 p.m. at the Todmorden Mills Heritage Museum and Art Centre at 67 Pottery Rd.

Admission for youth, adults and seniors is \$25. Children are free. For more information, call 416-396-2819, or e-mail todmorden@toronto.ca. Pre-registration required.

—Mike Crisolago



Observer, Tim Burden

REVISITING CANADIAN CULTURE: Canadian author Lee Gowan is part of a group of authors participating in a series developed to help communities rediscover Canadian culture.

Eh-plus for Canuck authors

By SHAWN STAR

Beavers, peameal bacon and maple syrup are often associated with Canadian culture — but as of a few days ago, there's another trait to add to the list.

The "eh" List, a series of Canadian authors speaking at Toronto's public libraries, kicked off its spring program with Lee Gowan, who appeared at S. Walter Stewart branch on Tuesday, March 3. He read excerpts from his latest book, *Confession*, and then fielded questions from the audience.

Gowan didn't think the importance of the event was to share his work with people, but to see that Canadians are benefitting from reading works by their own writers.

"It's difficult in Canada, since we're so overshadowed by the United States and we get overwhelmed by their novels and their movies," he said. "So

I think it's important that we tell our own stories and that we listen to our own stories. Any culture needs its own stories."

Joseph Romain, librarian and co-ordinator of The "eh" List, agrees that culture plays a big role in defining what makes Canadian literature unique, and this event is reflective of that idea.

"It's kind of like looking into a mirror instead of looking into a crowd. It's important to look around in crowds; it's important to know what the other looks like," he said. "But it's important to look in a mirror and say, 'What do we look like, as Canadians?' And that's what you get when you read Canadian authors."

Romain said The "eh" List is also an excellent way to bring the community face-to-face with Canadian authors.

"It gives Toronto audiences the chance to meet the writers whose

books they've been reading," he said. "We have this opportunity not just to present authors, but to present a full spectrum of Canadian writers."

East Yorkers Marg and Chuck Pilger are fans of Gowan's, and happy The "eh" List is happening in their own backyard.

"It's an excellent idea," Marg Pilger said. "It's introduced us to a lot of Canadian authors."

Chuck Pilger agreed and alluded to the impact such an event has on Canadian culture.

"Canadian literature gives us a window into Canada and allows us to see ourselves," he said.

As for Gowan, he thinks The "eh" List is a great idea, and he is happy to be a part of it.

"It's a good joke. It'd be nice to be an A-List writer, but I'm definitely an E-H List writer," he said. "But I'm proud to be on The "eh" List, whether it is E-H or A."

School board appoints new boss

By FARRAH COLE

The appointment of a new director of education for Toronto's public schools has drawn mixed reviews from the board's East York trustees.

After an 18-month search that drew candidates from all over the world, the TDSB has appointed Dr. Christopher Spence, currently the director of education for the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board.

Spence will take over in July from outgoing director of education Gerry Connelly.

Spence, who has 15 years of previous experience within the TDSB as a principal, teacher and board superintendent, will bring "exciting changes," said Cathy Dandy, the board trustee from Toronto-Danforth.

"He brings a real depth of understanding to the challenges our board faces, but he has clearly, in his work in Hamilton, sought solutions to problems in a range of ways," Dandy said.

Dandy hopes Spence will address is how to support students

and their families during their time under the TDSB.

"Kids don't survive or fail in vacuums. It's largely dependent on what kind of supports they receive separate and apart from education," she said.

Dandy said safety, access to adequate mental health resources and nutritional programs are essential to a child's success at school, and she hopes Spence will address these issues when he assumes his role.

"(Dr. Spence) understands the idea of integrating services right into schools," she said.

With a decrease in enrolment, many schools seek to use space that becomes freed up; Dandy said she hopes Spence will also address this issue because she said the board has been struggling with the idea of selling or leasing these open areas -- or deciding if they should be used for other public services that would support the community.

But Beaches-East York trustee Sheila Cary-Meagher is not as optimistic as Dandy. Some

of the concerns in her ward that she would like Spence to address are the quality of buildings, inner-city social issues and issues around English as a second language. But her major concern involves the level of administrative stability within the schools.

"Because of amalgamation, so many people retired," she said. "It is so attractive to retire as soon as you've hit your 85 factor, turnover of senior staff is extremely fast. [New staff] don't have the depth of experience."

Cary-Meagher said some people in the board are moving up to superintendent status after 15 years of teaching — which she thinks isn't enough experience, but happens when there is a shortage of people.

She described the process of replacing the outgoing director of education as "slow and painful," but said she's glad the position is filled.

East York's other public school trustee, Gerri Gershon of Don Valley West, was unavailable for comment.

Correction: hottest stars in sky are blue

A story in the Feb. 6 edition of the Observer, headlined Science Centre celebrates astronomy, misconstrued information from guide Kulin Matchhar.

He actually said that the

hottest stars in the sky, the ones we see, are blue — not yellow.

Astronomer Sara Poirier has also clarified the article's description of what happens to billions of tonnes of charged

particles released by the sun: "When the Earth gets in the way, these particles excite the gases in our atmosphere, causing them to glow, and this is what causes the northern lights."

Tax forum to help disabled lay claims

By ANDREW HOOD

Anyone with a registered disability can claim various forms of attendant care as medical expenses, reducing their tax payable.

The East York chapter of the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario (SSO) hosted a public education forum last month at Toronto East General Hospital. The forum provided information to people with disabilities on how they can receive tax deductions.

Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) representative Jim Weir gave a presentation and answered questions from the audience.

"In order to be certified as qualified or approved, the disability must be prolonged," Weir said.

He explained that "prolonged" means 12 months or more. However, the condition doesn't need to have existed that long. Rather, a doctor must confirm it will last for at least a year.

The types of attendant care expenses that can be claimed include food preparation, housekeeping services, laundry services, health care, activities (social programmer), salon services, transportation and security for a secured unit.

These expenses can be claimed by people living in nursing, retirement and group homes, but also in private residences under the category of "self-contained domestic establishment." It's important to keep a detailed record of the costs to submit with the tax forms.

A note from a doctor is necessary if you're not currently registered with the CRA as having a disability. More beneficial than a doctor's note would be getting the disability approved by the CRA. Once registered, tax deductions can be claimed every year so long as the disability still exists.

"Once the certificate is on file, and it is indicated as a permanent condition, there is no need to file again," Weir said.

To register, fill out part A of the T2201 form, take it to a doctor to fill out part B and then mail it to the CRA. You can print the forms from the Internet at www.cra-arc.gc.ca/forms, or order them by phone at 1-800-959-2221.

Along with medical expenses, those registered with a disability can claim the non-refundable Disability Tax Credit of \$7,021.

"The trick is to get approved by the CRA," said Len Micalles, treasurer for the East York chapter of the SSO. "They can go back 10 years."

Weir said the CRA allows you to claim up to 10 years' worth of the Disability Tax Credit, if your condition has existed in previous tax years and you haven't claimed the credits yet.

If claiming the Disability Tax Credit, the maximum attendant care that can be claimed becomes \$10,000. You can maximize your tax break with some simple math. If the total cost of attendant care for the year is over \$17,021, it's more worthwhile to claim only the attendant care credit and not the Disability Tax Credit.

It's important to note that for part-time attendant care, a maximum of \$10,000 can be claimed as a medical expense.

The tax credits are used to reduce the tax payable of the person concerned to zero. If there are still credits available at this point, they can be transferred to a spouse or caregiver to lower their tax payable as well.

Bjorn Harper, chair of the East York chapter of the SSO, explained the importance of having this public education forum.

"There are people that aren't aware of the ins and outs, and therefore may be missing some deductions that may be available to them," he said.

More detailed information can be found in the general guide, on the website at www.cra.gc.ca, or by phone at 1-800-959-8281.



Observer, Stephen Darley

A FORKFUL APPROACH: Claire, 2, was a study in concentration as she worked her way through a plate of pancakes and sausage at the Presteign-Woodbine United Church pancake supper held on Tuesday, Feb. 24. The food was prepared by Girl Guides from the East York neighbourhood. The supper is held annually to raise funds for the church.

East York Garden Club gives two green thumbs up to germination

By SHAWN STAR

Susan Dolbey thinks seed-starting is not only a step-by-step process.

She discussed the method at the East York Garden Club (EYGC) meeting, held at the Stan Wadlow Community Centre on Feb. 19.

Dolbey said that on top of seed-starting being a process of discovery, it is also a lot of fun.

"You will want to be patient to allow for the germination process to complete," Dolbey said. "But if you want to have some fun, just open the package."

Though the germination process depends on the plant or flower involved, and may seem

like an onerous task, Dolbey insists that the hardest part is simply getting started.

"There are a lot of people who buy the packages and don't grow the seeds," Dolbey said. "It's something to play around with in the basement in winter. It's sort of fun, I think."

As for people who are considering seed-starting for the first time, Dolbey has one piece of advice:

"Just open the package and do it," she said.

Carefully tackling one point at a time, Dolbey paced her presentation so the audience could follow along and ask questions. According to Veronica Callinan,

EYGC president, it was an effective way to deliver the presentation.

"She was very informative. Her information was very easy to follow," Callinan said. "I didn't think it was too overwhelming for the people here."

Meanwhile, the winners of this month's photography contest, based on the topic "Round," were voted on at the EYGC meeting.

Karen Bell won the contest, for the second month in a row, with her picture of a cactus. There was a three-way tie for second place between Helen Koski, Susan Evans and Anna Leggatt.

Next month's contest topic is "Square."

Local cafe invites patrons to eat, drink and make music together

By MICHELLE NASH

Chaotic at best, the Renaissance Café offers more than just a cup of joe.

A mannequin named Wanda, comfortable chairs and the sweet smell of coffee distinguish the tiny cafe. But on Saturday afternoons the café holds a free-for-all jam session that really defines the shop. Many of the musicians have been coming for the five years the café has been open. They range in ages and instruments, but most importantly welcome anyone who wishes to join them.

Located between Coxwell and Woodbine avenues on the Danforth, the place begins filling up on a cold Saturday afternoon. The music begins to play. Randal Clark, the café's owner, finds that everyone who comes to play works well with everyone else.

"It's anarchy at it's best," he said. "There is no leader, they just all co-operate automatically. It's just a wonderful group of people."

Clark, a retired teacher, is a gourmet coffee roaster and a sculptor on the side. He opened the business mostly to sell coffee, but felt music would create an ambiance for customers. He



Observer, Michelle Nash

OLDIES BUT GOODIES: Wally, Don, Robert and Harry start off their Saturday country jam session at the Renaissance café, located between Coxwell and Woodbine avenues on the Danforth. Every Saturday, these fellows show and play in the afternoon for free.

never thought it would grow into what it is today, but appreciates what Saturdays have become in his little café.

Some of the musicians, including Wally, Robert, Don, Harry, Mel and Gilles come every week to the Saturday Country Afternoon Jam, playing until they grow tired. The sounds range from 1930s music

to originals, mostly depending on how they feel.

"In a couple of hours there will be as many as twenty people up there playing," Clark said.

The stage is small, but the musicians manage to file in and play, always appreciative of anyone wishing to play along.

"It really ranges from people that have played professionally

to people that come for a guitar lesson," Clark said.

The main group of fellows coming every Saturday originally came from a bar down the road that closed down. Mostly hailing from the east coast, this group croons tunes with everything from guitar to accordion to banjo.

The café also offers other

outlets for the creative mind. Running along one wall, a long string with clothes pegs hangs for poets to hang their poems. If writers are shy, someone else can take them down and read them aloud.

"The line is for if a poet is feeling bashful, you still have a chance for your poem to be heard," Clark said.

The café has also been known to host a few Tin Foil Hat contests along the way. The contest involves the excitement of judging contestants' artistry in constructing hats made of tin foil. Creator and hostess Cynthia Gould loves the contest, but loves the venue even more.

"Randal is very open-minded and gracious when we have strange parties there. He is a wonderful supporter of music and the arts," she said.

Gould goes to the café for everything from coffee to performing with her band, The High Heels Lo Fi, to eating the great food, to organizing parties. She says the café brings out the best in everyone.

"The folks at the Renaissance are like neighbours and family," she said. "You know that every time you go, you'll have a great conversation."

Solar pilot project testing the waters in East York area

By SHAWN STAR

Taking that hot shower in the morning just might save you some money.

Piloting a project in East York, environmental group Solar Neighbourhoods says by using solar panels to heat water, the average homeowner can save approximately \$300 annually on his or her water bill.

Members of the organization, along with local environmental groups Windfall and RISE Again, presented their ideas to the public at a free meeting on Feb. 26. It was held

at the Danforth/Coxwell Library and attracted a crowd of homeowners eager to know more about what they can do to reduce their carbon footprints.

Danielle Murray, program co-ordina-

tor for Solar Neighbourhoods, thinks East Yorkers owe it to themselves to get involved with the project.

"If they take part, they help the neighbourhood," Murray said. "They will make it a sustainable community as a whole."

The process of having solar hot water heating panels installed, from an initial eco-audit of your home to the final installation, can cost anywhere from \$3,500-\$8,500.

Murray said she knows not everyone can afford to solarize their homes, but the group is taking steps to involve as many people as possible.

"We're trying to make it affordable," she said. "We're installing solar panels in some community housing because we would like to see it go on every home."

Various branches of the government offer incentives to homeowners wishing to in-

stall solar panels, according to Vince Hughes of the Windfall Ecology Centre.

"You get a \$300 rebate for getting the eco-audits — \$150 from both provincial and federal governments," he explained.

Canada tends to be viewed as an environmentally friendly country, but solar paneling is one department where it lags behind.

Germany installed more than 140,000 units in 2006 alone, and China currently has over 35 million in use.

Local resident Jeanie Stewart doesn't see why it took so long to gain popularity.

"I think it's excellent. I wish it had happened years and years ago," Stewart said. "I would have wasted less money on gas."

Though Stewart isn't sure if the project will be cost-effective for her, since the presentations announced it would take upwards of 10 years in order to break even on your investment. However, she is still excited about it and hopes to be involved.

"There's lots of things to consider," she said. "But I want to do it because it's a good thing to do."

Murray acknowledged the decision-making process involved for the residents of East York, but her message was clear.

"This is a great opportunity to make your difference against energy costs," Murray said. "It lowers your carbon footprint and can help financially amidst the recession."

For more information on solar hot water heating and this initiative, visit the Solar Neighbourhoods website at www.solarneighbourhoods.com.

'I think it's excellent. I wish it had happened years and years ago. I would have wasted less money on gas.'

—Jeanie Stewart



Observer, Meghan Housley

JOINING FORCES: Forty-two members of the Toronto police, OPP and RCMP ran a RIDE program spot check to catch impaired drivers on Feb. 21 at the Bloor viaduct. The spot check took place between 11 p.m. and 3 a.m. Officers stopped 2,850 cars.

Toronto police RIDE program cracks down on drunk driving

By MEGHAN HOUSLEY

Police are determined to keep the public safe from impaired drivers.

Straddling the Bloor viaduct on Feb. 21, Toronto police, Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) and Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) conducted the biggest RIDE spot check in the program's history. Amid heavy snowfall, 42 officers, five Mothers Against Drunk Driving volunteers and five tow trucks took over the bridge above the Don Valley Parkway from 11 p.m. to 3 a.m.

The Reduce Impaired Driving Everywhere (RIDE) program consists of police officers conducting spot checks

on drivers, questioning them on their alcohol intake. If police suspect a driver of being impaired, the driver is requested to a breath test.

Sgt. Jack West of the Toronto police traffic division thinks a zero-tolerance approach is key to avoiding tragedies.

"You always hear 'If I could only turn the clock back,'" West said. "I don't want to hear that again; if you're over the limit, you're under arrest."

West coordinated law enforcement collaboration on the viaduct, sending the message that police services are working together to stop impaired driving. Spread over three locations at Pottery Road, Broadview and Danforth Avenues, police stopped 2,850 cars and found 86 drivers had been drinking. Of those, 74 drivers passed the breath test, 11 received warnings and one driver was charged with impaired driving.

Staff superintendent Glenn Decaire said the strategic location helped reach a lot of people.

"The greater the number of vehicles we can stop, the more opportunity to arrest those that are drinking and driving," he said. "There were a number of events downtown and (when) people leave those events, the traffic flows in these directions."

To prevent drivers from escaping the spot check, Decaire and other officers stationed

themselves at the end of the bridge. This tactic caught anyone pulling a U-turn, attempting to evade the police check.

Police deem drivers impaired when they have 80 mg of alcohol per 100 ml of blood. At that

point, the driver is charged, loses his or her licence for 90 days and is fined \$1,000. Drivers testing below 80 mg but failing the breath test receive a 12-hour

licence suspension and have their car impounded, a \$300 inconvenience.

West hopes the financial costs of impaired driving will deter people from taking a chance, but acknowledges it is the emotional costs that really drive the message home.

"It is devastating to the family and loved ones (to lose someone to drunk driving) and it's devastating to the impaired themselves," West said. "I'm a believer that everybody who leaves their house to go to work in the morning deserves to come home safe."



DECAIRE



WEST

Afghan journalist brings message of hope, change



Observer, Sean Sillers

VOICE OF FREEDOM: Ahmad Zia, a journalist working in Afghanistan, speaks to journalism students at Centennial College's East York campus on Feb. 23.

By SEAN SILLERS

In Afghanistan, where the government mandates the level of freedom of speech, how does one man go from working at a corrupt Information Ministry to becoming one of the government's most outspoken critics?

Ahmad Zia, a lawyer and journalist, spoke at Centennial College's East York campus on Feb. 23 about his experiences after returning to his homeland of Afghanistan.

In 2000, Zia fled to Canada with his family to escape the Taliban and spent six years studying broadcast journalism.

Following his studies, he left his family behind in 2006 to return to Afghanistan.

Hoping to help rebuild his ravaged country, Zia gained a job working for the Information Ministry and later discovered he was being paid to make excuses for the Karzai government's secrecy and disseminate lies.

After only four months on the government payroll, he quit to join in the fight for free speech, joining his younger brother Faheem Dashti, editor of Afghanistan's largest independent newspaper *Kabul Weekly*, as a translator and columnist.

Zia believes Afghans must have access to the truth. He believes working in an environment in which the government produces a monthly magazine promoting the minister's achievements creates an element of mistrust and secrecy between the state and independent media.

"Government officials are all afraid for their positions... they can't communicate with the people," he said. "Ministers all think the people are their servants."

Yet Zia sees hope for the future if voices such as his continue to be heard.

He explained that while the attorney general's office

often harasses journalists for the identities of their sources, journalists are not legally required to reveal them.

The August election could be a turning point for unfettered freedom of speech.

"If Karzai loses the next election, it would certainly be better for freedom of speech," he said.

Zia believes foreign governments should refocus their attention in Afghanistan to work together to form strategies that would help rebuild the country.

"Reconstruction should be Canada's main role. Countries (with troops in Afghanistan) must unify strategies," he said.

While optimistic about the future of Afghanistan, Zia warns of dire consequences if the West fails to unify its approach to reconstruction.

"Afghanistan doesn't have much to lose," he said, "but if the international community fails, the Taliban could take control of Pakistan, which has a nuclear bomb."



Observer, Monique Plessas

POLICE CHASE ENDS: Police arrested four suspects after they chased a car in the East York area late Wednesday night. The pursuit ended on Main Street, just north of Danforth Avenue, just before 10 p.m. The province's Special Investigation Unit is conducting an investigation into the incident, because three of the four suspects had to be taken to hospital — one after being pepper-sprayed.

E.Y. councillor promotes area for new city investment plans

By MIKE CRISOLAGO

Don Valley West councillor John Parker hopes to bring a particular area of his East York ward to the attention of a new city agency intended to lure investment to Toronto.

"I am going to beat the drum vigorously on behalf of the Leaside Business Park as an outstanding place for new business investment," Parker said.

The councillor plans to attract the attention of Invest Toronto — an agency designed to attract foreign investment to the city in fresh and original ways. Along with partner Build Toronto, which is tasked with promoting developments on under-utilized city land, the two groups expect to maximise the potential of the city's \$18 billion real-estate portfolio. If successful, they could generate an extra \$150 million in profits for the city each year.

Parker envisions the area, once home to major industries like auto factories, as a business park focused on light industry.

"More software design, communication businesses of that type, I'm expecting will probably find a home in Leaside," Parker said. "What we've come to call 'knowledge-based businesses' rather than conventional, industrial businesses."

Toronto-Danforth councillor Case Ootes echoes Parker, citing the Industrial Business Park off of O'Connor Drive in East York, as a location with possibilities like Leaside.

"You've got two industrial commercial parks," Ootes said. "The attraction would have to be in terms of services — IT and retail and so on [coming in]."

Parker said he also hopes that development will occur closer to the Danforth once construction of a new light rail line is completed.

"Maybe we can attract more business investment, because it'll be easier for customers and employees to get to work," Parker said. "There are areas of my ward where we want to see more industrial and business

development, and as the light rail line goes in, we might be able to encourage that."

Parker also noted the land situated above or next to TTC subway stations along Danforth belongs to the city. He proposed either "major attractions, or major places of employment, or nodes for residential use" for most of the space currently being used as parking lots.

While the effect of the agencies on the landscape of East York remains unknown, the councillors hope residents from all areas of the city will share in the success and realize the potential of both Build and Invest Toronto: "To create jobs, to get value out of land that the city owns, and to generate desirable development on land in areas where we want that development to take place," Parker said.

"In general terms I hope that both are successful," Ootes said, "and that indirectly, East York benefits as a result of that because the city benefits as a whole."

Youth art program aims to teach kids through creativity

By CAROLINE GEORGE

For the last three years, police Const. Kelly Granell has worked the beat. The art beat, that is.

For two hours each week, Granell runs the ProAction Youth Art Program at the Royal Canadian Legion on Pape Avenue.

It gives at-risk youth an opportunity to engage in creative activities.

The Legion provides free space for the program, with funding provided by ProAction Cops and Kids, an organization bringing local police and children together.

Participants, ranging in age from seven to 14, include children from the eight schools encompassing Granell's beat at 54 Division.

She said the program helps kids who are not athletically inclined open up to the possibilities of learning through creativity.

"There are all kinds of programs running around the city, but none of them are art-based," Granell said. "There are kids who don't like to play hockey or soccer."

Granell really enjoys working with the kids and tries to come up with different projects each week, but said it's sometimes difficult to find projects that are stimulating.

"I have to come up with something that works," Granell said. "If it doesn't work, the kids are not interested."

Granell began the program three years ago with 20 children originally participating.

Now that number has grown to 70, with more children on a waiting list.

She said the program's popularity is so great she often has parents asking when the programs will restart.

Michelle Luff, whose children Michael and Shawn frequent the program, said it's great because of the fun activities and additional quality time with her children it provides.

"It's awesome because only one or two kids from each school are picked and they (the children) like coming because there are different things to do each week," Granell said. "I love coming because I can stay with them and we're doing something together."

Although Granell does not know how long the program will run, she hopes to continue with it for as long as possible because of its positive influence.

"We want to get the kids comfortable with the police and we want to get them comfortable with doing the right thing and understanding how to work in a group before they go off and start growing," Granell said. "We want them to go down the right path."

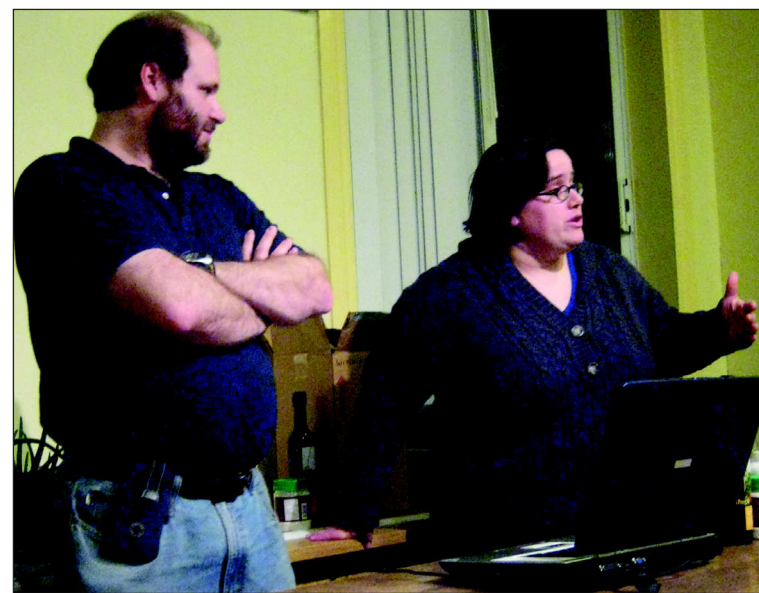
The program runs Monday nights at the Royal Canadian Legion at Pape Avenue, south of O'Connor Drive.



Observer, Caroline George

PUT YOUR HANDS UP: Ten-year-old Michael Luff (left) and four-year-old Shawn Luff (right) are all smiles as they proudly display the paper mache hands they made with Const. Kelly Granell.

Heart lecture shows us how to treat our tickers



Observer, Jessicka Loduca

HEART TO HEART: Dr. Claude Gallant and Joel Thuna address the audience at the Carrot Common on Danforth Avenue.

By JESSICKA LODUCA

Having a big heart is usually considered a good thing. In reality, it means you have increased risk for heart disease.

February was Heart Month, so it's no wonder the final installment of last month's Carrot Common health lecture was ensuring proper care of one's heart.

On Feb. 26, Joel Thuna, master herbalist and general manager of Global Botanicals, and Dr. Claude Gallant discussed the importance of heart maintenance.

"Cardiovascular disease is the number one killer in Canada and what's surprising is that it precedes cancer by more than double," Dr. Gallant said.

During his lecture, Thuna said stress levels take a toll on your vascular organ.

"Bad news is really bad for your heart because it actually causes your heart to work harder by releasing stress hormones," Thuna said. "Stress hormones are designed by that fight or flight acute stress action that our ancestors needed to survive, but it causes our heart to work harder than it needs to."

Instead, the old saying, "laughter is the best medicine," actually proves true. Laughing increases blood flow to the heart, making it an important factor in reducing heart disease.

Thuna also suggested checking blood pressure, also known as hypertension, on a regular basis as well as making lifestyle changes and maintaining a healthy diet to keep your heart strong.

"High blood pressure is also known as the silent killer," he

said. "The reason is because often you don't know you have it, and then one day, you're gone. There are many risk factors for heart disease, some preventable and others not. Factors that you unfortunately cannot change include your age, sex, ethnicity and family history."

Lifestyle changes are the best solution in preventing heart disease, especially considering that smoking is the number one cause. Smoking doubles the risk and even non-smokers can be affected by secondhand smoke.

"When you look at a healthy heart, it's supposed to look red, like meat," Dr. Gallant said. "An unhealthy heart would be yellow because it's surrounded by fat."

According to Thuna, regulating salt intake can reduce the risk of future heart problems.

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McGuinty steps up, but may be too late

East York may well be the child poverty capital of the megacity.

Children are considered impoverished if they live in a household where disposable income is half the nation's average. And in the most recent data that we found, from 2005, East York had the highest child poverty rate among all of the pre-amalgamation municipalities: a whopping 34.4 per cent.

Yes, more than a third of East York children are living in poverty. From 1997 to 2005, the number of impoverished children in East York grew from an estimated 5,940 to more than 8,000.

Not that the rest of the city is far behind. Between 1997 and 2005, the child poverty rate in Toronto went from 28.1 per cent to 31.3 per cent. So it's not just East York. Especially in the old municipalities of Toronto, Scarborough and North York, rates of child poverty have been steadily increasing.

But a bill passed by the provincial government last week could change this trend, because it specifically targets child poverty.

On one hand, the province's decision to act on child poverty couldn't have happened at a better time, considering the recession that's deepening and threatening families with marginal finances already.

But on the other, one could also be excused for asking why the Liberals took so long to do something about this. According to Premier Dalton McGuinty, "There is no shortage of evidence that if we don't address these problems in the early years, the costs will only be greater later on."

Thanks for pointing out the obvious, Mr. McGuinty. This has always been the case and successive governments — at all levels — have still allowed the problem of child poverty to fester.

But better late than never. Hopefully our leaders at City Hall, Queen's Park and on Parliament Hill will now also consider the other, growing gaps in our social safety net.

—Omar Mosleh

East Yorkers might take over the NDP

East York could soon be at the epicentre of the struggle for social rights and equality across the province and across the country.

The Ontario New Democratic Party (ONDP) leadership convention starts today, March 6, in Hamilton. Michael Prue of Beaches-East York and Peter Tabuns of Toronto-Danforth are two candidates for the leadership.

If one of these two MPPs wins, East York will become a true incubator for social change. The leaders of both the provincial and federal NDP would be from ridings in East York. Already, Jack Layton, the leader of the New Democrats federally, hails from our very own Toronto-Danforth.

However, the Ontario NDP has challenges to overcome.

According to Prue's website, www.prueforleader.ca, 94 per cent of Ontarians don't trust the ONDP with the economy — and 85 per cent of Ontarians actually prefer a different party altogether.

But the NDP has a tradition of political aspiration and influence.

When the NDP was known as the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), it directly influenced the creation of employment insurance, old-age pensions and a fundamental leftward political shift in Canada.

The ONDP also used its balance-of-power position to negotiate the implementation of several policies, including pay equity legislation, in return for its support of the minority Liberal government.

Just a few weeks ago Jack Layton almost formed a coalition government with Stephane Dion of the Liberals and Gilles Duceppe of the Bloc Quebecois. This pressured Prime Minister Stephen Harper to alter the Conservatives' budget to reflect NDP and Liberal concern over the recession's toll on Canadians.

Clearly the NDP has ongoing, significant influence in Canadian politics.

New Democrats can take considerable satisfaction in the balance they bring to Canadian government — and in the political voice that they give to those Canadians most in need.

If the NDP becomes centred federally and provincially in East York after the ONDP leadership convention, the citizens of this community will have the opportunity to carry on and even enhance a rich tradition of social struggle.

But with that opportunity will come responsibility: East Yorkers will have to push the future leader of the provincial New Democrats to think big.

—Andrew Hood

Violence needn't be part of the 'good ol' hockey game'

It pulses through the blood of many Canadians. It is an addiction. Television sets tune in nightly, acting as enablers of the fix that so many addicts crave.

This addiction is similar to so many others. It creeps into your life at a young age and slowly its vice-like grip squeezes its victims until they succumb. Perfectly legal, although highly addictive, its highs have various forms.

The addiction is hockey.

Morning, afternoon and evening we're inundated with live games, tape-delayed games and commentary in a multitude of languages. The game's influence, through the mass media, grows wider daily.

The laws of supply and demand begin to take effect. Is it any wonder that in the face of constant exposure the hockey fan is continually seeking his next fix and an even better high? Fighting appears to be that next high.

It is an interesting double-standard when a fight appearing on the news constitutes a crime, such as assault, and is condemned by the addicts, yet identical actions in the sports broadcast stimulate positive moans and groans of ooh and

Steve

Darley



aah, as the addict's drug begins to take effect.

How does the simple, harmless, positive love of the game become a raging addiction, where anti-social, criminal behaviour is lauded nightly? What was the tipping point and when did our pure love of the game become lost in pursuit of the next fist-fight?

Don Sanderson's tragic death must act as a wake-up call to the hockey community. Sanderson, 21, who played for the Whitby Dunlops, a senior-league hockey team, hit his head on the ice during a fight and succumbed to his injuries three weeks later on Jan. 2, 2009.

Where do we draw the line in our pursuit of pugilistic pleasure? Hockey is a tough game, not without risk. However, adding death by fighting to the list of occupational hazards associated with the game is truly frightening.

The professional game must take the lead on this issue. The

superstars of the game have extraordinary influence over their legions of young fans. They must be held accountable for their actions. Society must pressure the game to change.

It seems that the doors of an arena are becoming a psychological threshold beyond which societal standards do not apply.

The cavernous surrounds of the rink shield the world from hockey and hockey from the world.

At what point in this double life do children make the transition from playing a seemingly innocent game to one of fist-fights and skullduggery?

Is it naively hopeful to suggest that children and teenagers are not being coached how to fight in order to fuel our addiction?

Are we proud when they play hard but fair, score a goal or win and lose with equal grace? Or are we more proud when our children become bullies and their fists become the star players?

Hockey addiction need not be a negative thing. Knowing that hockey is a microcosm of life itself will go a long way in ensuring that the standards we maintain on a daily basis are not lost for an hour or two of sporting escapism.

Be a smart shopper: stick to local, seasonal produce

Time is money.

Being a vegetarian and occasional organic eater for over 14 years, sometimes it's hard to maintain a healthy, well-balanced diet on a budget. Sometimes it's easier and less expensive to eat Kraft Dinner, instead of spending \$200 every couple of weeks on organic groceries.

I'll admit organic food does taste better and I'm sure my body can do without all the additives. But one question often arises: why does it cost so much?

The answer is simple. There is more substance to organic food.

Organic food contains more nutritional vitamins and minerals and grows slower than non-organic food because of a lack of chemical pesticides. Organic food is free from all additives, pesticides, growth hormones and preservatives.

The best way to stick to organic food without breaking the bank is to find a local organic specialty store or farmer's market. They don't raise the prices nearly as high as the supermarket chains do and you'll find better quality

Jessicka

Loduca



organic produce. Also, buying produce that's in season is easier on the wallet. Don't buy organic strawberries in December like I did, or you'll end up spending an arm and a leg.

Another option to control costs is to comparison-shop.

If you are on a limited budget, you can check out any organic sources in your area, as well as online and make your own price comparisons. Then you can shop where things are cheaper, even if it means going to several different places to get everything you want.

You're probably thinking it would be easier to stick with less healthy alternatives, but at what cost to your body? North Americans have become consumed with money and convenience and are forgetting about their well-being.

A common misconception is that vegetarianism is overly expensive.

But unless you are buying pre-packaged vegetarian meals, it can actually be a less expensive alternative to healthy eating. It would cost the same — if not less — to make a delicious stir-fry from scratch, rather than buying it pre-made at a supermarket.

If you were to compare the two, you would find non-vegetarians actually spend more money per week if they eat natural foods because meat products, milk and cheese become costly.

When people depend heavily on prepared, processed or packaged foods, they end up spending more than those who eat natural foods prepared themselves.

If you don't have access to organic produce, don't fret. If you follow a vegetarian diet, your food is still benefiting your body. Maybe organic food can be compared to DVD players.

They are really expensive at first, but once there becomes more of a demand, the prices will eventually drop.

We welcome your input

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COMMENT

Bullying allergies: new twist to peanut debate

How's this for a new twist on schoolyard bullying: a young boy is chased by devilish classmates who tell him they have peanuts.

For a child with a severe peanut allergy, it must have been terrifying.

It seems that the glasses-wearing, pocket-protector sporting teacher's pet who once reigned as the supreme "geek" target for bullies has been booted from his throne. Now a kid with the simple inability to stomach a basic food product risks being targeted.

Fortunately, there haven't been any reported incidents of this kind of harassment in East York (one of Canada's national newspapers reported the bullying cited above). But peanut allergies and their significant implications are certainly familiar to local schoolchildren — and their parents.

East York schools have banned peanut butter from their students' lunch boxes in an effort to create the safest environment possible for all children. A staff member at Victoria Park Elementary School, for instance, pointed out that parents are asked not to pack peanut products. If they do, the child is asked to return it home with them at the end of day.

In just under a decade, the proportion of Canadian children who have severe peanut allergies has grown to 1.5 per cent. Years ago, peanut allergies were not as feared as they are now. There was a time when those suffering from nut allergies would eat their lunch directly next to someone spreading the potentially deadly condiment on a slice of bread. But soon, as the number of peanut allergies multiplied, the protein-powered product was forced into exile. It was a sad day for young children everywhere.

Now children, parents and some school staff in Canada are arguing to bring peanut butter back into cafeterias and packed lunches. Not surprisingly, there have been objections to that from parents of children who would then be in harm's way. To avoid placing their loved ones in a bubble, some parents have taken even stronger measures to remove their children from possible harm, such as homeschooling.

At Victoria Park Elementary, the staffer we spoke with said that the risk of harming the few severely allergic children is far greater than the frustration of other children craving their Kraft. All they have to do is wait until they get home; then they can munch their peanut products to their hearts' content.

That seems like the right balance. While both sides have points, the priority should be keeping children safe and happy at school... alongside their peers.

—Jenna Center



Observer, Jenna Center



Observer, Mallory Hendry

THEY'RE ALL HUGS: Rob Scheid, top, Barb Black and Grant Armstrong demonstrate the "belly laugh" cuddling technique at a recent meeting of The Cuddle Up group in East York.

Affectionate cuddlers are really just friendly people

By MALLORY HENDRY

Barb Black wears a pink T-shirt with "Champion Spooner" printed on it. Two silhouettes are cuddling beneath the words on her chest.

A "C" sits on her left shoulder; her name is printed on the back. Her clothing is appropriate because she is, literally, the captain of a cuddling group that does, in fact, spoon. She calls it "Cuddle Up."

Black is naturally affectionate, she says, although usually just in personal relationships. This is her first experience facilitating a group that she says more or less fell into her lap. It was originally a website — meetup.com — but the group leader disappeared and Black asked the group if they, along with her, would try and save it.

For Black, these groups are a way to meet new people and serve as an alternative to the dating scene.

"I'm not the type to bump my cart into somebody at the supermarket," Black said. "It's the affectionate social side of me without the pressure of sex."

If it helps, one can think of these groups as a kind of "friends with benefits" interaction, where the only benefit is platonic human contact. The need for affection is basic, according to Black.

To protect members, who hold meetings once a month in their homes, Black moved the group to Facebook. Because of that medium's access to profiles, it gives a better sense of who wants

to join, she explained.

Rob Scheid is a member of the group and sees it as a way to be social with people, but on a more physical, friendly level. He says he is embarrassed to talk about it sometimes because he is new to the cuddling scene.

"I'm still trying to get into it but I've heard that it helps people with social anxiety and I'm trying to work with mine," Scheid said. "It helps tear down a lot of barriers people put up in their lives."

Scheid hopes that dealing with his anxiety in social situations will help him be more comfortable with starting a relationship. Conversely, Grant Armstrong sees his time at the cuddle group as filling a need so he doesn't rush into a relationship just to scratch an itch.

"It's better to have a regular circle of people that I can cuddle with so I'm not feeling deprived of something and getting into a relationship because of that," Armstrong said.

Some people simply don't get enough physical interaction from their personal relationships, especially if they're single. Though Black can't speak for all members, she thinks it's possible these groups are a sort of layover for people who, for whatever reason, are not ready for relationships.

There are singles, widowers and divorcees who enjoy the benefits of human contact without the added strings of a relationship. But people always

assume there's more going on than foot rubs and massages. Even friends and family members have questions.

"I've been testing the waters at work and among friends and the reaction's mixed," Black said. "It's interesting. You get the 'uh huhs,' which implies all sorts of things, and then you get the 'oh sure,' nudge, nudge, wink, wink and you have to explain to them it's not a clever innuendo."

Armstrong hasn't been as open in his workplace, assuming that his fellow construction workers would make fun of him for it. But he hasn't found other people he shares his pastime with to be overly judgmental. He has open-minded friends, he said, although the sex stigma is popular.

"People get that idea pretty easily about anything," Armstrong said. "Even if you tell them it isn't. And it isn't!"

The problem is society's obsession with sex, to sell everything from diapers to radios, Black said. Society is too sex-saturated, and this is the group's small way of balancing it out. Black hopes that as more people learn about cuddle groups, the assumptions and negative stereotypes will fall away. She wants the general public to understand that their groups are simply filling a niche in society.

"Anything I would hope the readers get out of this is that it's ok, it's safe, there's nothing to be afraid of," Black said. "That's the basic message."

February warmed the heart but left black history in the cold

Before we turned the page on our calendars a few days ago, a friend and I were walking down the street when we saw a poster that read, "February is Heart Month." It was by the Heart and Stroke Foundation.

Wait just a second. Wasn't February supposed to be Black History Month? So are you telling me that not only do we, black people, get the shortest and coldest month of the year, but it's not even really ours? We have to share it with The Heart and

Stroke Foundation?

To all who still do not know, Black History Month was started in 1926 by an African-American man named Carter G. Woodson. Originally, it was just a week, and it was called "Negro History Week."

It was the second week of February because that timeframe marked the birthdays of two Americans who influenced the lives and social conditions of African-Americans. Those men were former president Abraham

Alyshia

Collins



Lincoln and abolitionist and former slave Frederick Douglass.

But whatever the history books tell us, I find it strange that an African-American man would choose February as the timeframe for anything related

to black history. Why would a man whose personal origins or ancestry originate in a hot place choose cold, bleak February as the time we should celebrate our history?

And I say "black" deliberately, because I think African-Canadian is an imprecise, unfair term. I myself am not of African descent — and I actually find it offensive when I am referred to as an African. My mother is from Trinidad and my father is from Jamaica. My colleagues on the East York

Observer include dark-skinned people who are Bajan, Guyanese, Ghanaian, Ethiopian, Jamaican and Antiguan. As for the majority of people I know, only a few are of African descent.

Some people think there's no longer a reason to observe Black History Month — now that a black man holds the highest office in the world. But that hardly makes sense. Whites have held that office since 1776; have we ever ignored white history? I don't think so.



Michael Prue

Age: 60

Political Experience: Mayor of East York, 1993 to 1997. Elected to inaugural Toronto City Council as councillor for East York. Elected as MPP for Beaches-East York in 2001 and re-elected twice.

In his words:

"People don't trust the NDP in this province because they don't think we can win an election, and they don't have confidence in our handling of economic issues. We need to convince Ontarians that the NDP can govern effectively."

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NDP

East York MPPs Michael Prue and Peter Tabuns are among four candidates vying to replace Howard Hampton as leader of the provincial New Democrats. Follow our coverage from the floor of the Hamilton leadership convention this weekend at torontoobserver.ca — and read their positions here:

Cities power regions — Prue wants cities to fuel economic growth in Ontario. To that effect, he advocates the elimination of the Ontario Municipal Board in cities with populations greater than 50,000 as it is "anti-democratic"; reforming the property tax structure, which he believes forces cities to be dependent on tax revenues; and allowing cities to establish their own versions of the City of Toronto Act, which would expand municipal powers.

"We would free up cities by giving them the tools to grow the economy," he said.

Prue also supports a Buy Ontario policy, which would award local businesses government contracts if their bids are within 10 per cent of the lowest bid.

Changing the culture of the party — If elected leader, Prue would reform the NDP party structure to make it a viable force in provincial politics again. He would institute a six-point plan for making the party "election ready", including providing \$10,000 to all local ridings for making election signs and paying for all non-television advertising. Prue would also seek to re-invigorate the party's youth wing which, he feels, has dwindled due to neglect from party leadership.

"We have a terrible record with the young," he said.

Prue believes that in the past, the provincial NDP was more concerned with maintaining its existing seats rather than winning an election. He hopes to attract new Canadians and individuals whose values are in line with the NDP, but who have historically voted Liberal.

"We only seriously ran in 20 ridings (in the last provincial election)," Prue said. "We need to change to win."

Decarbonization — Like Tabuns, Prue wants Ontario to move away from dependence on fossil fuels. He would authorize the conversion of all coal-powered plants to biomass as well as invest in green technologies to make Ontario an industry leader. Prue would also require new buildings to have energy-saving measures, such as solar paneling, and would provide financial aid for the retrofitting of existing structures.

Prue also supports the construction of green transit, such as LRTs, to connect regions.

Compiled by
RAHUL GUPTA



Peter Tabuns

Age: 58

Political Experience:

City of Toronto councillor from 1990 to '97. Deputy mayor. Executive director of Greenpeace Canada from 1999 to '04. MPP for Toronto-Danforth, 2006 to the present.

In his words:

"Building a sustainable economy is the single most important thing we can do to protect the environment. That's the core of any climate protection plan. We need large-scale investment in renewable energy, and a transition away from fossil and nuclear fuels, to an economy that is primarily based on renewable energy."

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Compiled by
TIM BURDEN

Mother cries for slain teen

Cont'd. from page 1

between the accused and her boyfriend exchanged the following day indicate M.T. was still pressuring him to kill Stefanie.

"I want her dead. LOL. We've been through this," M.T. allegedly wrote. "If it takes more than a week then we're just gonna be friends."

Nine weeks later, Stefanie was dead.

As Flumerfelt recounted the chilling details of Stefanie's murder, Patricia Hung wiped away tears.

Flumerfelt alleged that D.B. coerced Stefanie to meet him outside on Jan. 1, 2008, stabbed her six times, and left her to die.

Flumerfelt told the jury that the accused "didn't just counsel or encourage, but pressured" her teenaged boyfriend to kill Stefanie.

Charges laid in case of alleged spa fraud

Cont'd. from page 1

But when Lessard attended the spa's opening night, "Everyone seemed genuinely happy for her. I overheard conversations about people saying, 'Oh, you worked so hard for this, it's been so many years.'"

Filip Djukic, 39, Julia Sung, 25, Goran Sadic, 44, and Milena Sadic, 41, all of Toronto, face 114 charges, including fraud, theft and participating in a criminal organization.



PUBLIC SPEAKING CONTEST: Students from five different East York public schools came together on Feb. 17 for the 12th annual Agnes Macphail Public Speaking Contest at the East York Civic Centre.

Observer, Conor O'Brien