



Sanjeev Wignarajah /// The Observer

Flipped out

A multiple-vehicle collision on Wednesday morning at Broadview and Danforth avenues left a dump truck flipped on its side. Police said the cause of the collision is unknown and no one was hurt.

COMMUNITY

Greek spirit good despite bad economy

'It's freedom day. We're a strong nation,' says Greektown resident

By JONATHAN COSTA
The Observer

The parade was beginning to take shape, as thousands lined up along the Danforth to clap and wave Greek flags.

Greektown resident John Galaktopolous was among them — coming out to celebrate his heritage last Sunday, March 29.

"It's freedom day," he said. "That's what it's all about. We are a strong nation."

More than 15,000 people lined the Danforth, between Jones and Chester avenues, to watch the Greek Independence Day parade. It commemorates the Greek revolution, which freed Greece from the Ottoman Empire to become a nation in 1832.

The parade included Toronto dignitaries such as Mayor John Tory, Premier Kathleen Wynne



Jonathan Costa /// The Observer

More than 15,000 people attended this year's Greek Independence Day parade along the Danforth.

and Ward 29 Councillor Mary Fragedakis.

Despite the fact that the day acknowledges Greek strength in winning independence, Greektown residents such as Vasilios Daskalakis realize that modern Greece faces another battle: the severe governmental debt. Greece

is more than 300 billion euros in debt. Overall unemployment there is estimated between 20 and 25 per cent, and youth unemployment is estimated between 60 and 65 per cent.

"It's bad," Daskalakis said, "but knowing Greeks and what they have come out of, and what they

have endured, I think they are going to be fine. They need a little bit of patience and time."

Since 2010, Greece has received two large aid packages from the International Monetary Fund, a group of 188 countries working to secure financial stability in the world's different economies.

Newly elected Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras has clashed with the European Union, stating that massive bailout debts need to be restructured, because "without intervention they are impossible to pay."

Nevertheless, on a day of celebration, Greektown residents watching the parade along Danforth Avenue were optimistic about their homeland.

"We need to pull our socks up and work our way out of it. We need to give the youth a chance," John Galaktopolous said. "In our time we had better opportunities. This next generation is going to have a real hard time. Things are difficult, but we need to keep pushing on."

POLITICS

Liberals kick off election campaign

By DANIEL GOLDSMITH
The Observer

The federal election is still more than six months off, but you wouldn't have known it from the rally that took place last Sunday, March 29, at the Ted Reeve Community Arena just outside East York's southeast corner.

About 100 Liberals from the Beaches-East York riding gathered to help their candidate for this fall's federal election officially kick off his campaign.

He's Nathaniel Erskine-Smith, and he told the crowd that "public transportation and infrastructure spending" are the biggest issues facing Canada in the build-up to this October's election.

Beaches-East York MPP Arthur Potts and former Ajax-Pickering MP Mark Holland both gave speeches in support of Erskine-Smith, with the former labeling him as an "idea man" and "the progressive alternative" to the Conservatives.

Erskine-Smith will be going up against the NDP's incumbent MP Matthew Kellway and Conservative nominee Bill Burrows for the seat in the House of Commons from Beaches-East York.

This is Erskine-Smith's first run at public office. He touched on a number of issues in his speech, and in an impromptu Q-and-A session with supporters, he took time to snipe at the Harper government while also addressing immigration, education and the environment.

"Our politics should be about ideas, not just winning elections. We are so divorced from an idealistic political system... I struggle to come up with a single issue that the Harper administration has really addressed in the last nine years," Erskine-Smith said, going on to call for "major investment into infrastructure and education."

In a post-speech interview with the Observer, Erskine-Smith listed transportation and infrastructure spending as "the most important issues that the federal government can address."

"Municipal governments are overburdened by the cost of public transportation," he said.

"The least the federal government can do is provide them a stable third of support."

■ See LIBERALS, page 8

POLICE & FIRE

Pair sought after violent robbery

Police are looking for two men in connection with a violent assault and robbery that occurred on March 17 near the corner of Greenwood and Danforth avenues. Police say two men stabbed an unidentified victim who made several attempts to escape from the altercation. The pair also stole personal property from the victim. They're now wanted for robbery, forcible confinement, possession of property obtained by crime, theft of under \$5,000, assault, assault with a weapon and threatening death. Police are looking for Darrin Wickens, 29, and Taso Antipas, 45, both residents of Toronto. Anyone with information is asked to call police at 416-808-5500.

Teen stabbed in Thorncliffe Park

Police are looking for an assailant after a 15-year-old male was stabbed twice in his torso at around 11 a.m. on March 23 in a parking lot off Overlea Boulevard. According to Det. Jeremy Gray, the victim fled to a nearby Popeye's chicken restaurant, in the Thorncliffe Park Plaza. He was taken to hospital, where he was reported as conscious with non-life-threatening injuries. Two schools near the scene of the stabbing, Marc Garneau Collegiate Institute and Valley Park Middle School, were put under a hold-and-secure order.

~ **Brandan Kajioka and Amil Delic**



Observer file photo

Donna-Lynn McCallum shared a laugh with former East York mayor Michael Prue (right) after receiving an East York Bulldog Award in 2010.

Selfless citizen honoured

Woman recognized posthumously for her volunteer work

By **CHRIS DeMELO**
The Observer

Donna-Lynn McCallum is remembered for the remarkably selfless life she lived.

The ever-dedicated resident of East York was recognized posthumously last week for a lifetime of giving to her community.

The event took place at the East York Civic Centre, a

building she had a role in saving. On March 24, a shadow box full of mementos from McCallum's life was unveiled in conjunction with the Agnes Macphail Award ceremony.

"Donna was a very proactive, a very loud, but a very respectful voice — by conveying and making her case known. The East York Civic Centre was a very important piece of land to the community," said Justin VanDette, a friend of McCallum.

"I met Donna-Lynn McCallum in 1997-98 during the amalgamation debate between

East York and the city of Toronto."

The two became friends over their mutual love of the East York community.

"I'll confess to you today — I probably wouldn't confess this in 1998-99 when I was still in high school," VanDette said. "I was skipping school to go to those meetings. I was just very fascinated by the government debates and public issues."

McCallum was a staunch opponent of amalgamation — the merger of East York and the other formerly auton-

omous "Metro Toronto" municipalities into the 'megacity' of Toronto that the provincial government of Mike Harris forced in 1998.

In fact, her home was still carrying a sign saying 'Say No on the MegaCity' at the time of her death.

McCallum wasn't just an activist and volunteer, but also an avid photographer. Some of her photos are still retained by the NDP caucus at Queen's Park.

Donna-Lynn McCallum died at the age of 69 on May 29, 2013.

WHAT'S UP IN E.Y.

Get your game on at the library

Young people aged 11-18 are invited to challenge their friends and themselves at an afternoon of gaming through video games or board games. The event will be held at the S. Walter Stewart library branch, 170 Memorial Park Ave., on Monday, April 13 from 11:45 a.m.-12:30 p.m. For more information, call 416-396-3975.

Planting a talk

The Leaside Garden Society's April meeting will feature a special speaker on native plants and the popularity of them in Toronto. Paul LaPorte is a GTA Greenbelt resident and the past president of the North American Native Plant Society. His presentation is at 7:15 p.m. this coming Thursday, April 9, at the Leaside public library branch, 165 McRae Dr.

~ **Sanjeev Wagnarajah**

Pedestrian safety campaign raises awareness

By **NICOLE DAWE**
The Observer

David was in such a hurry to get to work that he almost didn't make it.

"All I was thinking was how angry my boss would be if I was late for my shift," said David, who asked that his last name be withheld, in a recent interview.

He was in a rush to catch a bus on Pape Avenue when he ran across Carlaw Avenue from behind a parked vehicle. And he barely escaped being hit by an SUV.

"Their car just missed, probably by four or five inches," he said. "Looking back at it now, being late would have been better than not making it at all."

As of March 24, Toronto had recorded 11 traffic fatalities in 2015, with nine being pedestrians — six more than this time last year.

In response to the increase, the Toronto police launched a March pedestrian safety campaign to raise awareness about the increase in traffic fatalities involving pedestrians.



File photo from Fotolia

"We will be paying close attention to crosswalk violations, intersection-related offences, jaywalking and mid-block crossing locations; these are definite areas of concern when it comes to pedestrian safety," said Const. Clinton Stibbe.

He explained that the campaign was timed to coincide with the school boards' March break, due to increased pedestrian traffic and risk.

"More youth are on roadways... so

it's a good opportunity to speak to them and try to curb risky pedestrian errors before they become habits," he said.

But he also acknowledged that traffic safety is a year-round concern: "Awareness should not end when the kids go back to school. They're not the only ones at risk."

Stibbe said the nine pedestrians who have died in Toronto traffic incidents this year were all 50 years or

older. He said the older the population, the greater the risk of fatality.

"It takes them more time to react to protect themselves and it's harder for them to recover from an injury because their bodies are more frail," he said.

Marlena Lee-Katinov, walking on Danforth Avenue recently, said she worries for the largely older population of East York.

"There are a lot of mid-blocks and a lot of older people use them regularly," she said. "All it takes is for them to step out a little too soon, or for a distracted driver to not see the flashing amber lights, and their lives could be over."

Stibbe said this is why it is important for pedestrians and drivers to pay attention.

"Everyone makes mistakes... so as a pedestrian, make sure you have the eye contact of the driver before stepping out, even if you have the right of way," he said. "We need to work together when we're on the roads, not against each other."

■ COMMUNITY

Singing the praises of diversity

Aga Khan Museum 'the perfect venue' for concert featuring multicultural, interfaith musicians

By RIDA TALPUR
The Observer

East York's own Aga Khan Museum hosted a special event last month to celebrate ethnic and cultural diversity through the power of music.

Diwan Saz is a classical music group from Israel with multicultural, interfaith members.

Their goal is to promote peace and unity, and above all, illustrate a side of Israel they say has not always been reported. So they're on a world tour to promote that climate of tolerance.

"We connected by the music," said Tzipporah El-Rei, one of the star vocalists in the group. She said the group consists of members that are Jewish, Muslim, Christian and Bedouin — who all play various instruments such as the Saz (the instrument their group is named after) and who all have impeccable, high-note-reaching, vocal talent. They play music that they say is inspired by ancient Sufism and folk songs from Jerusalem.

"The message was being conveyed through the art," said Amirali Alibhai, the head of performing arts at the Aga Khan Museum, which is located on Wynford Drive.

He said he was proud to host the event and added that it shows the strength of diversity — while acknowledging that some people might find it surprising that a centre for Islamic culture would host an Israeli musical troupe.

Eric Stein, director of the Ashkenaz Festival — a festival of Yiddish and Jewish culture and the organization that helped put the event together — said he wouldn't have it any other way.

"It's the perfect venue.... The medium is the message. This venue was as much as communicating what the concert was about as the group itself."

He said the museum and Ashkenaz sought to break down barriers from all religious perspectives, and therefore collaborating was in everyone's best interests.

"The museum is not just for Muslims," Alibhai said.

He said it offers learning opportunities for everybody in all cultures, races, and religions.



Kelsey Cheng /// The Observer

Joshua Casino is ready for lift-off with his Ninja storm-ship. He built it out of LEGO at an area library branch's LEGO Club, which meets on the last Tuesday of every month.

Building smiles at LEGO Club

By KELSEY CHENG
The Observer

For Joshua Casino, outer space is as close as the local library.

In a special room dedicated to the LEGO Club — at the Jones branch of the public library, just below East York's southern boundary — Joshua's mother Lisa Casino asked what he'd made with his LEGO pieces.

"Ninja storm-ship," the youngster said.

The LEGO Club is organized by the Toronto Public Library across 17 branches... including Thorncliffe and Riverdale. It meets on the last Tuesday of every month. This week, Casino brought her son to the LEGO Club for the first time.

"He's already asking if we can come the next time, and I already said, 'Yes,'" she

said.

Last September, when Teresa Taizzo and Liza Villanueva organized the program at the Jones library, they hoped to attract children 6-12 years of age.

"We wanted it to be a safe and welcoming place for them to come after school," Taizzo said, "and for them to learn and have fun."

They promoted the program to schools and daycares in the neighbourhood, and the program grew. Now, more than 15 children and their parents or guardians show up for an hour of play time at the library every month.

"LEGO is one of those classic toys. It promotes science and technology practices as well as teamwork," Taizzo said. "It's a great resource."

Benny, Julia and Rachael Lorus, ac-

companied by their babysitter Monica, have come to the LEGO Club since the program started.

"They love LEGO. And there are more kids here, so it's more fun," Monica said. "LEGO... lets them use their imagination to create something."

In the middle of her own LEGO construction project, Rachael Lorus spotted her friend, Sophie, and the two began collaborating on an elaborate home model. It even has an outdoor barbecue patio.

"They're so into it; it's so cute," laughed Monica, watching the four busy children at work.

Based on the response from parents and children at the Jones library, Taizzo and her team would like to expand the LEGO Club into a daily program.

Pan Am Games a chance to be recognized: Gosal

Minister of sport says games will raise profile of Canadians

By PATRICK RAIL
The Observer

Canada's minister of sport visited East York late last month and said he thinks the forthcoming Pan Am Games are a unique opportunity for Canadian amateur athletics to get mainstream recognition at home.

"In our country, we don't appreciate younger athletes as much as we should," Bal Gosal told a group of sports journalism students at Centennial College's East York campus on Carlaw Avenue.

The Pan Am Games will be held in Toronto and across southern Ontario July 10-26.

Gosal, the Conservative MP for Bramalea-Gore-Malton, said the influx of 7,000 athletes from 41 countries participating in 36 different events will raise the profile of Canadian competitors, as well as excite young athletes.

"Any time you host a Games, it inspires a generation of Canadians," he said.

Gosal likened the opportunity to the emergence of tennis superstars Milos Raonic and Eugenie Bouchard, who have raised the profile of the game in Canada.

Gosal believes that the Pan Ams will have the same effect on amateur athletics and their competitions.

"National recognition raises the profile of amateur sports," he said.

Ontario hasn't hosted an event of this scale since the British Empire

Games in 1930 in Hamilton.

The Pan Am Games have given Ontario an opportunity to develop new sports infrastructure to be used by athletes, and following the Games, the host communities.

"Ontario is lacking facilities," said Gosal, in response to a question about why Quebec athletes are sometimes more successful than those from Ontario.

To make the Pan Am facilities sustainable after the Games, the federal government has created the Sports Legacy Fund, which will

contribute \$65 million to the operating and maintenance costs of these facilities, Gosal said.

With the national recognition of hosting the Pan Am Games, as well as the new infrastructure being developed, the question arises: Could Toronto be in line to host a future Olympic Games?

"It's always a possibility," Gosal said.

"The GTA is a prime place where you can host" the Olympics, he said — adding there have been no serious discussions about a possible bid.

One woman's quest for gender equality

Journalist, human rights activist Sally Armstrong says the 'earth is shifting'

By NAZANEEN BAQIZADA
The Observer

Women have been fighting for equal rights for centuries.

Some risk their lives every day when they try to reveal the injustice done to other women in places like the Democratic Republic of Congo, Bosnia and Afghanistan. One of these women is journalist and human rights activist Sally Armstrong.

In 2013, she wrote in her book, *Ascent of Women*, that the earth is shifting and change is happening for women.

Two years later, Armstrong still holds this belief. On March 23, she sat down with three journalism students for an interview at Centennial College's Story Arts Centre in East York.

"The change is here," said Armstrong, who recently returned from Afghanistan. While there, she was called everything from 'whore' to 'infidel' to American spy. "What we do with the change is going to be the next challenge. We're not at the finish line."

On March 19, an Afghan woman named Farkhunda was murdered by a mob of men. She was beaten, thrown over a bridge, burned and then thrown in the river for allegedly burning the Quran, which turned out to be false.

"It's a horror story, a tragedy, but it's progress," Armstrong said. "It captured the people there the way the Jian Ghomeshi story captured the people here."

Protests happened all over the world in the wake of this incident, especially in Kabul, where it triggered unprecedented public outrage. President Ashraf Ghani even called for a special inquiry.

"We tend to look at the country as a failure, but almost nine million kids are back in school," Armstrong said. "Life expectancy has gone from 42 years to 62 years, and when



Photo courtesy of Sally Armstrong

Sally Armstrong is pictured here during her 2009 visit to the Nyanzale displaced persons camp, in the war-torn African nation of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

they had the presidential election, 75 per cent showed up knowing some dopey Taliban could shoot them."

Armstrong says anyone can help bring about change, no matter who they are or what they do. Actress Emma Watson is one of the people who took a stand last year and helped launch the UN Women campaign HeForShe.

"I don't care if you bring in Jack the Ripper," Armstrong said. "If it's going to bring equality, fairness and justice to women and girls, I don't care who says it."

Armstrong believes anyone who sees injustice happen and does nothing about it is guilty. To her, the expression "innocent bystanders" is an oxymoron.

One of the most powerful ways to show what happens to women in developing countries is through photojournalism, she says. Unfortunately, many photos are often not published because the content is too hard for the average reader to look at.

"We always want to cover up what happens to women," she said, "because we don't want to address the fact that some men want to hurt women."

Once when Armstrong was walking down an alleyway in a little village in Bangladesh, she met a young woman who had been terribly beaten and burned. She had skin hanging from under her breast because her husband had thrown boiling water at her. Armstrong wanted to show the world what had happened to her by publishing her photo, but her publisher would not let her.

"I think publishing the photo would have made a strong statement about what people do to people, and I think it's different than publishing a photo of a child who has died from hitting the ground from 17 floors up," Armstrong said. "My wish was to make a statement about violence. My wish wasn't to show the horror of a burn."

Another tool that is very effective is social media, she said. Armstrong believes Facebook and Twitter will do much for women's rights and help things move faster.

One of the qualities someone must have in order to travel to all these war-torn places is strength. Armstrong has seen many horrible things during her trips, but has always felt grateful for the opportunity.

"I pay people \$30 a night to let me stay in their house, tent or mud brick place," she said. "Even though my coat gets mucked up with the kerosene burner, I'm lucky because I get to see these things happening."

While all women may not have the level of rights they deserve, every action taken to fight for it is one step closer.

"You've taken a hammer to the wall and you've made a chip in it," Armstrong said, "and every time you hit it, you weaken the wall, and ultimately the wall will come down."



Sanjeev Wignarajah /// The Observer

A brush with the egg-straordinary

Freya McInnis-Hogarth, 6, concentrates on creating the perfect design. She took part in Todmorden Mills' Easter egg painting workshop last weekend, ending up with a personalized Easter egg created using traditional "wax-resist" techniques.



Sonya Nov-San /// The Observer

Students bite into Ontario-grown apples at Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School in East York. This event was part of FoodShare's "Great Big Crunch" program. The goal was for everyone to bite into an apple at the same time in an effort to promote food literacy.

One giant bite for kid-kind

By **SONYA NOV-SAN**
The Observer

Meredith Hayes was riding home from work on the subway when the idea struck her.

"I bit into an apple and everybody kind of stopped and looked at me," she said. "I realized it was actually pretty loud.... All eyes were on this crunchy, loud woman."

The impact of the moment helped Hayes, FoodShare's schools and nutrition manager, conceive of a way to draw a lot of attention to her program. At precisely 2:30 p.m. on March 12, students, musicians, volunteers and guests gathered in the gymnasium at Our Lady

of Fatima Catholic School, at East York's eastern edge, to bite into Ontario-grown apples.

"(We tried) to make the biggest crunch we could," Hayes said.

FoodShare's "Great Big Crunch" program kicked off nutrition month with more than 130,000 students registered online to participate in the city's eighth annual synchronized apple crunch. The event promotes food literacy and highlights the year-round availability of Ontario apples and vegetables.

Alyssa D'Angelo is a core French teacher at Our Lady of Fatima and strongly supports

the point made by the Great Big Crunch event.

"We strongly believe in healthy living and the importance of promoting nutrition for our students," she said. "Participating in the Great Big Crunch allowed our students to enjoy healthy food... and appreciate all the hard work our Ontario farmers do to keep us healthy."

Katie German is a senior co-ordinator at FoodShare. She and her team try to promote food literacy and help schools obtain affordable local produce.

"We also offer educator training," German said. "Teachers who are interested

in doing more can come be trained and take that information back to their school and their community."

In another FoodShare event, Grade 2 and 3 students gathered at the FoodShare location (at Bloor and Brock streets) for a concert and participatory activities to highlight food literacy.

Activities included making healthy snacks, worm composting and learning about nature connections such as birdcalls.

Apple farmer Don Werden and MPP Cristina Martins demonstrated their Great Big Crunch technique by biting into fresh apples.

Keeping skates sharp a labour of love for pair

By **AMIL DELIC**
The Observer

When the children from St. Brigid Catholic School line up in the hallway at the East York Arena, they can thank Angelo Moutoulas for the day's class skating trip.

"I love the community. I love being at the rink," Moutoulas said. "Whenever you can do something positive, do it."

For several years now, Moutoulas and his son George, at The Real Edge Pro Shop, have volunteered their time and talent to St. Brigid as skate-sharpener, all to the delight of teacher Dennis Moulds. The skating trips were easy to arrange, but many of the students didn't have their own skates.

So, with the help of a few teachers, parents and the East York community, the Woodmount Avenue school was able to collect used skates fairly quickly and ship them off to Moutoulas for his expert touch.

"(Moutoulas) arranges for a hockey bag full of our skates to be sharpened and (he has always) refused to accept any payment," Moulds said, adding that Moutoulas's services are valued in the hundreds of dollars.

With school and government budget cuts increasing annually, volunteers have become more of an asset to many neighbourhoods across the GTA.

"I realized years ago that if the volunteers don't exist, there really (aren't) many people there to help out in the community," Moutoulas said.

But he also understands the bigger picture of his efforts when working with youth.

"When you are young and people volunteer to spend time helping you develop, it makes a difference," he said.

The East York Arena had its origins in the early 1950s thanks to the "dedication and hard work of many volunteers," according to the arena's webpage. Sixty-years-plus later, according to teacher Moulds, this still holds true.

"Many people put in the time for the good of the kids and the community," he said.

Many of the kids whose skates Moutoulas has sharpened over the years at the East York Arena continue to come back and get them done by him.

"They still come back and get their skates done at East York, and still say their thank-yous and be appreciative of that," he said.

Whether he's helping out with the Janet Davis skate, proving some sort of gift baskets or sharpening skates for the children at St. Brigid, Moutoulas recognizes a common thread.

"Many people... go unnoticed in the community for the work they do," he said.



Amil Delic /// The Observer

George Moutoulas has been volunteering his time and talent to St. Brigid Catholic School for years.



The wonders of watercolours

The S. Walter Stewart library branch hosted this painting and other work by four East York artists at a March art exhibit called "Awesome Images." The painters were Alan Breeze, Gail Gregory, Nola McConnan and Jenny Reid — all members of the Toronto Watercolour Society. But although the library exhibit closed at the end of March, the society is holding its big spring show across town, at the Neilson Park Creative Centre, 56 Neilson Dr., Etobicoke. The show opens on April 21 and runs until May 10. Information: torontowatercoloursociety.com

Reproduction by Kimberly Naipaul /// The Observer

EDITORIALS

Lifting the veil

With a strong Muslim constituency in neighbourhoods like Thorncliffe Park (where, for example, the Islamic Society of Toronto is headquartered), there's been considerable discussion in East York around the niqab — and some intolerant, “un-Canadian” ideas shared across the country... from the top on down.

Conservative MP Larry Miller was especially vocal with his stance on the controversy. He recently went on CFOS radio in Owen Sound to tell Muslim women who wear the full veil over their faces “to stay the hell where [they] came from.” He later apologized.

Miller's comments came after Prime Minister Stephen Harper disagreed with the Federal Court's decision to permit the niqab during citizenship ceremonies — and he even went as far as to claim the niqab is “offensive” and “rooted in a culture that is anti-women.”

A recent Leger poll found that a surprising number of Canadians share similar opinions. In fact, 70 per cent of voters agreed that the niqab is anti-women and nearly a third of them were offended by it.

In this fiasco of a discussion, one question remains at the forefront of our minds.

Why are some of us so against the niqab? Is it because the niqab is “imported” and therefore inherently not Canadian, even though this country prides itself on its supposed multiculturalism — a case of “we versus them?” Is Canada having an identity crisis?

Apparently it is, according to Harper: “Their” culture is anti-women, Canada's is not. At the same time he, ironically, gave unsolicited fashion advice to women who choose to don the veil.

Nour Bakr, a Muslim woman, disagrees with Harper. Although she doesn't wear one, she said the niqab is “rooted in a culture that believed that a woman is so precious, like a diamond, that no one is good enough to see her without her permission. Women have the freedom to choose what they do.”

On one level, there are legitimate concerns. Niqabs can be security risks, but niqabis will and do remove their veils at airport security or whenever they need to confirm their identities. And many Muslim Arab countries follow similar practices. However, they shouldn't be required to do so in settings such as the citizenship ceremony. The ceremony is just that — a ceremony. Niqabis remove their veils prior for identification purposes.

Harper's argument is weak at best. What opinion does he have on a topic that is integral to the Muslim community and in the lives of certain women, neither of which he is a part of? Blame it on ignorance, but no one has the right to tell niqabis, or any women for that matter, what they can and can't do or wear. Instead, the Canadian government should work with the Muslim community to address its concerns.

This isn't cynicism. It is criticism. We want what's best for Canada because we love this country. Stop being blinded by overzealous patriotism and offended by something that has no direct impact on your lives. Instead, recognize the problems that manifest in this country and fix them. And wearing a niqab at the citizenship ceremony is not one of those problems.

~ Wing Kei Lam

Hydro bills heat up

Energy Minister Bob Chiarelli announced a few changes to Ontario's hydro prices on Thursday that are set to take effect next Jan. 1. The changes are an attempt to lessen the financial load of lower-income households — like those concentrated in certain neighbourhoods of East York. However, the Liberal government's plans still do not address the alarming rate in which hydro costs are rising for all Ontarians.

The plan includes the elimination of the Debt Retirement Charge, which is a \$38.1 billion debt left behind by the former Ontario Hydro utility. It's a debt that Ontario residents have been paying since 1999. According to Chiarelli, this will reduce hydro bills by approximately \$6 a month. That's good news, right? However, they also plan to eliminate the Clean Energy Benefit, a 10-per-cent rebate that provided an average monthly reduction of \$17 on all hydro bills. Not so good.

Chiarelli also announced the enacting of The Ontario Electricity Support Program, which provides an energy discount to low-income customers. The program states that lower-income households (below \$50,000 annually) are eligible for a \$20-\$50 discount per month. Those who don't qualify for the discount will have to pay approximately 70 cents more a month, depending on how many apply for the discount.

It's laudable that low-income households and families are finally getting the help they need. And a 70-cent increase is not the worst of the problem. But is now really the time to single out low-income residents when monthly energy costs are expected to continue rising to an even more unaffordable level?

The average Ontario hydro bill is currently about \$150 per month, or \$1,800 per year. Hydro costs rose by over \$2 just last November. And according to Ontario's long-term energy plan in 2013, monthly hydro bills are expected to rise even higher to \$193 by 2022. That's a pretty heavy burden for Ontarians to carry. Even harsher winters and global adjustment will continue to contribute to these rising costs.

With the three program changes, Chiarelli expects the bills of higher income households to go up “less than \$10 a month,” or (at the very least) \$120 a year. The question is whether these “higher” income households can really afford it.

~ Shelby Morton

EDITORIAL CARTOON

Observations...



Rob Catherwood for the Observer

News item: Councillor Rob Ford continues a tough cancer fight, with best wishes from Torontonians; council anticipates his hoped-for recovery and return to the fray — to vex the East York delegation and other ‘lefties.’

COLUMN

A clean slate for spring

Have you become sick of winter? Well, your cure has arrived.

Except for the biggest mounds in the mall parking lots, the snow has melted — and the formerly cold, crisp air has been transformed by sun-driven warmth.

After another hard winter, spring has finally arrived. As of today, it's been official for two weeks. But as we take off our winter coats, it's time to put on our dusting aprons.

Time to begin spring cleaning.

Spring cleaning can definitely feel overwhelming, especially since many of us have let things get a little out-of-hand around the house. But don't fret; I'm about to share some essential tips to help you get started with your own warm-weather cleaning blitz.

The best place to start is the kitchen. Then bathrooms and closets. Don't get frustrated. Plan to take some time. (Be prepared to spend more than just an hour.) The most important thing to keep in mind is to start in one place, and finish there before moving onto another task.

other task.

Sometimes the best approach is an actual plan of attack. If you are unsure of what needs to be done first, write a list. That may help you to remain stress-free. (Because, remember, this is an exciting task, not an annoying chore. Or so I tell myself.)

Make sure you have gathered all of the necessary tools to get your spring cleaning done in an organized fashion. Start with tape, boxes and garbage bags; these items are the best supplies to help you sort through what you are keeping/storing/discarding/donating.

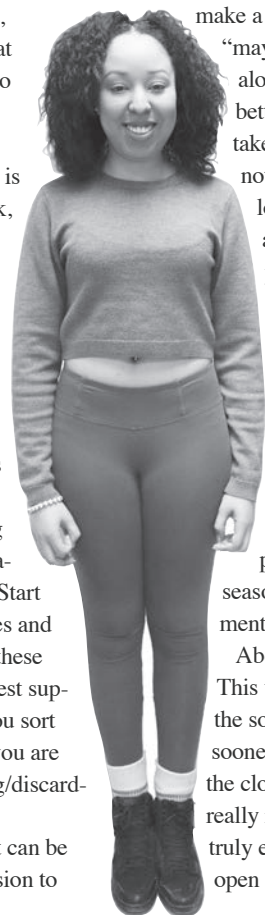
Sometimes it can be a difficult decision to

figure out what you are ready to part with. Just take some deep breaths and stick to your decisions. If you are unable to

make a choice, try making a “maybe” pile and leave it alone until you are in a better frame of mind to take another shot. Do

not keep items that no longer fit you. Yes, we all know the famous phrase, ‘I'll lose the weight and wear it again soon.’ Well, why not just toss those jeans that are a few sizes too small — and allow room for the new clothing that you will end up purchasing. With new seasons, come new statement pieces anyway.

Above all: Remain calm. This will be a big job. But the sooner you start in, the sooner you'll finish. And the closer you are to feeling really refreshed and ready to truly embrace spring with open arms.



Lataevia-Ceanna Kemp



Photos courtesy of City of Toronto Archives

The good — and bad — ole' days

The Observer continues its look back on East York history through photographs from the City of Toronto Archives. The photo on the left shows civic officials on an “annexation tour” of East York on April 4, 1930 — when East York was struggling financially at the outset of the Great Depression, and the municipality had approached the City of Toronto about a possible merger. The more upbeat, post-war picture on the right was taken on May 13, 1949, and is identified in the archives simply (and straightforwardly) as “East York student panel, five girls and two flags.”

Toronto school board facing \$16.5-M deficit

Bleak March budget will result in a loss of about 250 positions

By DANIEL GOLDSMITH
The Observer

East York’s senior public school trustee says it’s too soon to quantify the impact that the new school board budget will have locally.

But there are few rays of light for anyone in the budget that the Toronto District School Board passed at its March meeting. Among its provisions is the loss of about 250 jobs — hopefully through attrition rather than layoffs.

The cuts were made to address a projected \$16.5-million deficit in the TDSB’s \$3-billion operating budget for 2015-2016. TDSB chairman Shaun Chen said that the board hopes to avoid letting go of anyone by simply closing

jobs that are left by people who resign or retire.

John Smith, president of the Elementary Teachers of Toronto, called the cuts a “mistake” in a statement on behalf of ETT, criticizing the budget for “diminished support for students in need.”

Speaking about how the cuts would affect East York, Ward 16/Beaches-East York trustee Sheila Cary-Meagher told the Observer that it is “far too early” to predict how the austerity will trickle down to neighbourhood schools.

Cary-Meagher added that there could also be further cuts in the coming weeks when the Ministry of Education releases next year’s “Grants for Student Needs,” which provide funding for Ontario school boards.

In a fact sheet released shortly before the board’s budget meeting, the TDSB revealed that the cuts include 98 elementary teaching

positions as well as 116.5 high school positions.

The statement also announced cuts to English as a Second Language programs and special education funding. A total of 36.5 special education teaching positions were eliminated, while ESL programs lost 93 positions.

One of the TDSB’s three Newcomer Reception Centres will also close as a result of the cuts. The centres offer English language and mathematics evaluations to students who are new to Canada.

The board also discussed partnering with the Toronto Parking Authority to create a revenue-generating program whereby downtown schools would rent out parking lots after school hours.

The TDSB currently oversees 595 schools in Toronto and approximately 246,000 students. The board estimates that there will be 2,000 fewer students enrolled in 2015-’16.



■ CARY-MEAGHER

College president unveils plaque for murdered women

By VERONICA AGUDELO CORREA
The Observer

Centennial College has ensured that the students at its East York campus will always have a reminder of the women’s rights movement — in both its brightest and darkest moments.

At a March ceremony observing International Women’s Day, staff and students packed a hallway and college president Ann Buller unveiled a plaque that remembers by name the 14 women murdered by a deranged misogynist at the École Polytechnique in Montreal on Dec. 6, 1989.

Her remarks focused on both the heights and depths of the women’s rights movement.

“I would say celebrate, be proud.... Know that you are part of a community that makes an incredible differ-



Veronica Agudelo Correa /// The Observer

Ann Buller unveiled a plaque in memory of the 14 women murdered in 1989 at Montreal’s École Polytechnique.

ence and reflect on how lucky we are to be in this place and in this time,” she said. “Think about what you can do to help other women.”

While she stressed the importance of remembering the women who died in the so-called Montreal Massacre,

she said it’s also important not to lose sight of feminism’s progress.

“For women and girls, our place of birth has a profound impact on our opportunities and ambitions,” she said. “In many parts of the world, girls are prohibited from at-

tending school.”

The most important thing for them is to explore their talents and live a full life, Buller added.

“This plaque talks about our values and the commitment to create a culture where the differences can be reconciled without violence,” she continued. “A culture where men and women will stand up and say there will be no more abuse against women and children.”

Centennial’s associate vice-president of human resources, Yves Deschenes, said that as a father of two daughters, he’s keenly aware of the need to embrace the values of equity and take action in that direction. He also said Canadians should understand the privileges they have.

“Certainly we have a long way to

go in Canada, but also we are doing a lot better than many across the world,” Deschenes said.

“We are a college that believes in, teaches and tries to live our global citizenship values,” Buller said. “We choose not to ignore, but to engage.”

Buller finished her speech by saying that post-secondary students and faculty members everywhere in Canada should remember the courage of the 14 women murdered that day in Montreal by providing safe environments where people can have freedom of expression.

“Canada’s institutions must reflect our values and our vision for our country, which means they should allow for debate, and freedom of expression, and ideally, understanding and compassion,” Buller concluded.



Ryan Chatterjee // The Observer

Muhammad Masood Alam (right) received the 2015 Agnes Macphail Award for his volunteer work with Toronto Police Services and the Canadian Association of Pakistani Origin.

Macphail 'inspired' award-winner

By **RYAN CHATTERJEE**
The Observer

It was standing room only as people gathered at the East York Civic Centre on Tuesday for the 22nd Agnes Macphail Award ceremony. The award honours someone who lives in the former Borough of East York who contributes outstandingly to the community. This year, it was awarded to Muhammad Masood Alam.

Alam said he's "honoured" to receive the award and "inspired" by Macphail.

"Wherever I find some social injustice, I am always trying to help," he said.

Alam volunteers with Toronto Police Service in 53 Division to increase neighbourhood safety and with the

Canadian Association of Pakistani Origin to assist with their community development initiatives, as well as to fundraise for natural disaster relief in Pakistan.

He previously sat on the school councils for Thorncliffe Park Public School and Marc Garneau Collegiate Institute.

The ceremony has been MCed for the last 15 years by Bob Lister, who won the award, along with his wife, Elisabeth Lister, in 1998. Lister enjoys being part of the Agnes Macphail Recognition Committee to highlight people who have a positive impact in the community.

"It is a great way of promoting good people doing good things which is wonderful for the health of our society,"

Lister said.

Councillor Janet Davis also spoke at the ceremony. She said she admires Macphail as someone who was not afraid to stand up for what she believed in at a time when men dominated the political landscape.

"She was a feisty politician. She spoke her mind, she stood up in a world [that] at the time was extremely biased, patriarchal," Davis said in an interview. "She was a true inspiration for women who wanted to enter politics. As an elected representative, I feel she was one of our trailblazers."

Others in attendance included former Beaches-East York MPP Michael Prue, who delivered the keynote address. Prue said this event keeps Macphail's memory

alive. He talked about some of Macphail's memorable speeches as a politician and called her a "absolutely remarkable" woman.

Macphail was the first woman elected to the House of Commons in 1921 and one of the first two elected to the Ontario Legislature in 1943. As MPP, she represented the riding of York East.

Macphail championed the causes of human rights, peace, social justice, pension and prison reform. She represented Canada in 1929 at the League of Nations.

If Macphail were alive today, Davis thinks she would say to "carry on and never apologize."

MacPhail died at the age of 63 in 1954.

Liberals kick off fall campaign

Cont'd. from page 1

The federal Beaches-East York seat was once firmly held by the Liberals: Maria Minna represented the riding for six consecutive terms for the Grits before losing to Kellway in 2011.

Erskine-Smith also revealed that early fundraising efforts for his campaign have been successful, saying that he had already built up a "\$35,000 war chest" on his way to a target of \$100,000.

Matthew Kellway spent just under \$69,000 in his victorious 2011 campaign.

Born and raised in East York, Erskine-Smith has worked as a commercial litigator for Toronto firm Kramer Simaan Dhillon LLP since 2012.

He earned a law degree at Queen's University before completing his post-graduate studies at Oxford. He revealed in his speech that he is taking a leave of absence from litigating to focus on the campaign.

The election is currently scheduled for Oct. 19.



Daniel Goldsmith // The Observer

Nathaniel Erskine-Smith kicks off his campaign at the Ted Reeve Community Centre.

East Yorker gives back to community, brings out the fans

By **JASON SUTCLIFFE**
The Observer

For a while, the bleachers at Stan Wadlow Park sat empty during East York Senior Baseball home games. Thanks in part to Adam Panagopka, that's changed.

"We brought that East York spirit back," he said.

Now there are couples in the stands, parents and kids eating ice cream and cheering support for the team. A fourth-place finish at provincials – thanks to volunteer coach Panagopka and the rest of the coaching staff – has a lot to do with it.

"The parents will keep their kids behind and bring them to watch us play," Panagopka said. "We brought that love and fire back."

Panagopka, 32, takes pride in being an East Yorker. After spending his youth playing East York baseball, he decided it was time to give back. It shouldn't be surprising; he said he's had some positive examples.

As a boy he was mentored by another East Yorker, Andrew Green. Green



Jason Sutcliffe // The Observer

It can't be all about work. Panagopka (wearing the grey sweatshirt) takes a little time out of practice to talk and joke around with the guys.

coached Panagopka in 1998 when he was just 16 years old. The team won the Ontario Summer Games, an Olympic-style tournament in Guelph.

It was an experience Panagopka regards as his best memory from baseball. Green talked about knowing Panagopka both as a player and a person.

"He was an important player on the team," Green said. "I regret not taking him the following season because he was a bit of a tough guy.... But he was

very passionate and very heart and soul on the team.... Maybe it's the great relationship he has with his wife and the kids, but I have just seen him mature so much."

Panagopka admitted he and Green didn't always see things eye-to-eye.

"Ever since I became a coach (however) and we became friends outside of baseball," Panagopka said, "I feel like I am becoming the new Andrew Green – his style, his way. So I really do look up to him."

Panagopka is a hard-working, blue collar guy, living with his wife Andrea and daughter Angelica in a modest East York house. He still volunteers time to the local baseball club. His social media handle "Mr. East York" seems appropriate.

"I was born and raised here at Greenwood and Memorial (Park avenues), running around with my close friends that I played baseball with," he said. "My four or five best friends I know from mosquito or pee-wee (level sports). One of them is my daughter's godfather and the rest of them were in my wedding party."