



Sunnie Huang /// Observer

A bittersweet Greek Independence Day

Children complete Greektown's annual parade, as a flag-waving crowd cheers. Thousands of people lined Danforth Avenue on March 26 to commemorate the 191st anniversary of Greek independence — amid concern over painful economic and social upheaval in Greece. Story on page 7.

East York schools in jeopardy of closures

By **TATIANA HERMAN**
The Observer

East York school trustees are worried about the community's vulnerability to school closures in the wake of last week's provincial budget — and Education Minister Laurel Broten's pledge to stop propping up underpopulated city schools.

Almost a third of Toronto's public elementary and high schools have low enrolments.

The province said it won't tell public or separate boards which schools to close, but Broten said she's committed to ending financial supports for

underused schools.

That jeopardizes schools like Eastern Commerce High School on Phin Avenue, in the area of Danforth and Jones avenues. It operates at about one-third capacity.

The Toronto District School Board trustee for Ward 16/Beaches-East York, Sheila Cary-Meagher, said underpopulated schools like Parkside Elementary on Cedarvale Avenue and Victoria Park Elementary on Tiago Avenue are also in peril.

Cary-Meagher called the cuts to education in this year's budget "despicable."

Finance Minister Dwight



■ **Sheila Cary-Meagher**

Duncan announced a guarantee to implement full-day kindergarten by 2014 and promised to hold the line on class sizes.

But in provincially televised remarks, he added that sometimes "schools get to the point where they're too small to maintain."



■ **Gerri Gershon**

"The Liberal government has become morally bankrupt if they can suggest the things they're suggesting," Cary-Meagher said.

"They are putting out statistics about the empty school spaces that are woefully inadequate; they're based on six-

year-old information."

Gerri Gershon, the TDSB trustee for Ward 13/Don Valley West, said the budget will boil down to more job losses in Toronto's public school system, on top of the hundreds of layoffs across the board that were announced on Wednesday night.

"The TDSB's budget is going to be rather tight this year," she said. "We will unfortunately be losing some very loyal, wonderful staff."

But Gershon is still hopeful.

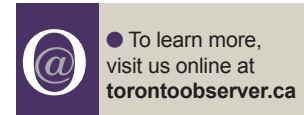
"What I've said to my community is... we only have \$2.6 billion to operate our schools, and the good news is we have

\$2.6 billion," she said.

"In other words, we could always use more money but we still have the ability to provide excellent programming for our kids."

But Cary-Meagher's assessment is bleaker.

"There are an infinite number of options, but closing and selling is not one of them," she said of the prospect of shuttering schools. "Public land is too hard to come by, and demographics are very complicated."



An unforgettable evening learning about Jane's journey

By **SCOTT BARBER**
The Observer

Dr. Jane Goodall is synonymous with chimpanzees. For more than five decades of groundbreaking primatological research, she has sought to use her notoriety to spread a message.

"Every one of us has a role to play," Goodall said. "We make a difference every day."

From enviro-political rhetoric to corporate ad campaigns hocking 'green'

products by appealing to bleeding hearts - it's a cliché.

But not when Goodall says it. On March 23, the Ontario Science Centre hosted An Evening with Dr. Jane Goodall, featuring a cocktail reception with Goodall and a screening of her latest film, *Jane's Journey*. After the documentary, Goodall explained why this movie is significant.

"It is the only film ever made so far that actually takes my message the way I wish it to be taken," she said.

"It's about more than chimps. It's very much about who I am."

Goodall began studying the social interactions of chimpanzees in 1960 at Gombe Stream National Park in Tanzania. Since then, she's become a respected chimpanzee expert and advocate, promoting a wider program of environ-



■ **Jane Goodall**

mental activism through the Jane Goodall Institute.

"We need money to live, but we shouldn't live for money," she said. "The future belongs to our children and we've been stealing from them."

We are bombarded by environmental slogans so often that their authenticity is rarely appreciated. Goodall challenges this paradigm and seeks to empower ordinary individuals.

"If we would just think about the consequences of

the choices we make every day; what we buy, what we eat, what we wear," she said. "Where does it come from? Was there animal cruelty? Was there child slave labour? If we would just think about those things then I know for a fact because it has been proven that people start living in a way that is more harmonious with the environment."

Goodall also emphasized the importance of political accountability.

"It is very easy to blame

our politicians and we point fingers and talk about corrupt politicians, but we helped corrupt them," she said. "If we aren't going to support the tough decisions, they're not going to make them."

Goodall travels the globe 300 days a year imparting her environmental ethic to thousands of people. It is impossible to question her sincerity or the experience informing her opinions, and even harder not to be inspired by them.

POLICE BRIEFS

Laundromat catches fire

An East York laundromat caught fire early Sunday morning. New High Efficient Coin Laundry, on Pape Avenue north of Mortimer, was engulfed in a two-alarm fire on April 1 at around 3:30 a.m. There were no injuries in the blaze. The cause of the fire is yet to be determined.

Woman, 21, assaulted

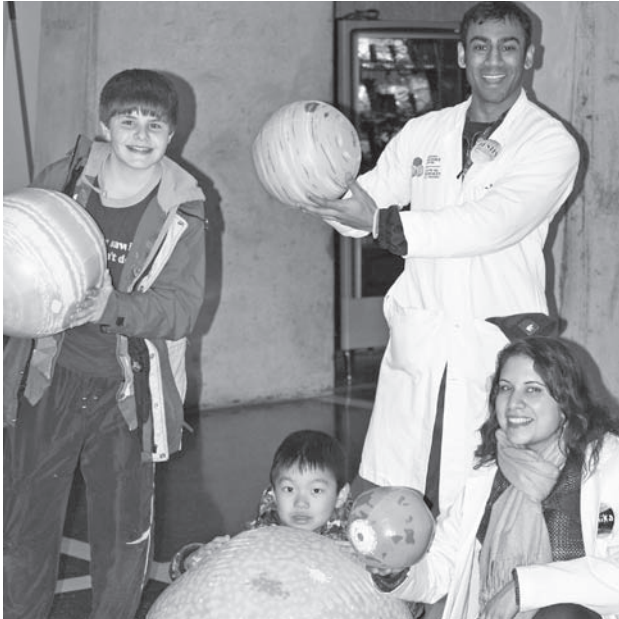
A young woman was sexually assaulted early on March 28 near Victoria Park and Danforth avenues. Police say a 21-year-old female reported being assaulted at around 2:45 a.m. She did not require medical attention. Police are looking for a white male suspect, 20-25 years old, with short brown hair and brown eyes.

Man mugged near Gamble

A man was robbed on March 24 near the intersection of Pape and Gamble avenues. Police say the 31-year-old victim reported being approached by another man while walking in the area at about 6:45 p.m. The man grabbed the victim and pulled out a knife. He took a hat, ear buds, some jewelry and a grocery bag of items, before fleeing westbound on Gamble Avenue. Police are trying to identify a black male suspect, 33-36 years old, 5'8" to 5'11".

~ Dylan C. Robertson

EARTH HOUR



Rebecca Steckham // Observer

Justin Persaud and Monika Mistery educate young minds about Earth Hour at the Ontario Science Centre on Saturday.

Dark skies mean a brighter world

By NIKKI PULSONE
The Observer

Lights being switched off around the city makes for a great night of stargazing.

When the World Wildlife Foundation (WWF) asked Australians to turn off their lights for an hour in 2001, they didn't expect that 2.2 million people would flip their switches. The hour that left Aussies without light was called Earth Hour. The following year, Earth Hour took place in Canada and other parts of the world.

This past Saturday night, as Toronto took part in its fifth annual Earth Hour, the Ontario Science Centre held an outdoor event featuring activities for kids as well as performances by a fire-breather and a First Nations storyteller.

But one thing that intrigued astronomer Jessi Rogerson, 26, was seeing the beautiful night sky.

"The Toronto Astronomical Society of Canada has brought all of their scopes out

and made it possible for us not only to look up with our eyes but to see the moon close up, and Mars and Saturn," Rogerson said. "It's amazing."

In 2011, almost 15 million Canadians took part in Earth Hour.

"Turning the lights off is a good thing because it saves energy, creates awareness of environmental change — but it also makes darker skies," Rogerson said.

This year, WWF-Canada asked Canadians to create lyrics for the anthemic song *When The Lights Go Out*, with proceeds going toward fighting global environmental threats like climate change.

Around the world, Earth Hour has become a phenomenon, with the International Space Station taking part, monitoring as the world turn off its lights. In Libya, Earth Hour was observed this year for the first time.

"I feel like people are getting more and more involved in it," Rogerson said. "Obviously that's what I'm hoping."

Confused about the budget? You're not alone

By MICHAEL BAGHEL
The Observer

On a bright Saturday afternoon, Beaches-East York citizens withdrew from the sunlight, descending to the basement of Danforth Mennonite Church.

They weren't seeking spiritual guidance. Rather, they sought help in navigating the recently announced federal budget.

About two-dozen concerned community members attended the meeting on Saturday, hosted by NDP Beaches-East-York MP Matthew Kellway. The budget will almost certainly pass without a fight, given the

Conservative government's majority, but Kellway said debriefing is still important.

"The budget, even though it's a majority government, is obviously a critical part of legislative events," Kellway said. "And so, it's a matter of giving people an opportunity to come out and hear first-hand, from the guy who represents them in the House of Commons, what's in the budget and what he thinks about it — and (for me) to be able to respond to people's questions and hear people's comments about it."

Michael Prue, the New Democrat MPP for Beaches-East York, also spoke briefly about the provincial budget,

Small effort can make a big change

Catholic schools turn out lights to fete Earth Hour

By JESSICA VELLA
The Observer

To help the environment, families and workplaces across Ontario turned off non-essential light sources on March 31, otherwise known as Earth Hour.

Since beginning in Sydney, Australia in 2007, it has grown steadily and now enjoys worldwide recognition.

On March 30, students and teachers across East York's Catholic schools shut off all non-essential lights and energy sources from 10 to 11 a.m. in an attempt to save energy and money in support of Earth Hour.

Vincent Citriniti, program co-ordinator with the Toronto Catholic District School Board's Curriculum and Accountability department, says it just takes a little initiative and understanding of Earth Hour to see its benefit for the environment.

"It's one of the pivoting points in understanding the whole environmental issue and how a little thing like turning off lights can result in a large reaction to save the environment," Citriniti said. "The carbon footprint of one person is very small. But when you put 168 schools together and you take a look at com-

parative sizes and you start doing some thinking, in the mathematical and statistical realm, you are going to be able to see that you are making a bigger impact as a global group. The individual does make a difference."

When asked about upcoming energy-saving results from Earth Hour, Citriniti referred to a study determining the benefit of shutting off unneeded energy-suckers year-round.

"We did a study a number of years ago, with shutting down all non-essential computers. Just shutting that down saved us somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$10,000 a year," Citriniti said.

"That's a ballpark estimate, but it does save a lot of money (and energy)."

Citriniti said it's meaningful involving students in Earth Hour and taking the initiative to go green.

"It's important that they see a small thing that they can do makes a larger impact if everybody does this little small thing that doesn't seem to affect anybody, like turning off the lights if it's a bright sunny day in your classroom,"

Citriniti said. "Let's do it now trend right through and with that they can take a look at other non-essential things. It gets them to think about their home environment and think of their school as their home environment and what they can do to change things in their building."

● To learn more about Earth Hour, visit www.worldwildlife.org

WHAT'S UP IN E.Y.

Local gallery hosts art show

East York residents are in for an artistic treat. Between this coming Wednesday, April 11, and April 22, local artists will display some of their most colourful abstract creations at the Papermill Gallery at Todmorden Mills Heritage Site, 67 Pottery Rd. The show will include works by East York artists Alexander Ahilov, Jeanne Isley, Joanne MacLean, Maha Takiyyuddin and Margaret Thatcher. It will also include impressionistic landscapes, realistic creations and flower compositions of various sizes. The show will run daily between noon and 4 p.m. For more information, call Beverly Rosenberg at 416-663-4419.

~ Lilian Asante

Police seek suspect in TEGH thefts

By SCOTT BARBER
The Observer

Police released security camera images on Wednesday in connection with a theft investigation at Toronto East General Hospital.

Toronto police are seeking the public's help in identifying the man in the video.

On March 20, the man was seen in the hospital's halls, entering patients' rooms while they were unoccupied, according to a police news release.

Police said that when patients returned to their rooms, they discovered their personal items had been stolen.

Anyone with information is asked to call police at 416-808-5400, Crime Stoppers anonymously at 416-222-TIPS (8477), online at www.222tips.com, or text TOR and your message to CRIMES (274637), or leave a tip on Facebook.



Suspect

Bringing the farm to the city

Trend toward local food foreseen on Donlands Avenue

By JOSHUA SPENCE
The Observer

Tim and Jacqui Schmucker were ahead of their time. Years before the promotion of regionally grown food became popular, they opened a store that anticipated the movement.

"Here in the city we saw the need to bridge the gap between rural food producers and urban food consumers," Tim

Schmucker said.

"We started just bringing in food for ourselves and friends, but then word spread and we quickly grew."

The Schmuckers have been running their Fresh From The Farm grocery store at 350 Donlands Ave. for almost nine years now.

As its website says, the store specializes in "local, farm-fresh, hormone-free and drug-free meats, produce and other products from Ontario Amish and Mennonite farmers."

The Schmuckers started out by renting an industrial space on Pape Avenue and hiring a truck to go out to Mennonite and Amish farms to pick up food.

"The space had a big cooler, so the

truck would drop off the food and people would come in and pick up their orders," Tim recalled.

"Then about eight and a half years ago we opened up this store."

In their 'warehouse' days, their customers were mainly Eastern Europeans. But that's changed with the times and the storefront operation.

"At the beginning, it was definitely people from the former Yugoslavia and Eastern Europe," Jacqui said, "and then, when we opened the store, we had people coming from Leaside, the Beaches and even coming from the west end."

"We've known our farmers for 15 years, so we have a great relationship with them," her husband added.

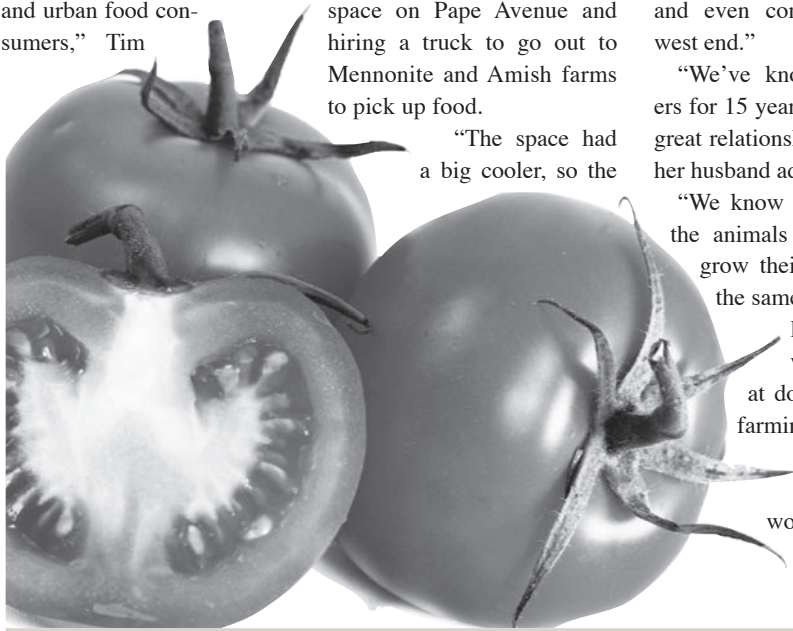
"We know what they feed the animals and how they grow their crops. But at the same time, there are

lots of farmers who are great at doing sustainable farming, and they're not Mennonite, so we would be open to having that relationship."



Joshua Spence // Observer

Tim and Jacqui Schmucker outside their Fresh From The Farm grocery store on Donlands Avenue.



Leigh Cavanaugh // Observer

The baseball diamond at Topham Park marks a beloved community tradition. The neighbourhood softball league is one of the many Toronto sports clubs that could be hit with new user fees that are being fought over at city council.

City plays hardball with softball league

But opponents of user fees rally their allies at city council

By LEIGH CAVANAUGH
The Observer

Softball has been a beloved tradition among members of the Topham Park ball club for almost 40 years.

Founded in 1973, the organization has run and survived on a volunteer basis. But that could be changing.

If they're not overturned, the city's new recreation fees are something that may force some leagues to sit out the coming season. In fact, in one Toronto league, the entire executive resigned once they heard about the new user fees, which were buried in the city's 2012 budget. Use of municipal fields went from free to a maximum cost of \$12 per hour.

For many, it's a matter of timing as much as money that's been causing the woe.

Susan Osborne, the president of Topham Park Minor Softball League, said she was not even informed of the decision. Rather, she heard about it on the radio.

"We've already collected all of our money for this year. Our registration was at the beginning

of January," she said. "So we have no money to recoup this."

But this week, Beaches-East York councillor Janet Davis chaired a special meeting of city council to hear from coaches, players and parents opposed to the fees. Mayor Rob Ford was non-committal in his response to them, but Davis said she is confident that she and her allies on council can rally the votes to look elsewhere for the \$1.5 million in revenue that user fees would bring in. She said she plans to introduce a motion this coming Tuesday to reconsider the fees.

As Osborne pointed out, her club already fundraises. They also have sponsors and extra income from their snack bar in Topham Park. But the revenue just covers their current expenses.

Topham Park player Shenelle Mason said she's also concerned about what user fees could do to the state

of the club.

"Topham is run completely by volunteers, which has always enabled them to charge lower prices."

Mason's father, Ron Mason, said he thinks higher participation fees to cover field rentals would be especially hard on lower-income families — some of whom already pay in instalments.

Osborne estimated that if city council doesn't cancel the fees, her club could lose 10 to 20 per cent of its members.

Topham is not the only league calling foul on the city fees. Leaside's East York baseball club is too.

One of Topham's guidelines is that they don't turn anyone away because of financial restraints. But Osborne said that without a fee reversal, they may have to drop that pledge.

"There's a tolerance of how much we could raise (the fees) before it becomes unaffordable," she said.

Hospital puts the fun back in raising funds

By JESSICA VELLA
The Observer

Dinner, entertainment and prizes were the attractions at a Toronto East General Hospital (TEGH) Foundation fundraiser last month.

The Greek Community Centre located at 30 Thorncliffe Park Dr. was the venue, and it was all to aid TEGH as it begins its renovations to make the hospital more accommodating for users — including 210 new beds and a new building.

Justin Van Dette, manager of community relations for the foundation, said the East York area relies on TEGH and he believes the renovations will benefit local residents.

"When people have medical needs and they have certain specific emergencies and they need health care right away, I'm sure an overwhelming majority will end up at Toronto East General Hospital if they live in East York," he said.

Van Dette said the foundation always welcomes donations of any size.

"The nicest thing about this campaign is that people can contribute \$2, \$5, \$10. There's no really specific amount," he said.

Jane Pitfield, former East York politician and now a volunteer for the TEGH Foundation, believes the renovation is very much needed.

"We needed to upgrade the facilities so we could handle all emergencies. It's a true community hospital," she said. "There is a big difference from the large hospitals that are downtown, where research is going on and they are funded heavily by the government. This hospital relies on fundraising."

The hospital needs \$210 million for its upgrades. Donations can be made at the hospital's website, TEGH.on.ca.



● For more East York stories, check out torontoobserver.ca

Giving a voice to national anthem

By **JIYOON ELLIE KIM**
The Observer

East York's Catholic school trustee wants to ratchet up the patriotism in the city's separate schools.

Angela Kennedy, Ward 11 trustee on the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB), wants students to sing *O Canada* during daily opening exercises in school — instead of just listening to a recording of it.

Kennedy says she scorns the CDs.

"I think they all have to go in the garbage," she said.

She first delivered her notice of motion at the TCDSB board meeting last week.

According to the TCDSB's opening exercise policy, principals annually consult their school council to establish specifics — but the rules mandate a morning prayer and some version of *O Canada* — either sung or recorded. Schools also have a choice around whether to recite a short Pledge of Citizenship: "I affirm that I will be faithful and bear true alle-

giance to Her Majesty...."

Parents and students can apply for exemption from participation, but exempted students are still expected to show respect by standing quietly and removing their hats.

Kennedy wants to firm up the rule around the national anthem by eliminating the option of a recorded version — not only during opening exercises, but at special school events as well.

"We, as Canadians and educators, should be encouraging our students to actually sing



■ **Angela Kennedy**

O Canada," Kennedy said. She explained that encouraging students to sing is critical in a multicultural community like East York, and that sing-

ing helps newcomers appreciate living in Canada and the privileges Canadians take for granted.

After years of attending numerous graduations, she said, she's always embarrassed when a huge crowd only listens to the song, with some not even paying attention. Kennedy said there's no excuse.

"You should sing it, whether embarrassed or not."

John Shanahan, principal of St. Patrick Catholic Secondary School, said that, realistically, it would be difficult to super-

vised the singing. He explained that many teenagers are reluctant to sing in general. But he still agreed with Kennedy's idea.

"If they start singing in elementary schools, it would be second nature and an easier transition," he said.

Kennedy plans to pursue the issue with the board after communicating with stakeholders such as parents, teachers and board staff. The motion on singing *O Canada* will be reviewed in full at the April 19 board meeting.



Elita Tsilo // Observer

High fashion hits East York college

Designer J'net Cavanagh promotes her Aboriginal-inspired clothing at campus' first-ever Indigenous Fashion Show

By **JANE IGHARO**
The Observer

In the heart of East York is some unique architecture that lent itself recently to a unique fashion show.

A winding, two-storey ramp in the lobby of Centennial College's East York campus on Carlaw Avenue was turned into a runway for models to show off clothing designs at an Indigenous Fashion Show.

The event showcased designs by aboriginal textile artist J'net Cavanagh.

Cavanagh, the Indige-

nous Studies curriculum developer and manager at Centennial College, began designing 15 years ago as a hobby.

She chose to do the show at Centennial because she wants to create a cultural energy in the college community — a place where indigenous staff and students will feel welcome and appreciated.

Her designs are contemporary in style, with the collection including everything from jean skirts and summer dresses to evening gowns and blazers.

Cavanagh refers to herself as a textile artist, not just a fashion designer. She puts a cultural spin on her pieces by adding new designs to older clothing.

The clothes at the show were a combination of three to four years of her work.

Passionate about her aboriginal roots, Cavanagh does not want her designs to deviate from the culture.

"For me, indigenous textile art is going to be where my heart stays because it is a way of reviving oral traditional stories," Cavanagh said.

"It keeps our stories alive and contemporary. It's a very contemporary representation of indigenous art — it's living art."

Although Cavanagh is a busy mother of three, she is committed to finding ways to fit textile art into her schedule and accomplish her goal of having an Aboriginal Achievement Awards host wear one of her designs.

Cavanagh's designs range from \$40 to \$300 and can be found at Vintage Grounds, a shop at 780 Bathurst St.



Teona Baetu // Observer

Horsing around

Parents took advantage of the weather last weekend to bring their children to Riverdale Farm. The farm, located off Winchester Street just outside East York's southwest corner, is open daily from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m.

Danforth awash with Greek pride, concern

By **SUNNIE HUANG**
The Observer

After a two-hour journey that spanned a dozen blocks, Odysseus Vlachopoulos wrapped up his part in the Greek independence day parade with a mid-afternoon nap, while tucked comfortably in his stroller.

The toddler fell asleep halfway through the parade, with the cheering of the crowd and the Greek national anthem from loudspeakers as his lullaby. His older sister buzzed around in excitement while his father, Nicholas, kept a watchful eye.

The Vlachopoulos fam-

ily was among the hundreds of Greek-Canadians who marched down Danforth Avenue on March 25 to commemorate the 191st anniversary of Greek independence, after 400 years of Ottoman rule.

Ushered by sunshine and the balmy weather, the parade kicked off shortly after 1 p.m. at Jones Avenue and headed east toward Broadview Avenue.

Music, colourful costumes and a veritable wave of blue and white garnered applause from spectators filling up the sidewalks.

Politicians, dignitaries and community leaders led the procession. Interim Lib-

eral Leader Bob Rae, and Toronto-Danforth's MPP Peter Tabuns and city councillor Mary Fragedakis, were among those in attendance.

The lighthearted spirit of the Toronto parade was a sharp contrast to its Greek counterpart, where police in riot gear lined the streets of central Athens during the parade there in anticipation of another flare-up of anti-austerity riots.

The persistent rioting in Greece has been in response to severe austerity measures put in place by the Greek government. Those measures, in turn, are a condition of Europe's bailout of the Greek

economy, which is saddled with such enormous debt that it has threatened the European currency, the euro, and even the European Union itself.

But despite the economic and social turmoil back home, many Greek-Canadians remain defiantly optimistic.

"Not everything is valued monetarily," Nicholas Vlachopoulos said.

"No matter what happens in the world, you can't take away a culture's history, as well as its language and accomplishment."

Vlachopoulos, a veteran of Canadian Armed Forces, added that he was pleased to see a greater youth turnout

this year.

"It gives us a good feeling in terms of the next generation, knowing that they have a heck of a lot of culture and history associated with their background and with their ethnicities," he said.

Beaches-East York MP Michael Prue, who has been a fixture in the parade over the years, echoed the same sentiment.

"Greeks are resilient," he said. "Greeks are proud and capable in spite of what's happening there. They will persevere."

Sunnie Huang // Observer





Lilian Asante // Observer

Principal John Shanahan (left), Catholic school trustee Angela Kennedy and Superintendent Michael McMorrow cut the ribbon at the grand opening ceremony for the Multicultural Centre for Parents.

E.Y. parent centre a figure of speech

By LILIAN ASANTE
The Observer

St. Patrick Catholic Secondary School's new parent resource centre aims to break language barriers.

The Multilingual Centre for Parents opened on March 26 and will provide services for parents who are not fluent in English.

Leanna Kloppenborg is the community representative for the Catholic School Advisory Council (CSAC). She said the centre's aim is to provide information and resources in a variety of languages to reflect the school's multicultural community.

"We recognized that parents could not understand the report cards and other things their children bring home, because they are recent immigrants to Canada," Kloppenborg said. "There are some very good resources at this school for kids who don't speak English, but

there is also a need for parents to have some parenting resources available in their language."

Kloppenborg said the centre also invites translators to CSAC meetings with guest speakers to ensure that parents have an opportunity to take an active role in their child's education. Located in the school's guidance department, the centre is run by volunteers in the community and currently offers resources in the school's three main languages: English, Filipino and Spanish.

John Shanahan is the school's principal. He said the message he wishes to send new immigrant parents is that there is a supportive place for them to connect and learn about their children's education.

"We are trying to be inclusive," Shanahan said. "I think they get the feeling that there are people who represent their

culture in the school."

According to Shanahan, if one parent immigrates to Canada while the other parent stays behind, there is sometimes a disconnect between the parent and the child. This is because as the sole caregiver, one parent ends up working many hours and may not know how to maintain communication with his or her child.

In situations such as this, Shanahan said, he hopes the centre will provide resources that will reconnect the family.

"We are interested in what they have to offer," he said. "We also want to be involved in their lives to make their experience in Canada a richer one."


The school's social worker, Rosemarie Johnson, agrees

with this vision. In addition to providing materials about the school system, she said the centre also offers literature on teen parenting.

"We are still gathering resources... when it comes to books about parenting of teens they are difficult to find in other languages," she said. "Specifically, when it comes to resources on parenting about 'How do I communicate with my child?' or 'How do I get to know my teen?'"

Johnson said the project was made possible by a Parent Reaching Out grant from the Ministry of Education.

The centre is open from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m., and evenings before monthly CSAC meetings and during parent-teacher interview nights.

 For more stories, see torontoobserver.ca

Cellphone bandits lurk

By DYLAN C. ROBERTSON
The Observer

A top target for thieves is probably sitting in your pocket. As some smartphones now retail for hundreds of dollars, phone theft is a lucrative industry with a thriving black market — fed by the scores of phones that are stolen in Toronto each month.

A key to avoiding phone theft is following gut instinct, says Const. Ingrid Hannah, community safety officer for 54 Division, which covers East York.

"When you feel something's not right, that someone's looking at you too long, you can react by calmly making yourself safe," Hannah said, noting steps to avoid prevent being targeted.

"Don't display valuables. People don't always think of their cellphone as a valuable, but it can be," she said. "When you're displaying a phone, you're distracted. So you can become a victim."

Last month, police in north Etobicoke started a phone registry, one of the first in North America. After violent phone robberies, police visited schools, offering to mark phones with invisible ink and registration stickers.

The situation's not as severe in East York. Police don't keep statistics on what specific objects are stolen, but community crime maps for the past month are published online.

The East York maps show multiple street-level robberies in Flemingdon Park and around the intersections of Pape and Cosburn avenues, and Main Street and Danforth Avenue.

But it's not just on the street that mobile phones can be stolen.

In November, officers in Scarborough took to TTC buses warning commuters to watch for grab-and-runs of cellphones and other handheld electronic devices.

The local division warned that TTC riders had been targeted while exiting or waiting to board buses, with thieves sometimes luring victims into pulling out a phone by asking for the time.

"That can happen anywhere, including East York," said Hannah. They're distracting you and you've displayed what you have. They're putting you off-guard."



HOW TO PREVENT CELLPHONE THEFT:

- **Avoid unsafe situations.** "Have a safe route home after dark," says Const. Ingrid Hannah. "Go for well-lit areas."
- **Proceed cautiously if someone asks you for the time.**
- **Know your International Mobile Equipment Identification (IMEI) number for reference.** If your phone is found, the number can prove it's yours.
- **Most smartphones have GPS tracking software.** You set a password and can check the location of your phone online.

School festival gives students a voice

By REBECCA STECKHAM
The Observer

The music programs across Toronto's Catholic schools are hitting their high notes this spring with the annual Music Education Festival that's taking place at St. Patrick high school and other Toronto venues.

The separate board's festival is an opportunity for students to showcase their musical talents in front of faculty, classmates and family.

Students in grades 1-8 have the opportunity to express themselves through a variety of disciplines, including vocal and instrumental music, and choral speaking. Gregory McGrade, an adjudicator for the choral speaking event and a drama teacher at Father John Redmond Catholic School, says the festival is educational and worthwhile for young minds.

"It's the idea of getting the kids together to see what other schools are doing... and achieving," McGrade said.

On March 30, students in grades 3-6 at three Toronto schools participated in the choral speaking portion of the festival at St. Patrick Catholic Secondary School on Felstead Avenue, in the Danforth-Greenwood area.

"Choral speaking is a group of kids speaking a single text in unison," McGrade said. Their contrasting voices can create a pleasing effect from a piece of prose. "I guess it would fall under public speaking but it's a great way for students to under-

stand how to communicate effectively as a group."

It may be hard to imagine the impact a music festival can have on such young learners, but McGrade is certain the event has value.

"It teaches them memorization and interpretation of words," McGrade said. "It teaches them how to speak and use tone and inflection to support meaning. And it is co-operation... that's hard for them to do. It's a discipline."

■ EDITORIALS

More questions

Toronto police need to be better prepared for the confrontations they're bound to encounter. This unfortunate fact was driven home in the shooting death of Michael Eligon in East York in February.

Eligon, a mental patient who escaped psychiatric care at Toronto East General Hospital, was confronted by about 11 police officers on a quiet residential street, Milverton Boulevard, and shot in the chest.

He was wielding two pairs of scissors, and he allegedly told police, "One of you is going to die." But he was also dressed in nothing more than a hospital gown, socks and a toque.

The police, who had the mentally unstable man surrounded, said they felt threatened by Eligon's advances towards them. That's despite the fact that one resident who watched the confrontation described Eligon's movements as "zombie-like" and others say his speech was incoherent.

When Eligon got too close, one of the officers fired three shots. Only one of those bullets hit the target.

A report released by the Special Investigations Unit, which investigated the incident, put the distance at 10-12 feet.

Why did only one bullet hit a slow-moving target at a dozen feet? Why did one of the other bullets end up in a resident's porch window? Why did one tear through a nearby garbage can?

Why were bullets necessary in the first place?

Although the SIU cleared the officers of any wrongdoing, the way these policemen handled the confrontation still raises serious questions.

Perhaps things would have been different if they could have used a stun gun. But they weren't so equipped. Maybe a little dialogue and mediation could have saved Michael Eligon's life. But instead, this man is dead. Milverton Boulevard's residents remain shaken. And Eligon's infant son will never know his father.

Police use of deadly force is a subject that we should continue to consider and debate. But surely guns should always be the absolute last option. And whether that was the case on Milverton Boulevard on Feb. 3 remains an open question.

~ Jesse Mirsky

Let's hit the books

Literature does more than entertain us. It connects us. It brings us together.

Books are first experienced as an individual, through reading, but are then shared with other people. The sharing aspect of books is the main reason behind book clubs. It is also why children ask to be read to even after they have learned to read. There is something special in sharing thoughts and analysis of a novel with other people.

Books don't just sit on shelves, stacked one against the other. No, books have a life of their own, being read and re-read, lent, borrowed, shared, and discussed. Words give us the freedom to express ourselves, to share our stories and experiences and to better understand one another and our individual trials. Books connect people from different backgrounds and break boundaries; they make it easy to see that no matter where your neighbour is from, you have something in common: imagination and an appreciation and interest in the same things. That's how books benefit our society — by building connections between people and creating stronger neighbourhoods.

This magic that is released through the opening of each book is only part of the reason libraries are important, especially in a place as diverse as East York.

For example, Thorncliffe Park is a neighbourhood that is home to many immigrants. Many of these people are just starting their lives in Canada and may not be able to afford books. Nevertheless, it is so important that these people, and everyone else, have the opportunity to read. And that's worth fighting for.

Also, libraries have many services that help children and adults connect, learn English, and even learn how to use the internet. Libraries in East York, and everywhere else, host events — including book clubs, recreational activities for children, author visits and readings, and more. They offer services from nutritional information to historical documentaries on East York.

These services and events are important to creating a strong and healthy community. So it's important that they be protected. That, in turn, is why the librarians took their recent stand against the Ford administration's lack of appreciation for their contributions — and went on strike.

It seems that Rob Ford understands that kids need to be active. That's why the mayor has a football fund.

But kids should be active mentally as well as physically. Not only should kids and adults get daily exercise by walking, running, playing sports, etc., but they should also exercise their minds, by reading books.

Last week's settlement of the librarians' strike is a compromise that will hopefully protect the libraries' vital interests. And thankfully, the branches in East York and beyond are open again.

But we shouldn't have any illusions that the long-term battle is won — particularly in the face of city councillors chanting the mantra of austerity. We can show what side we stand on, however, by lining up behind the librarians, starting now, with participation in their Keep Toronto Reading Festival that began on Sunday and runs until April 30.

Join our librarians and other book lovers from all over Toronto. Because books are important, not only to the development of the individual, but to the development of the community.

~ Teona Baetu

■ COLUMNS

Art beyond complexion

The Hunger Games is the newest entertainment franchise that teenagers are obsessing over. Set in a futuristic world, the series surrounds a competition where young adults must fight each other in a life-and-death battle.

Upon the release of the movie, hordes of teenagers rushed to the theatre to see the big-screen adaptation of Suzanne Collins' flagship novel. After earning \$155 million in its opening week (making it the third highest opening in history) it's clear the series is a success on the page and the big screen.

But there's been an unfortunate sideshow to The Hunger Games: racist-sounding comments from fans that have been hitting the Internet since the movie premiered. Some people, for instance, have been criticizing the use of three black actors, specifically Lenny Kravitz and 14-year-old Amandla Stenberg, who plays the young and innocent Rue.

"I was pumped about The Hunger Games," tweeted one person, "until I learned a black girl was playing Rue."

"Why does Rue have to be black?" tweeted another. "Not gonna lie, kinda ruined the movie."

These comments are disturbing — especially considering the demographic of The Hunger Games' fan base. I would have thought these young people would be liberated enough to see past the actors' colour. I'm all for keeping the

movie true to the book, but does the actors' skin really matter?

Besides, both Kravitz and Stenberg did an amazing job portraying their characters. Stenberg captured the youthful innocence and shy demeanour of Rue perfectly.

It's really shameful how closed-minded some people can be... to the point of using racial slurs against a 14-year-old girl.

For the record, Collins' described the character of Rue as having "dark brown skin" — which, if you look at a picture of Stenberg, is fairly accurate.

Making matters worse, there is a whole blog devoted to tracking these racial comments.

Much has been made of the dystopian motif of The Hunger Games: teenagers killing one another for sport. Sadly, in our society, there's a virtual forum for the same thing.



Evan DeSouza

Thanks for reality check

Here it is. No sugarcoating: We're the entitled generation.

A little while back, I was making my way to my Friday morning class. Knowing we would have a guest speaker and suspecting that we probably wouldn't be expected to do much ourselves, I begrudgingly dragged myself onto the TTC. What I didn't know was that this guest speaker would bring some incredibly valuable advice to the table.

Joe Glionna is the director for Newcom Business Media in Quebec, publishing Today's Trucking magazine. During his presentation, he brought the proposition to our attention that we (the students) are the entitled generation. He explained that while

we're all talented individuals (thank you), we expect too much when we start in the work world. While vocational education may provide us with the skills to do our jobs, we still really don't "know how to do our job yet."

"Finally!" I thought to myself. I've heard too many inspirational presentations to keep track of, but none of them, I felt, were as straightforward as this guy. He is perfectly right. We are the entitled generation and we don't really know what to expect in the real world. And no, I'm not being sarcastic.

I'm also perfectly aware that I myself am guilty as charged for occasionally hoping that someone will hold my hand along the way. But what many people my age don't realize is that their lives are dependent on how much drive and effort they put into themselves. No professor or boss can teach someone that.

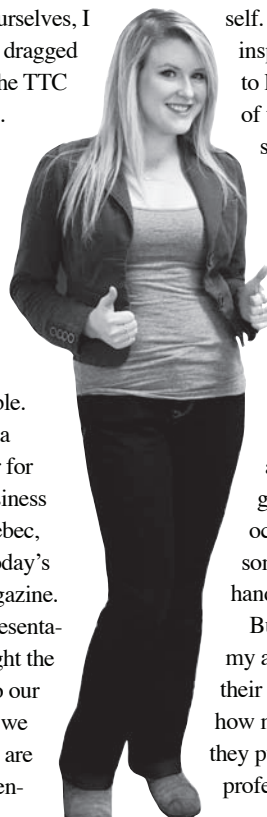
While it is nice to get extra time and

extensions to do our work, we are not helping ourselves asking for such things. How would we survive in the real world? We all have jobs, extra-curriculars, volunteer work, etc. It's all about how you manage your time.

Glionna bluntly told us that because we (not all, but many) act as though we are entitled, many employers are hesitant to hire us.

He even gave us the equivalent of free career counselling on how to win potential employers over in a job interview, and how to get the interview in the first place. He explained that knowledge, thought, reading, writing and common sense, combined with personality and charisma, create a "brand of self" that provides real value in the job market.

Many in that Friday morning class may have initially felt Glionna's words were harsh, but the fact that he was brutally honest with us and didn't sugarcoat anything was really very valuable and more enlightening than someone who might have come in and made things sound too easy. Life is never easy. It's what you make it.



Cortney Cook

Local parent helps veterans out

By CLAYTON GRUNDY-WARD and MICHAEL BAGHEL
The Observer

Billie-Joy Grundy is a loving single parent of three, and a childcare provider at Tiago Community Child Care Centre in East York.

When she isn't looking after her class of two to five-year-olds, she is caring for a completely different age group – Canadian veterans.

Like many single parents, Grundy works two jobs to help make ends meet.

When not working at Tiago, she spends her time at the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 345, where she connects with veterans.

"It's great that kids are on peoples' minds all the time, but people focus too much on our future and forget about our past sometimes," Grundy said.

Grundy was attending one of the legion's monthly meetings when she sparked a conversation with Ernie Maddocks, the legion's service officer. Enlisted at the young age of 17, Maddocks is a Second World War veteran who also served with the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers Corps. During the meeting, Maddocks asked Grundy to accompany him as he visited some veterans in hopes of raising their spirits that day. Grundy accepted the



Michael Baghel // Observer

Lin Han, a student at Gordon A. Brown Middle School, received a standing ovation at the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 345's Annual Veteran Appreciation Dinner on March 10, after delivering her award-winning poem, "Only Two Minutes." Han's poem won second place in the legion's 2011 National Remembrance Contest.

invitation immediately.

Maddocks and Grundy arrived at the senior residence building where they met Bob. Bob had no television in his room to keep him entertained, but he took great pleasure in just staring out the window.

"He knew everything about the area. He knew which mail man worked the street, when garbage collection was and when the last fire truck zoomed by," Grundy said.

Bob only had one other source of entertainment in his room – an old, beat-up clock radio on the end table next to his bed. When Grundy asked Bob to turn the radio on, she

found that it didn't work very well and was constantly interrupted by static.

"He told me you had to jiggle the antenna to get it to work," Grundy said.

When she asked why he didn't buy a new one, he told her that he had submitted a request, but the funding wouldn't come for at least a couple months.

"After hearing that, I couldn't get it out of my head," she said. "It bugged me so much to see that something as simple as a clock radio couldn't be provided (for our veterans) right away."

Grundy posted her

displeasure with Bob's situation on her Facebook page and received overwhelming support from friends who agreed with her. Support for Grundy's cause snowballed and led to her collecting 100 clock radios to donate to veterans.

Thanks to all the people getting involved, including parents of the children she looks after, Grundy succeeded in her mission to provide every veteran with the opportunity to own a clock radio.

The heart-warming story doesn't end there. Grundy brought the radios to Tiago and got the children to wrap

the radios themselves with some Christmas wrapping paper, generously donated by one of the parents.

"They didn't do the best job wrapping," she confessed. "But it was out of pure love and it was a great opportunity to teach the kids an early lesson on giving back to the veterans."

After wrapping the radios, the children and staff at Tiago carried them over to the legion, just down the street.

Waiting for them there was Eric Reynolds, current president of legion Branch 345, who happily welcomed the kids inside and watched

as the youngsters put the wrapped gifts underneath the legion Christmas tree.

"It's the least I could do," Grundy said. "They've done so much for us in the past, I felt obligated to get involved to help provide a little more entertainment for them than just staring out a window."

Although the clock radios were donated around Christmas time, they were officially distributed on March 10 during the annual Veteran's Appreciation Dinner.

For more information, visit the website of the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 345, visitrc1345.com.

Stories fill hearts, bellies

By JIYOON ELLIE KIM
The Observer

Tall tales have been drawing attention from outside East York to a local church's community event.

St. David's Anglican Church, at Donlands and Danforth avenues, invited audiences of all ages to enjoy folk tales from around the world. The last round of the Mosaic Storytelling Festival 2012 was March 18, capping a run of biweekly instalments since January.

For the finale, two veteran author-storytellers, Celia Lotteridge and Rukhsana Khan, delivered tales of wisdom. Dim lighting and Lotteridge's soft voice added warmth to her family story and helped the adult audience empathize with the story, while Khan's favourite Persian folk tales filled the small basement with energy and laughter.

The Toronto Storytelling Festival (TSF) has existed since the 1970s and is the genre's largest forum in the city. The East York festival, however, gave a chance to



Jiyoon Ellie Kim // Observer

Award-winning author Rukhsana Khan tells Persian folk tales at the second annual Mosaic Storytelling Festival. The biweekly talks at St. David's Anglican Church spanned three months.

local tellers like Khan, who haven't spoken at the TSF. It also attracted audiences from across the GTA.

Storytelling enthusiast Gayle Mount doesn't live in East York or go to church on a regular basis but appreciates the church's initiative to integrate the community.

"It brings local people. People get to know each other at a venue like this," Mount said. "It's good to see a church doing it."

Trish O'Reilly-Brennan, the festival's producer and an artist, explained that the church has been holding other events to engage East York artists. She said she's proud to be a "link" between the church and the local, non-church-going, creative community.

"We thought we could vitalize our church, by offering the space for the entire East York community," O'Reilly-Brennan said.

"It was also a positive and creative way to reinvigorate the church community at the same time."

St. David's began its Open Door programs three years ago, incorporating East York neighbours.

Non-church community members have established a backyard vegetable garden, sponsored by the Home Depot at Gerrard Square. Results go to the Eastview Community Centre food bank.

Donation helps kids build their future

By LUCY QI
The Observer

There's been a lot of creative playing inside Flemingdon Park Community Centre lately.

Four big, yellow cases of imagination are kept against the painted rainforest walls in the playroom. Inside, there are big, blue, soft blocks waiting to be used as castle walls, bridges, chairs or whatever the mind wants them to be.

Foresters Life Insurance Company donated the blocks at a cost of \$25,000 per case, to encourage free, imaginative play for children visiting the community centre.

Foresters president George Mohacsi was the one who presented the gift to the community centre.

Angela Wong, a mother of two who lives on the Danforth, says she will be taking her kids there to have some fun.

"I think they'll really love



Lucy Qi // Observer

Foresters Life Insurance donated \$100,000 in blocks to Flemingdon Park kids.

playing there. My oldest daughter is really creative. I think she could probably spend hours building castles or something like that," she said.



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Teona Baetu /// Observer

Beaches-East York MPP Michael Prue congratulates Alice Carriman, this year's recipient of the Agnes Macphail Award.

Volunteer turns ideas into action

By **TEONA BAETU**
The Observer

Alice Carriman is different from previous recipients of the Agnes Macphail Award. For one thing, she doesn't sit on any boards or committees.

Amy Sutherland nominated Carriman for the award. Sutherland recalls a time when she and Carriman attended a committee meeting.

"I remember after one very long, pointless meeting she said to me, 'Ah, I just think about how many crochet squares I could have made if I had stayed home,'" Sutherland said.

Carriman contributes to her community in other ways.

"Over the past three decades, she's been changing the fabric of our community," Sutherland said.

She added that while "other community activists are always trying to start something new and revolutionary and they call these things urban agriculture or guerilla gardening or tower renewal," Carriman has been doing those things for

years, just by being who she is and doing what she loves.

Carriman started a breakfast club and afterschool program for local school children, the Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office and the East York Spelling Bee.

She teaches knitting and sewing to seniors and children, donates homemade blankets to homeless shelters and gardens around her neighborhood in Thorncliffe Park.

"Growing up in the islands, my parents taught me that a community is what you make of it, which is why I have always had passion to volunteer in my neighborhood," Carriman said.

Carriman also learned gardening from her parents, something she loves to this day.

She said gardening takes patience and persistence, but like a community, what you put in it is what you get out of it and the end result's beauty is "well worth it."

Carriman said she is extremely humbled by the community's recognition and that she never thought

she would receive such a prestigious award.

Councillor John Parker said he's glad to see Carriman win the award because she's a "sweetheart" and "all the work she does, she does with a smile."

The award ceremony, held annually on Agnes Macphail's birthday, was ushered by the Boy Scouts and opened with singing of the VOCA chorus.

In attendance were councillors Mary Fragedakis of Toronto-Danforth/Ward 29 and John Parker of Don Valley West/Ward 26, as well as Beaches-East York MPP Michael Prue, previous Agnes Macphail Award recipients and members of the community.

The winner of the recent Agnes Macphail public speaking contest for middle school students, Haris Babar, delivered his winning speech to the crowd.

The evening ended with the presentation of a \$2,000 cheque to William J. McCordic School, where Carriman gardens voluntarily and makes crafts such as sock monkeys with the children.

Macphail home deemed historic

By **SHAUN THOMPSON**
The Observer

The deadline for objections has just passed, and so the home of East York's most illustrious citizen ever will get its historic site designation after all.

After city council's February decision to grant the designation — despite the reluctance of the homeowners and ward councillor John Parker — the last hurdle was overcome on March 14, the municipal deadline for objections.

"The homeowner could have appealed," said Lorna Krawchuk, chair of the Agnes Macphail Recognition Committee. Now, she said, with the expiry of that deadline, "we are very pleased that the designation will happen and that it has made it all the way through."

Agnes Macphail was a prominent social reformer and the first woman elected to the House of Commons. Voters in what was then the riding of Grey Southeast — around Owen Sound — sent her to Ottawa in 1921, and she stayed in Parliament until 1940.

Shortly after her defeat in that federal election, she moved to Leaside, and in 1943 she ran for the provincial legislature in what was then called York East.

She was one of two women elected that year — the first female MPPs. She served at Queen's Park as a member of the CCF, the forerunner of the NDP, until 1951.

Macphail owned the home at 720 Millwood Rd. between 1948 and 1954, when she



Shaun Thompson /// Observer

The former home of Canada's first female MP, Agnes Macphail, located at 720 Millwood Rd., is set to get historic site designation.

died. Local residents and civic activists, realizing the home's importance, have been working to get it designated as historic for years.

The issue was raised again at North York Community Council in January, but was merely passed on to the full city council without a recommendation.

According to Parker, who represents Leaside as part of his Ward 26/Don Valley West, the property meets all three criteria for being formally recognized as heritage, but he wouldn't support the designation without support from the homeowner.

"The legislation doesn't require that you consult the homeowner, but as a matter of common decency, that's the sort of thing that you would do," he said.

"I think it's best that you don't proceed in opposition to the person with the most at

stake in the whole matter."

The designation does give the city the ability to block major alterations to the home that would dilute its heritage.

But at city council, another East York representative, Janet Davis of Ward 31/Beaches-East York, pointed out that thousands of Toronto properties carry the heritage designation with minimal impact on the owners' rights. Most other councillors agreed, and the designation passed.

"Although the Leaside home was only inhabited by Macphail for a few years, it may have been the only home she ever owned," Krawchuk said.

The East York Historical Society has been raising funds for a plaque to be installed on the house. Donations for installation are tax-deductible and can be sent to the East York Foundation, c/o the EYHS.

Justice goes green

Organization helps Canadians fight for the environment

By **VALENTINA KRGOVIC**
The Observer

When citizens and groups want to take environmental polluters to court, they often turn to Ecojustice.

Ecojustice is a national charitable organization dedicated to defending Canadians' rights to a healthy environment.

It is an independent organization with 100 per cent of its funding provided by donors. The Ontario chapter is located at Evergreen Brickworks, at 55 Bayview Ave.

Consisting of lawyers and

scientists, Ecojustice works in four major areas: clean water, natural spaces, healthy communities and climate protection.

Ecojustice provides legal services free of charge to charities and citizens on the front lines of the environmental movement, helping to safeguard fair access to justice nationwide.

Setting legal precedents, it aims to toughen laws that protect and repair the environment.

Currently, Ecojustice is working to prevent new construction of nuclear reactors in Ontario until more environmental evaluations of potential threats to Lake Ontario and surrounding communities are completed indicating that there is no substantial danger

to residents or local ecosystems.

Following the Ontario government's lead in 2006, Ontario Power Generation has submitted a proposal to build up to four new reactors at its Darlington site in Clarington, just east of Toronto.

Devon Paige is the executive director at Ecojustice. He said there are major concerns with the federal government's assessment of the proposal.

"The assessment failed to consider the long-term environmental effects of radioactive waste," he said.

"It also failed to look at the need for the project and alternatives to the project such as green energy."

So Ecojustice has filed an application for judicial review in Federal Court.