



# Municipal candidates ready to roll

Former councillor John Papadakis returns to the fray

By **JASUN SINGH**  
The Observer

Three familiar faces are among the first out of the gate in the 2014 municipal election campaign.

East York incumbents Janet Davis and Mary Fragedakis both filed their candidacy papers with the city's election office on Jan. 6. Davis has been the councillor for Ward 31/Beaches-East York for 10 years, and Fragedakis has represented Ward 29/Toronto-Danforth, since 2010.

But even with the election more than eight months off, they both have competition in their campaign for re-election. Perhaps most interestingly, John Papadakis has returned to the East York political scene in Toronto-Danforth.

Last Friday, Jan. 31, Papadakis filed his papers to vie against Fragedakis in Ward 29. Prior to the creation of the "mega-city" — and East York's amalgamation with the other municipalities of

the former Metro Toronto — Papadakis was a councillor for the old Borough of East York, from 1991 until 1994.

He's since run for office unsuccessfully several times, including for an East York

seat in the House of Commons as a Progressive Conservative in 1993, for an East York

seat on Toronto city council in 1998, for mayor of Fort Erie, Ont., in 2006, and for Fort Erie council in 2010. Papadakis was living in Fort Erie at the time.

In Beaches-East York meanwhile, incumbent Davis has two lower-profile competitors: teacher Michael Sokovnin and Stephen Prince.

In Ward 26/Don Valley West, there are no declared candidates yet — not even incumbent John Parker, who has gained a new prominence at city hall as a spokesperson for councillors trying to carry on with city business despite the scandals surrounding Mayor Rob Ford.

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■ DAVIS



Jasun Singh /// Observer

## Portrait of a program

Centennial College's East York campus held an open house on Jan. 25 to showcase its communications programs. At this session promoting the fine arts curriculum, Nicole Silvestri painted the portrait of model Maria.

## ■ HOUSING

# New plan is 'border-line' crazy: Parents

Family moves, finds out child can't attend the school it wants

By **DEIDRA BARTON**  
The Observer

For at least one family living at the northwest corner of East York, it seems like the old bait-and-switch.

Their school trustee says that they moved to that neighbourhood in part for the neighbourhood school.

But full-time kindergarten has brought changes in school boundaries that now bar their children.

"There's a big issue there," said Angela Kennedy, the Catholic school board representative from Ward 11, encompassing East York.

Kennedy is among the trustees and parents who recently met to talk about the admission policy and borders changing in their neighbourhood.

As the new year begins, parents are already thinking of schools for their children to go to in the fall. New boundaries have been in place since 2012 because of the full-time kindergarten program. These boundaries are frustrating

to some families because their children will have to go to a school further than their siblings.

According to Kennedy, St. Anselm Catholic School at 182 Bessborough Drive, near Millwood Road and Bayview Avenue, is the only school in East York that is going through this dilemma.

But, Kennedy said, that still means that "there's three families who live on a street called Balliol who were previously within the boundaries and were now told they can't admit their children to the school anymore, and they moved into the neighbourhood in order for them to go to that school."

Kennedy added that one of the families bought a house in that neighbourhood that was only five

minutes away from the school, but was still told that their children can't attend there.

"Most of the trustees were getting complaints from parents who thought the boundaries in the schools were what they've been for years and years," Kennedy said, "and because of the full-day kindergarten, we changed some of the boundaries."

She said the board is trying to revert to pre-2012 boundaries.

"We amended, but the amendments still have to come back. They're not finalized. The policy has to come back in its revised form and we're going to take a look at it and see if it's what we want."

# Woodbine station set for renovation

By **BRITTANY DEMPSTER**  
The Observer

Improved accessibility will be the key feature of the renovated Woodbine TTC station, according to "liaison officer" Lito Romano, who hosted a community open house on Jan. 29 to discuss the coming construction.

Romano says the station will have more accessible features: two new elevators, a sliding door and a second exit are going to be added at the location. The project begins later this year and will be completed by 2017, and according to Councillor Janet Davis of Ward 31/Beaches-East York, it will cost the city \$20 million.

Married couple Brian Kurosky and Jane Welsh are enthusiastic about the future changes.

"We're very excited about the project and looking at the pictures, it kind of looks like it could fit into the neighbourhood," Kurosky said.

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## POLICE & FIRE

### Man arrested in stabbing

Toronto police have arrested a man after a stabbing at an apartment building at 500 Dawes Rd. On Jan. 20, officers from 54 Division found a 40-year-old man on the fifth floor of the building with a stab wound to the chest. EMS rushed the victim to hospital with life-threatening injuries. Andrew Peter Jackson, 39, of Toronto faces charges of attempted murder, aggravated assault, and two weapons-related charges in connection with the incident. Anyone with information is asked to contact 416-808-5400 or Crime Stoppers anonymously at 416-222-TIPS (8477).

### Hotdogs lead to warning

Two separate discoveries of hotdogs, spotted in areas where East York residents walk their dogs, have prompted Toronto police to issue a public safety alert. On Jan. 17, a man walking his dog in a park in the Linkwood Lane and Spanbridge area found hotdogs in the park. On Jan. 23, a woman walking her dog in the park at 90 Balfour Ave. also found hotdogs. Police have collected the hotdogs for forensic testing. At this time, no one has reported any animals eating the hotdogs or falling ill. Police advise anyone who finds hotdogs, or any food out of place in a park, not to handle it and to call police at 416-808-2222.

~ Nicholas Misketi



Maria Shipulina // Observer

Laura Vincent's character represents the pain of remembering tragedy.

## Titanic mystery on stage

By MARIA SHIPULINA  
The Observer

There's still time to catch the unique mystery "The Scotland Road" on-stage at the Papermill Theatre on Pottery Road.

But you'd better hurry: there are only three performances left in the week-long run — today, Feb. 7, at 8 p.m., and tomorrow at 2 and 8.

The play, directed by Victoria Shepherd, picks up on the notion that dying misunderstood and alone is what people fear the most. But if you believe in your dream, if you want it to come true with all your heart, then time is

not an obstacle anymore.

The cast features West McDonald, Laura Vincent, Anne McDougall and Paulette St-Amour.

John (McDonald) knows everything about the tragedy of Titanic. He is familiar with every known passenger and knows the ship from top to bottom like he built it himself.

His only dream is "to be there when it comes," to witness the horror and desperation, to look death straight in the eyes and not to turn away.

Destiny unites him with a woman (Vincent) found in the open sea on top of a floating iceberg.

She is dressed like a passenger from

Titanic; she seems so cold inside — like she was in the sea for years. And the only word she says is: "Titanic."

Two souls, lonely and lost, each with a burning desire inside: one, to finish her long journey; the other, to start it.

There is also a third, the soul of the sunken ship, the soul filled with pain and tears.

Titanic unites a woman and a man to help make their dreams come true and take their last journey together.

All seating for "The Scotland Road" is reserved, so call 416-860-6176 or go to [www.amicusproductions.ca](http://www.amicusproductions.ca) to book.

## Ice storm repercussions continue

By XUETING ZHAO  
The Observer

For 11 years, Olgica Tosic and her family on Ferris Road enjoyed the cool shade in summertime under the elm tree in their back yard. But this coming summer, they might have to go without it, because almost half of the tree was taken down by the ice storm that slashed the GTA area just before Christmas.

The ice storm left more than 250,000 residents in Toronto living for days without power and heating. Many property owners suffered significant losses — and some of them are still recovering.

"It looks pretty much like a war zone," Daniel Murton said. "I was unable to drive to the property because the tree debris was blocking the road and there were electric wires falling on the ground."

Murton is the franchise owner at Kutting Krew Mowing Service, a landscaping company based in East York and serving the eastern and northern regions of the GTA.

He was outside cleaning the tree debris for residents in the days following the snowstorm. The service fee for cleaning up tree debris is based on the duration of working hours, and could vary from \$150 to \$400. He said because of the soaring demands from customers asking for



Roxana Chiriac // Observer

### City trees fell and blocked the road at Cedarcrest Boulevard, near Ferris road.

cleanups, many landscaping companies got so busy that sometimes it would take \$500 to just get an arborist to come to the house for a consultation.

Leaside is among the most badly hit areas in Toronto. More than one month later, branches and twigs are still buried under the snow in some residents' yards. Several properties still have cordons around the damaged trees.

Alvin Ng lives on Rumsey Road. He said a city-owned tree fell on his neighbour's property and took out power from five houses in his

block. He added that Toronto Hydro told him he'd have to pay \$1,200 by himself to hire a contractor to restore the power — and it took two days before the power came back.

"It really depends on how fast you can find a contractor," he said.

He said he was very disappointed with the city's work on the recovery.

"The city doesn't trim the trees before things like this happens. You phone in, they just don't do anything."

Murton suggested that property owners should check their trees regularly and trim the branches if needed.

## WHAT'S UP IN E.Y.

### East York student's work showing at Betty's pub

The St. Lawrence Market area pub "Betty's" will host an art show by art student Matthew Rooney tomorrow, Feb. 8, from 2 until 8 p.m. The show, called "Hey, We Here's Good Art," will be upstairs at the pub, 240 King St. E., and is open to anyone 19 years of age and over. Rooney studies at the Carlaw Avenue campus of Centennial College.

### Volunteers sought for youth advisory group

The S. Walter Stewart branch of the Toronto Public Library's "Youth Advisory Group" is looking for volunteers. The group next meets at the library, 170 Memorial Park Ave., this Wednesday, Feb. 12 and on Wednesday, March 12 from 5 until 6:30 p.m. Students looking to earn community service hours are encouraged to come and pick up an application at the information desk.

### Dreaming of Tuscany

The Leaside Garden Society will meet this Thursday, Feb. 13 at 7:30 p.m. at the Leaside public library branch, 165 McRae Dr. Speaker Donna Fenice will be showcasing the natural beauty of Tuscany, Italy as she shares the history behind some of the most famous Renaissance and Baroque gardens. Refreshments will be available at 7 p.m.

### Games galore at library

The S. Walter Stewart library branch will host a game night for teens on Friday, Feb. 21 and Friday, March 21 at 170 Memorial Park Ave. from 4 to 5 p.m. Teens between the ages of 11 and 18 are welcome to come out for some friendly competition. Free Wii, 360 and Kinect systems are available for play.

### Calling all tutors

The East York Learning Experience, located at 266 Donlands Ave., is looking for volunteers to help adults build their reading, writing and basic math skills. Training begins this Thursday, Feb. 13. Anyone interested should call the East York Learning Experience at 416-425-2666 for more information.

~ Samantha Freeman



## ■ TRAFFIC PREDICAMENT

# Early fixes make for clean streets

Last year's road work keeping East York running smoothly

By LOUIS PIN  
The Observer

A stitch in time saves nine — or more directly, may have saved major East York roads from one of the worst ice storms in the last decade.

Road repair along Pape Avenue and the Danforth began early last fall. Now, with much of Toronto reeling from an early-January ice storm, those same roads are some of the cleanest in Toronto.

With total storm costs rising to around \$171 million and the city unanimously asking both the provincial and federal governments for financial aid in early January, East York residents can rest easy knowing their major streets were fixed at just the right time.

Hector Moreno is the Toronto manager of road operations, and headed a major effort to clean up the city after it was chilled by dangerously low temperatures in January.

"The potholes (were) a city-wide initiative," Moreno said. "Starting with expressways and main streets; (for East York), this included Pape, Danforth, and Woodbine."

According to Moreno, the warmer weather gave Toronto management the opportunity to utilize more people in pothole repair efforts.

A few days after the first storm, between 40 and 50 road crews were tasked to repair major roads in just the first two days.

"Pothole fixing is a daily activity," Moreno said. "We (were) just taking advantage of the warmer weather."

According to a Globe and Mail report, crews aimed to fix a total of 1,200 potholes

per day, giving each crew a quota of 25-50 repairs.

Sidewalks are also an issue. Darren Osmond lives near Aldridge Avenue, where walkways haven't been cleared or salted.

"You're walking on the sidewalk, and all of a sudden it's like you're wearing skates or something," he said. "(They are) really bad ... just a giant sheet of ice. I don't know who's supposed to clean them."

City rules state that it falls upon property owners, not the city, to clean up sidewalks. On its website, the city stipulates that homeowners have 72 hours from the end of the weather event to make their sidewalks safe.

Failing to follow regulation can result in a \$125 fine.

Some residents remain optimistic. Sara Voci works part-time at the Serano Bakery on Pape Avenue. According to her, the streets



Louis Pin /// Observer

**Extreme changes in temperature can be devastating to smaller roads like Carlaw Avenue, west of Pape Avenue.**

and sidewalks aren't as big an issue as they might seem.

"It's still easy to get around," Voci said. "You just have to be a bit more careful."

It's the best advice she can give to people who live

off the major roads. Even with the "pothole blitz" in effect a few weeks ago, smaller roads will have to wait longer for repair.

Those who know of roadwork in need of repair can call city management at

311, and are also invited to fill out a form online at [www.toronto.ca/311](http://www.toronto.ca/311).

East York seniors who require assistance clearing sidewalks can call (416) 392-7768 for immediate assistance.



File image from Fotolia

## Commute or convenience?

By ALI RAZA  
The Observer

As Toronto's population grows, the competition for property intensifies. East York is home to hundreds of detached and semi-detached houses and as the housing market becomes more competitive, the price of East York homes booms.

"Every year is different," says Darin Bauer, a mortgage broker at Mortgage Intelligence Inc. on the Danforth. "Houses that were five or six hundred thousand in 2008 are now eight or nine hundred thousand, even a million dollars."

Many East York houses were built 70 or 80 years ago. The size of the houses, on average, is smaller than the average detached or semi-detached house outside Toronto in cities like Pickering, Brampton or Milton.

These larger homes in the suburbs offer a better value if size is the only thing the buyer is looking for.

Still, East York realtor Anna Michaelidis argues that size isn't everything.

"We get folks that come from the suburbs living in mom and dad's sprawling mini-mansions," Michaelidis says. "They come here and think, what is this? But, if you grew up in the core then the old homes have that charm. It really depends on people's varied expectations."

A house in the suburbs is more affordable when comparing size, but Toronto still attracts homebuyers because of overwhelming traffic when driving into the city.

"People want to live in East York rather than Milton," Bauer says. "They're selling tons of new homes out there for four or five hundred thousand. You get a bigger house, but you have to live in Milton and deal with traffic every morning."

Bauer argues that there are two markets, one for buyers willing to put up with commuter traffic and the other for buyers that have regional preferences.

Despite high costs, houses are still being sold at a quick rate.

"(We have) plenty of home buyers because it's a desirable area," Bauer

says. "It's not far from downtown, there's a lot of stuff around it, it's a high demand area so houses that are listed go very quickly. There are people willing to pay for it."

Several East York bungalows are being "topped up" to enhance property value in a competitive market.

"Topping up means building a second story," Michaelidis says. "Builders take a standard bungalow and they put a second floor on it. It usually involves adding on top and/or extending from the back."

"Topping up" of East York bungalows increases property value and can address a buyer's desire for a larger house.

Bauer insists East York is a hot spot for the housing market in Toronto. Besides local buyers, many houses are sold to foreign buyers looking to invest in Toronto's real estate market.

"A lot of foreigners snap up those properties," Bauer says. "They either live or invest and rent it out with the hope that in five to 10 years the price has gone up 30 or 50 per cent."

## Taxi drivers in East York finally break through

By JENNIFER LEE  
The Observer

Beck, Co-op, Royal and Crown are a few of the companies running taxis on the highways and byways of East York.

But the way East Yorkers use their services is set to change in the upcoming weeks.

On Jan. 23, the city's licensing and standards committee considered the final report on the "Taxicab Industry Review" at city council. The report outlined changes that will not only directly affect drivers and the industry, but passengers as well.

"The outcome of the LNS Committee meeting last week was positive. Nobody got everything they wanted, but there was a lot of risk that was on the table," said Kristine Hubbard, the operations manager at Beck Taxi Limited. "I think that everybody kind of ended up with something."

Hubbard said the taxi industry has struggled to be heard at city council for years.

"It was made clear to us, I would say in 2010, that there was interest in changing the

way things were, correcting the mistakes of the past and moving forward in the hopes of a healthier industry," she said.

These changes include pre-payment for trips, changes to licensing and perhaps the most talked-about aspect: a \$25 vomit cleanup fee. Hubbard doesn't believe the pre-payment reform will be implemented because it requires drivers to profile customers.

Sajid Mughal, president of the iTaxiworkers Association, said it is one of the most important regulations that have been discussed.

"I've been a victim a few times of customers not paying. In a couple of circumstances when I've called the police, I've waited for two hours and they didn't show up," said Mughal. "So I lost money because they customer didn't pay me and I lost more money for two hours waiting for the police."

But to Mughal all of the proposed changes are based on two things he believes taxi drivers want above all others: equality and fairness.

The report will be considered by city council on Feb. 19.



# Afghan women welcome savvy business tips

Speaker talks about starting her enterprise

By **SANA FATANI**  
The Observer

It is never too late to start dreaming. This is what a group of Afghan women learned after gathering on Saturday to hear Centennial College journalism student (and Observer reporter) Samira Mohyeddin, 38, tell the story of how she started her restaurant business.

The Afghan Women's Organization is a government-funded group with a history of helping Afghan women establish themselves in Canada. They invited Mohyeddin to their offices at 747 Don Mills Rd. to give newcomer Afghan women an inspirational talk about starting businesses. However, it was soon clear that most of the inspiration lay in the women themselves.

"I thought we'd get a poor turnout but look how dedicated they are," Seema Saeedi, a coordinator at AFO, said.

The women were initially gathering for a sewing class

that takes place twice a week. It is part of AFO's new program in partnership with the International Development and Relief Foundation that teaches sewing, business and English. The goal is to start small and maintain momentum for growth with the first sale of the garments happening Thursday at the AFO offices.

The talk was after the class and Saeedi, who arranged the event, hoped that Mohyeddin could be relatable and helpful for the women.

"She's a successful business owner who has the same linguistic background," Saeedi said. "We really feel the need to motivate and build the self-esteem of the ladies here because they're all very smart and talented people but there is a bit of fear with the risk involved with starting a business."

Fear and risk are not strangers to these women, who left their homelands in search of a better future. Yet these are not the only challenges the women face.

"It's difficult for them because they all have families. Most of them are mothers and so they have childcare issues," Saeedi said.

Despite the obstacles, participating women like Nadia, 35, and her mother who live in Thorncliffe remain enthusiastic.

"We're all learning. It's a



Samira Mohyeddin // Observer

**Sewing class is underway for members of the Afghan Women's Organization in Thorncliffe Park. The women meet twice a week to learn a trade and to share stories.**

very nice class. Everybody comes here and they're learning," she said.

Certainly, everyone who came on Feb. 1 learned something, including Moheyddin, who was a little nervous about giving the talk in the beginning

as she identified a difference in age and circumstances between her and the women.

"We're not starting at the same place so I can't say to them just go and apply for this loan. It's not like that," Moheyddin said.

Surely, the procedural process for an Afghan refugee is different from a Canadian citizen with an Iranian background, yet there is a common denominator. It took Moheyddin seven years before she made a profit, and the women's

life experiences made them practiced in the skill of resilience.

Though the talk was successful, Mohyeddin was more impressed with the women there.

"I should be learning from them instead," she said.

## Candidates starting to emerge

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There are no declared candidates in any of the East York wards for either public or separate school board.

Potential candidates for council and school board have until Sept. 11 to file with the city.

In an interview with the Observer, Ward 31 councillor and candidate Janet Davis reflected on her renewed run.

"There are people who think there ought to be term limits," Davis said, "but I can tell you that every year I learn more about how to be a better councillor."

In the 2010 election, her popularity won her 63 per cent of the vote, with the second-place candidate coming in at a distant 11 per cent.

When she's out and about in East York, she said, almost everyone who comes up to her has smiles or praise.

Before first being elected to city council in 2003, Davis helped develop child care at the Toronto District School Board and served as a senior policy advisor to the Minister of Education. She became active in child care and children's issues after her son was born in 1979 in London, Ont. As a single parent, she lived in several cities in Ontario before finally settling in Toronto.

"I never did intend on a career in politics," she said, "but I think what politicized me more than anything was becoming a parent, a single parent, and

having to face the dilemma of a low income and childcare fees that were astronomical."

She worked in childcare centres, which she called "a politicizing experience — an underpaid and undervalued job." She worked as an early childhood educator at the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, where she eventually rose to the position of president.

About childcare, she said, "I've lived it and breathed it for over 30 years." In her role as councillor she helped expand childcare facilities in the city by almost a thousand spaces.

Davis was on the cabinet-like executive committee of then-mayor David Miller, and she has generally opposed Mayor Rob Ford and Ford's right-hand man, brother and Etobicoke councillor Doug Ford. She made city-wide news most recently when, during a heated council debate about an after-school recreation program, she walked up to Doug Ford and told him to shut his "f-king mouth." In 2011 she was booted from a committee meeting for allegedly trying to intimidate the members.

"Certain councillors like to bully councillors around," said Georgio Mammoliti, "and Janet Davis is one of them."

"I mean, yeah," she said when asked about that. "I stand up and I speak out and I'm hard-nosed and I'm tough, I agree.... I do that in defence of what I think is right."

The mayor included Davis in his list of councillors who are "two steps left of Stalin." In turn, Davis blames Ford for people's increasing cynicism towards city hall.

But Michael Sokovnin, who is running for Davis's seat, said that Davis is no better than other politicians.

"That was unbelievable when I heard that," he said about Davis cursing at Doug Ford. "C'mon, these are like kids — like kids playing."

Sokovnin says that councillors should be allowed to serve a maximum of two terms.

Meanwhile, Davis takes time to order at the Last Drop Café in East York, and greets the staff like friends. During her interview, a man taps her on the shoulder and flashes her a thumbs-up.

"You come to know every neighbourhood, every street," Davis said, "and quite often the individuals."

"I am a neighbour," she added. "I live here. This is my community... and I walk around, I drive around. It drives my family crazy. I'll stop and say 'Hey, you know, look at that, that's not quite right.... That tree has died, needs to be replaced.' Or... someone stops me on the street and says the lights are out on whatever-whatever park, or the garbage bins are broken. Some people say 'Doesn't that drive you crazy?' It does not at all because I realize that I'm in a position I can help and it's incredibly gratifying."



Courtesy of TTC

## TTC upgrades coming

Cont'd. from page 1

He also said the new elevators would be an advantage to them. According to the presentation, the elevators will lead from street level to the concourse and platforms. The TTC's second exits and accessibility programs were combined to launch this project, according to Councillor Davis.

"Both projects were put together, and then additional station improvements were added on top [of the programs]," Davis said, "so this is part of the TTC's overall plan to upgrade the safety features and the accessibility of its stations."

Further improvements include improving the interior of the station and the lighting,

exterior treatments around the windows, signage, bus bay resurfacing and landscaping, according to Davis. Romano said the other exit is being added for safety purposes.

"The second exit is required to enhance the safety of employees and transit riders," Romano said.

It will be located at the north-west corner of Strathmore and Woodbine streets, according to the TTC diagram.

All stations will be accessible in the future, because public buildings must meet the AODA (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act) standards in the province of Ontario by 2025, according to Davis. Currently, 32 out of 69 stations are accessible.



# Canine Wellness Centre cuts calories for dogs

Woof Watchers program aims to keep dogs healthy

By ERICA RAE CHONG  
The Observer

Billy's eyes eagerly follow the lime green squeaky toy waved in front of him. Panting heavily, the five-year-old takes one step after another as he runs on an underwater treadmill. He quickly succumbs to fatigue and unceremoniously sits on the treadmill, but with a quick push by his trainer and a soft grunt, he picks up his tubby 55-kg body and keeps moving.

Billy is an overweight chocolate Labrador and part of the Canine Wellness Centre's "Woof Watchers" program, a fitness initiative started by trainer Tania Costa tailored to help overweight dogs lose the kilograms. It is held at the 4,000 sq. ft. facility at 19 Waterman Ave., close to O'Connor Drive and St. Clair Avenue East.

"I've been doing the 'Woof Watchers' for about six years and I started it because so many of the dogs coming in were fat and they have orthopedic issues," Costa said in an interview. "If they'd just lost weight they wouldn't have the issues that they have."

The program concentrates on helping dogs get fitter instead of focusing solely on weight loss. Dogs like Billy are first assessed in terms of their initial weight, heart rate and chest and girth measurements, after which they are put on a customised exercise routine. They go through 20 minutes of interval training at a time with short breaks in between. Costa cranks up the intensity of the workout after each break and measures their heart rate again at the end.

Billy shows up once a week for his 20-minute swim or treadmill session with his owner Debbie Craij. After a month, Billy steps onto the scale three kilograms lighter. The goal is for him to lose 10 kilograms.

Billy is not the only animal struggling to cut the fat.

"Over the last 10 years, the number of overweight pets has certainly increased (for



Erica Rae Chong // Observer

**Billy does a 20-minute underwater treadmill session with short breaks in between. He has lost three kilograms since enrolling in the "Woof Watchers" program a month ago, and now weighs 55 kg.**

both cats and dogs. Probably over 60 per cent of the pets we see are either overweight or obese," said Dr. Jim Berry, president of the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA).

The increasing obesity levels in pets parallel that in humans.

According to a 2012 University of British Columbia study that tracked obesity in Canada from 2000 to 2011, obesity rates in Canada have steadily risen to record heights since 2002. The researchers in the study described the problem as an "epidemic in progress."

Statistics Canada estimates that two out of every three Canadian adults between 18 and 79 are overweight or obese. That's 60 per cent of the population. "I think the two are related for exactly the same reasons. I think lack of exercise is the big culprit so pretty much by definition if you are not taking your dogs for a walk it means you're not going out for a walk either," Berry said.

Berry cites a 2011 pet wellness report conducted by the CVMA and Hill's Pet Nutrition, saying people spend three times as much time watching television and almost twice as much time online as they do playing or exercising with their pets.

"If you were to take all of that time sitting in front of the TV and surfing the Internet and walk, we would all be in better shape and pets wouldn't be overweight," Berry said.

"We have a sedentary society and our pets reflect that."

Despite his weekly exercises and daily walks, Billy's weight loss is slowed down by his diet. Craij admits that it is sometimes problematic to keep tabs on what Billy eats.

"Once, I got out of the car to get flowers and

he ate 20 samosas in five minutes! I have an SUV and he ripped the bag open from under the front seat where I hid it and he was way in the back of the car," Craij said. "He only moves fast when there's food involved."

Berry said the most common error he sees is people overfeeding their pets.

For example, some owners put food out and let their pets eat buffet-style. Others feed their adult pets inappropriate food such as food meant for kittens or puppies, which are higher in fat, or table scraps.

"That's like us going to Tim Hortons and having donuts and coffee all day because we like it. It doesn't mean that it's good for us," Berry said.

This makes Costa's job harder because not only does she have to create a diet plan for her clients but she has to train owners not to give in to their dogs' puppy eyes when they beg for food.

"I always say to my weight loss clients, 'Dogs don't have thumbs.' So there is no way they can overfeed themselves. They can't get into the container to get the food, they can't open the fridge and they can't open the cupboard. So it's us that is overfeeding them," she said.

One surprising difficulty both Berry and Costa face are owners in denial.

"Pet owners are usually quite surprised by it (the news) actually. The pet can

be fairly significantly overweight without people realising it," Berry said.

"Again I think it is a reflection of our society. If you're looking at dogs on the street, overweight pets are so common now, people start to see them as normal," he explained.

"It has come to a point where it is not that common for people to bring their pets in because they think they are obese but it is fairly common for people to bring their pets in because they think they are too thin... when in reality most of those ones are actually the ideal bodyweight."

Costa says she sees clients who come in with pets that have health issues, such as arthritis or ligament problems, triggered or compounded by the excess weight without realising that the weight is the cause.

Billy, too, has a knee issue. "I could see that he was getting a bit of a limp," said Craij.

"So that was the whole push to come," Costa chimed in. "To try and avoid having surgery."

Despite his aching knee and one samosa setback, Billy seems to remain optimistic, smiling as he continues to run on the treadmill, his tail wagging with each step and his eyes ever focused on the squeaky lime green toy held in front of him by an encouraging Craij.



■ CRAIJ

## Pudgy pooch?

■ Place your hands on your dog's sides. You should be able to feel the last two ribs very easily on any dog, no matter the breed, age or size.

■ Getting tired easily, being less willing to play or go for walks and exhibiting difficulty when standing up are common signs your pet is overweight.

■ Know how active a particular breed is and understand how much exercise it requires.

■ You don't have to go for long walks. Even a 10-15 minute walk or playtime before work helps.

■ If you have a cat, you can play with it for 15 minutes with a felt mouse or toy while you're having your morning coffee.



EDITORIALS



"We kept the ladder for sentimental reasons."

# Petition cools down

Toronto can't get its priorities straight — and East Yorkers will have to suffer the consequences.

Late last year, it was decided that a fire truck would move this coming March from Station 224, at 1313 Woodbine Ave. in East York, to a station that's under construction in Scarborough, on Eglinton Avenue East west of Midland Avenue.

Moving the pumper, we're told, will ultimately save money. But are emergency personnel and their vehicles really where the gravy has been hiding all along?

A petition to keep the truck in East York that garnered nearly 1,000 signatures on Change.org was presented to city council last week ... but despite the strong views of Beaches-East York councillor Janet Davis (and 15 other councillors) to maintain the status quo, the motions to keep the truck where it is were ultimately defeated.

Moving the truck is part of the city's 2014 budget, which includes taking four trucks out of service altogether, redeploying others, and reassigning 105 firefighters.

The city is actually spending over \$9 million more on fire services this year, but most of that money is going to locked-in salary increases. The Toronto Firefighters Association says the lack of investment beyond that could mean lives lost because of delayed response times.

They're not complaining about the raises though. The final result will be fewer, but higher-paid, firefighters with fewer tools. Yes, this city needs to operate economically - but skimping on the safety of East Yorkers shouldn't be an option.

~ Will Koblenky

COLUMNS

# Sports on the rise?

On Sept. 24, officials of Maple Leafs Sports and Entertainment (MLSE), alongside NBA Deputy Commissioner Adam Silver, announced that the 2016 NBA All-Star festivities would take place here in Toronto.

Months later, the Toronto FC major league soccer club announces that Jermaine Defoe, a highly sought-after player, has signed a deal with the struggling team.

These two occurrences are the fruits of new MLSE President and CEO Tim Leiweke's labour.

Leiweke, a top sports executive credited with bringing English soccer star David Beckham to Los Angeles, was hired by MLSE last April and has not wasted any time putting his mark on the organization.

He has even enlisted the help of the homegrown celebrity Drake to serve as MLSE's "global ambassador" and help lure big names to the city.

With a new man in charge, Toronto's teams are beginning to take shape. The Maple Leafs clinched their first playoff berth in nearly a decade last season and the Raptors are on track to do the same for the first time in six years.

Leiweke also has an interest in bringing the NFL to Canada. He and his good friend Jon

Bon Jovi, who was just inducted into the Air Canada Centre Hall of Fame, have expressed an interest in bringing the Buffalo Bills to Toronto. This is a long shot, as Bills owner Ralph Wilson said that he is "uninterested" in selling.

MLSE is also prepared to revamp the BMO field for the fans. His goal is to plant the seed for a potential future NFL team in Toronto.

"There's no way the NFL comes here without the CFL being unbelievably successful first," Leiweke said.

Regardless of what Toronto fans have been through over the years, it's clear that Tim Leiweke wants to provide us with teams that will make the fans proud.

With moves like the Toronto FC big-name signings, as well as the hiring of a top NBA executive for the Raptors, it's safe to say that Canada's top sports group is finally dedicated to deliver a winning culture for sports fans all over the city.



Marcus D. Wilson

# Russia's anti-gay law is a disturbing echo

Hauntingly familiar rules in Sochi should be a warning sign

The Winter Olympics open today, Friday, in Sochi, Russia — seven months after Russia's parliament unanimously passed Article 6.21, a law banning "the propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations." This enactment has made possible the criminalization and persecution of Russia's LGBTQ community.

As a result, many human rights organizations and foreign heads of state have called for a political boycott of the games.

The President of the United States, Barack Obama and Canadian Prime Minister Steven Harper have publicly criticized the law and will not be in attendance at the Sochi Games, starting on Feb. 7.

Flash back to Sept. 15, 1935, months before the 1936 Berlin Summer Olym-

pics. That's when the Nazi government enacted the Nuremberg Laws. Among other things, the laws forbade Jewish people from participating on the German Olympic team and prohibited sexual relations between Jewish and non-Jewish people.

The new law barred Jewish people from entering all public parks and pools, and it fired and banned all Jewish teachers from public schools.

A month later, it banned all Jewish people from attending any institutions of public learning

The Nuremberg laws effectively stripped Jewish people of all civic life in Germany, crippling them economically and robbing them of their livelihood and citizenship rights. Calls for a political boycott of the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin went unanswered.

Nazi Germany did not begin



the Holocaust with gas chambers and death camps. It began with exclusionary legislation with the idea that a group of people had to be expelled from German society in order to keep it "pure."

Now, ironically, the nation that was key to the defeat of Nazi Germany in the Second World War is imitating it.

By providing ammunition for the most reactionary and homophobic segments of Russian society, Vladimir Putin's government has ensured the demise and destruction of Russia's LGBTQ community.

In fact, Russian human rights organizations have already reported a massive increase in the amount of violent crimes against the community.

The mayor of Sochi, Anatoly Pakhomov, even stated that there are no gays in his town.

The denial of another person or group's existence is the ultimate form of exclusion.

It would be churlish to compare the atrocities of the Nazi genocide against the Jewish people to the recent prejudicial anti-gay laws of Russia.

All things considered, it would be wilfully ignorant to not map the many parallels between them and the processes involved in marginalizing and persecuting certain groups of society. It's not the same, but it's pretty close.

As we move into Black History Month, the words of Martin Luther King ring truer than ever:

"History will have to record that the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the strident clamour of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good."

Samira Mohyeddin



COMMUNITY



Natalia Makarski // Observer

**How much is that kitty in the cage?**

Lily Farmer helps her family pick out a new cat at Wag on the Danforth's adopt-a-thon event, held on Feb. 1 in conjunction with the Toronto Cat Rescue organization. (The cat brightened up right after this picture was taken.)

**'Murder and Mayhem' in E.Y.**

Crime writers share some scary stories at local cafe reading

By SANDRA D. SUKRAJ  
The Observer

On a cold, snowy winter day, a group of six gathers in a cozy East York café to share stories of murder, mystery, sensuality, romance, revenge and humour.

They're stories that grab your attention, wrapping themselves around the crevices and corners of your mind, leaving your fingers anxiously waiting to turn the page — themes that the Crime Writers of Canada are no strangers to.

Eager patrons grab their coffee and cookies and pull up a chair at Du Café on O'Connor Drive.

They listen attentively to live readings of excerpts from seasoned writers, many of whom are journalists-turned-authors.

Hosted by Sharon A. Crawford, author of *Beyond the Tripping Point*, readers at a recent session included Rosemary McCracken, a Toronto-based freelance journalist and author of *Safe Harbour*; Catherine Dunphy, Ryerson print journalism and magazine professor and author of *Morgentaler: A Difficult Hero*; Madeleine Harris-Callway, award-winning mystery author and contributor for *Thirteen: An Anthology of Crime Stories* by Mesdames of Mayhem; Karen Blake-Hall, author of



Sandra D. Sukraj // Observer

**From left to right: Catherine Dunphy, Madeleine Harris-Callway, Sharon A. Crawford, Karen Blake-Hall, café-owner Crystal Holmes, Rosemary McCracken and Steve Shrott pose for a picture at Du Café for the Murder and Mayhem event on Jan. 25.**

*Nefarious North: A Collection of Crime Short Stories*; and Steve Shrott, an award-winning comedy writer and author of *Audition for Death*.

"I really hate reading out loud," said romantic suspense author Blake-Hall. "It's the worst part of writing."

Since opening its doors almost a year ago, Du Café has been involved in helping and providing a venue for the events put on by the Crime Writers of Canada, such as Murder and Mayhem.

"It's a little community within the community," said Crystal Holmes, owner of Du Café.

Crawford approached Holmes

in September with the idea of hosting the events.

Mesdames of Mayhem is a group of 15 female Canadian crime writers. Founded by Harris-Callway in 2013, *Thirteen* is their first anthology, consisting of the works of 13 of the 15 authors.

Harris-Callway said they have been working together for a very long time.

"When Madeleine had this wonderful idea, I just thought, we have to support her," McCracken said. "I love writing. I always wanted to be a fiction writer."

So, why are women intrigued by mystery?

"I think the reason so many

journalists have segued into mystery writing is because the ultimate mystery is 'who the heck are we?'" Dunphy said. "It's motivation. It's character study."

Shrott, who has written jokes for comedians Phyllis Diller and Joan Rivers, found his niche by combining comedy with mystery.

Crawford said one of the greatest rewards of being a writer is having people read your work.

Organized by Nate Henley, Crime Writers of Canada Books and Beverages takes place once a month, with the exception of December, each at a different venue.

**Unveiling the realities of mental illness**

Experts say success stories of mentally ill patients lack proper media exposure

By SHAWN FOURNIER  
The Observer

From press accounts of the inquest into the shooting of hospital patient Michael Eligon on an East York street through to celebrity gossip on evening television, it might seem that the media categorize those who are suffering mental illness in one of two ways: those to be feared and those to be pitied.

Few of us are strangers to stories about mental health, which sometimes tend to link terms like "mentally ill" with others such as "escapee" and even "deranged."

But in reality, this only makes up a fraction of the total cases involving mental illness.

The world isn't overcome with a plethora of homeless folks attacking city dwellers and delusional people chasing down police officers. For Valery Belyanin, who works as a psychotherapist in East York, these negative stigmas are something he says he has to work to alter on a daily basis.

"It's much easier to get access to these kinds of negative stories. They are more public. When someone is happy and functioning, they are not going to tell everyone about it, they want to forget about the experience," Belyanin said, when asked why he thinks mental illness is portrayed so negatively in the media.

"When a car is broken you pay attention to the issues, but when it is running, you don't think about it at all," said Belyanin.

He added that when it comes to people under professional psychologists' care, few pose any danger to others.

"Almost 70 per cent of the clients in Canada and North America suffer from depression and anxiety," he said.

Many might fail to recognize the negative stigma that attaches to mental illness, but a study conducted in 1996 by Greg Philo sheds light on that topic.

Philo concluded in his work that the media's representation of mental illness is so influential to its audience that it can even override their personal experience.

The media does have the power to shape what we think.

However, despite what might be depicted through the mainstream media, not all coverage of mental illness is negative.

Rebecca DiFilippo, publisher for Moods magazine, which provides educational information on mental health, works to assist in helping others understand what mental illness really is.

"For the most part, those struggling with mental illness are not harmful to others. They don't do bad things and they are not violent," said DiFilippo.

So psychotic episodes like the one that led to Michael Eligon being shot by police after he walked away from Toronto East General Hospital are the rare exception.

"I think there has to be a better understanding," said DiFilippo. "There aren't enough people who understand it so that there isn't something sensationalized."

And conversely, she added: "I think there are an awful lot of positive stories to be told, success stories."

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● For more East York stories, please visit us at [torontoobserver.ca](http://torontoobserver.ca)



# A delightful blend of food and friends

East Yorkers ready for meet-and-eat opportunities

By NICHOLAS MISKETI  
The Observer

The aroma of Italian-inspired food had cooking participants eager to enjoy their meal at the East York Community Centre, on Pape Avenue near O'Connor Drive.

Roberta Weisbrot was one of 15 participants who helped to cook an Italian-themed menu, which included cauliflower soup with parsley, Tuscan panzanella, baked penne with roasted vegetables and vanilla-roasted pears with chocolate sauce.

"It's hard to believe it's free. It's a wonderful way to get to know your community better," Weisbrot said.

On Jan. 26, the East York Community Kitchen, a volunteer-run community group, wrapped up a series of five cooking sessions for community residents. The group hopes to resume sessions next month.

They provide the food, ingredients and cooking equipment at these sessions free of charge. All of the participants help to cook the meal and then sit down together to eat it.

Jennifer Kim, one of the co-facilitators, said participants in each of the five sessions responded well to this concept.

"All the ideas for the food come from feedback from the participants," Kim said. "We have a really good group of people here and everyone loves it."

The idea for



Nicholas Misketi /// Observer

**Jennifer Kim, centre, shares a laugh with participants in this East York Kitchen cooking session on Jan. 26.**

a community kitchen came from the North of the Danforth (NODA) report, released last year by the South Riverdale Community Health Centre. The NODA report studied the accessibility of health and social services in the Pape Village neighbourhood. Researchers for South Riverdale consulted with residents of Pape Village in the study.

According to Susan Bender, community health promoter at South Riverdale, residents wanted a community kitchen to help improve access to healthy food at a low cost.

"It seemed like the community kitchen was something that people were the most interested in," Bender said.

The group held the first of the cooking sessions on Nov. 3. Thanks to funding obtained through South Riverdale, the group also provided licensed daycare and TTC tokens free of charge to participants at each of the five sessions, in addition to the food. The funding, however, only covered the costs for five cooking sessions.

"We've applied for other funding," Jennifer Kim said. "I'm hoping to start up again in March but that really depends on the funding."

For more information call 416-532-7840 or email eyckitchen@gmail.com.



Nicholas Misketi /// Observer

**Thea Andonoff cuts tomatoes for an entrée of baked penne with roasted vegetables. Andonoff, along with the other participants, hopes the community kitchen can start up again in a few weeks time.**



Nicholas Misketi /// Observer

## Snowy smiles

**Ben Clancy, left, and Claire Byrne — from Ireland — keep warm by enjoying a leisure skate at Dieppe Park. There seems to be no end in sight to East York's cold (and snowy) 'skating weather.'**

# The most delicious Winterlicious yet?

By CHRISTINE HOGG  
The Observer

In a little restaurant at 516 Danforth Ave., crystal chandeliers hang from the ceiling and burning candles cast a warm glow across the bar. Diners chatter among themselves over beautiful lunch dishes.

At Pan on the Danforth, Toronto's annual Winterlicious festival is well underway. The owner, Chris Christodoulou, is hurriedly taking reservations over the phone.

"This is our eighth year doing it," Christodoulou said as he scribbled names on a napkin.

Although the cultural food festival promotes business for many restaurant owners who participate, the creative vision that Pan on the Danforth has always stood for remains the same: to offer fine quality, Greek cuisine in a place that feels like home.

Winterlicious is a culinary festival that invites restaurants in the Toronto area to showcase some of their finest dishes on the menu, made by the city's top chefs.

Now in its eleventh year, over 200 restaurants all over the city have been partaking for a week already. The promotion ends this coming Feb. 13.

At Pan on the Danforth, Winterlicious means something other than a marketing tactic used to generate income during the slower winter months.

"When [you] come to your home, and I treat this like my home, [you] are my guests," Christodoulou said. "It's not about money. Money is good, you need it to pay the bills, but it's not just the money. It's for [people] to have a good time and to enjoy the night out."

Pan on the Danforth offers a fine dining option right in the heart of Greek Town. It celebrates Winterlicious by promoting the lavish side of Greek food that does not exist in the minds of some.

Like other participants, it provides a three-course price-fixed menu, where diners choose an appetizer, entree, and dessert for both lunch and dinner options.

"We don't cheap out on our guests,"



Christine Hogg /// Observer

**Chris Christodoulou owns Pan on the Danforth, on Danforth Avenue a few blocks west of Pape Avenue.**

Christodoulou said. "Some restaurants feel that they can lessen the quality of the food because the price is so low, but at Pan we don't cut corners. We even give doggy bags for those who are too full to finish their plates."

Christodoulou runs the restaurant with his wife Soula, and because of their commitment to their guests, Pan remains a culinary success even during Winterlicious when the competition between Greek restaurants is fierce.

"You must remember to respect the customers," Christodoulou said, noting the negative attention Winterlicious sometimes gets. "Unfortunately, there are restaurants who don't normally participate and therefore they don't respect the Winterlicious diners."

"It's a bad overall picture because it gives Winterlicious a bad name," he said. "Restaurants who don't give 100 per cent of their effort to please their diners, whether these people give \$15 or \$25, should be eliminated, otherwise it gives everybody a bad name."

Good prices are not the only reason why diners are visiting Pan on the Danforth during Winterlicious. As part of the dining experience, guests can enjoy performances by belly dancers on Friday nights, and live music every weekend.