



Good News Toronto

OUR EVERYDAY HEROES

Diana Alli: A Heart for Community

BY NICOLE GEORGES-BENNETT

It's 7 a.m. on a Saturday morning, but instead of sleeping in on her only day to do so, Diana Alli is at the University of Toronto's Medical School making coffee, hot chocolate, and tea for 220 people. These are special people to her; they are the volunteer co-directors, mentors/tutors, and kids who participate in the University of Toronto Medical Faculty's Saturday Tutoring program.

The program is one of 20 community projects that Diana has helped develop. At 10 a.m., Diana checks over the simmering jugs. When the kids and their tutors come in, they'll be greeted with hot drinks and Diana's warm smile. Anybody who needs a hug only has to ask.

Diana's passion for young people has been

obvious during her thirty-four years at the University of Toronto. Until recently, she was the Student Affairs Coordinator, but was appointed the impressive sounding post of Senior Officer of Service Learning Opportunities and Partnership and Student Life Enrichment in the Faculty of Medicine. Diana accepts the new title with little fanfare; her innate sense of humility can't abide too much of the spotlight being on her.

Anybody who needs a hug only has to ask.

Her small office serves as a haven for students seeking everything from academic counselling to a friendly hug, as they struggle through an

intensely challenging program. Diana puts the heart into the medical faculty; she is an iconic figure to medical students and her reputation has won her countless allies in her projects for youth. In 2005, she received the Order of Ontario, the province's highest honour. Her office overflows with awards of distinction and cards from grateful students.

Medical student Michelle Ryan personally experienced Diana's generosity. "She'd known me for about two months, when I delivered my baby prematurely and had to travel a long distance between home and the hospital. She gave us the key to her condo and let us stay there. She brings a richness and a homey feel to the faculty,

Diana continued on 9



Diana Alli: Order of Ontario Recipient



David Churchill, Doreen Schwartz, Ruth Zatzman, and Pam Churchill

Building Community One Condo at a Time

BY EVA KARPATI

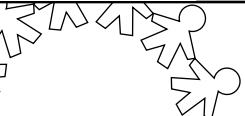
Reva Spunt, a single woman, had a problem. She could not reach up to change the burnt-out light bulb in her apartment, and she was afraid to stand on a chair. She asked fellow resident of her North York condominium, David Churchill, if he could change it for her. From that request, it dawned on Reva that there must be many more residents like her who could not do minor tasks around their apartment. However, she also realized that she had something to offer: she could drive people to appointments.







Thus, in January 2006, Condo Care: Neighbours Helping Neighbours was created. Ruth enlisted

David to make a flyer and write about it in their condominium newsletter. They asked residents to donate their skills, expertise, or hobbies should they be needed. No money would be exchanged, only the possibility of a favour in the future.

A core group of twelve people look after organizing Condo Care. They are retired people who are able to devote their time to this project. In the first year, there were 140 requests for help. "Setting up new TVs and DVD players is a very common request," says Reva, "as well as fixing faucet washers." Ruth Zatzman, also on the organizing committee, needed her cupboard hinges fixed.

Condo continued on 10

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In Praise of Community

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the second issue of Good News Toronto: Our Everyday Heroes. From the response to the first issue, it is clear that this newspaper was destined to happen. I received feedback from many readers saying they felt the same as I did and thought it was time for good news. I am glad to have started the impetus and thrilled that this is a revolution of many voices.

I am honoured to present the heroes in this March issue. Every story is different, but each person has acted on a desire to effect positive change in their environment. Each one has extended beyond herself/himself in order to touch their community. From the young students to the retired seniors, all the heroes have displayed a true soulfulness, illustrating the vital relationship between the individual and the community. Vibrant, compassionate individuals create caring, inclusive communities, and these

communities in turn nurture spirited, kind-hearted human beings. They are responsible for a continuous upward-spiraling energy of goodness. How exciting that Good News Toronto can witness this momentum, and how wonderful that all Torontonians will benefit from their benevolence.

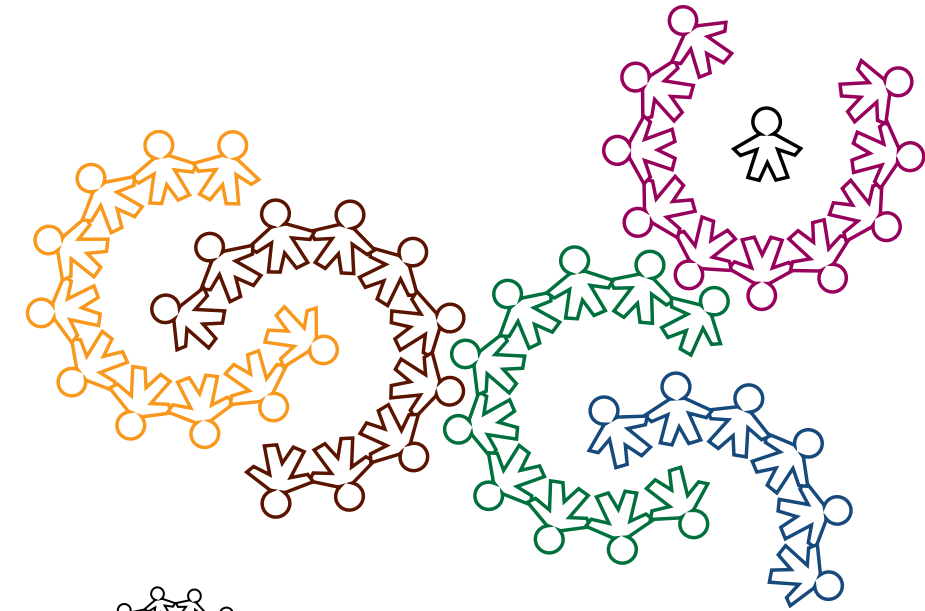
To me, the heroes also include the contributors to this newspaper. They all have the conviction that each story is profound and needs to be told in order to make our world peaceful and bright.

Margaret Mead said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

I have no doubt that we, the citizens of Toronto, who are all everyday heroes, will change the world.

In appreciation,

Eva Karpati
Publisher/Editor



Good News Toronto OUR EVERYDAY HEROES

Good News Toronto offers stories about the multitude of diverse, generous, caring, and inspiring people who live in Toronto, with the goal of motivating all of us to continue to make this a city rich in everyday heroes.

Good News Toronto is a monthly newspaper distributed throughout the Greater Toronto Area.

Good News Toronto is a not-for-profit endeavour committed to publishing works by aspiring and experienced writers and artists.

Letters to the Editor



I liked your heroes...great variety of cultures & ages. I will pass along the paper now to my neighbours. The net take away is that the world isn't all the evil place mainstream press would have us believe. There is certainly an important need for Good News stories that can resonate with anyone.

Anne Rawson
Feb 22

Congratulations and kudos on the launch of your newspaper! I have often expressed my dismay at all of the negative news in the media which seems to define "news" as situations involving violence, corruption, greed, dishonesty, etc. It certainly does create a slanted perspective on the world. Your paper brings a much needed balance to the media. Good luck with your future publications. I look forward to seeing the next issue of Good News Toronto!

Etta Kaner
Feb 14

Thanks for your great paper! All the best to everyone involved...

Guru Fatha Singh
Feb 14

Congratulations, Great idea, and nicely done. Best of luck with your newspaper and website.

Eva Rosenbaum

Our attitudes towards the community we live in and the people we live with are largely a matter of perspective. It's great to be reminded that there are people out there, like Grace Ng'ang'a, Jake Apacible, and you yourself, who see the goodness in everyone and try to make their lives that much better. Good News Toronto is a truly inspirational and admirable pursuit, and I hope you keep the issues coming.

Jason Levy
Feb 29

Send us your heroes

Report acts of kindness

Give us your comments

Join our GNT team

Inquire about advertising

Visit our website for more information

Share your favourite photographs of Toronto.

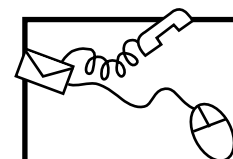
Share this newspaper with your family, friends, and neighbours

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Crusader for Taxi Safety

By ANDY RÉTI

Gerry Manley loves his job, but it is a line of work that is often dangerous. The statistics are frightening: a driver is five times more likely to be killed or injured on the job than a police officer. Gerry knows this because he is an ex-policeman who conducted a study on the subject. A fitness buff who stands over six feet tall and weighs 230 pounds, the 63-year-old cabby is more than able to take care of himself. He is less worried about himself than for his fellow cabbies, most of whom are immigrants. His dogged perseverance and dedication is just another illustration of how one man can make a difference. It took thirty years, but Gerry single-handedly changed thinking and policy at Toronto City Hall about workplace safety for taxicab drivers.

It all started in 1973, when Gerry, a high-spirited young officer, left the police force and bought his own cab. He had dealt with taxi drivers as a policeman and recognized the potential

of being self-employed. He quickly became aware of the deplorable working conditions pertaining to safety issues in the taxi business. Beginning in 1978, he wrote letters to all three levels of government, but failed to gain much support.

In 1988, he went into high gear against City Hall. He started gathering statistics on taxi-related injuries and fatalities and began to lobby City Hall to change the existing rules. Taxi drivers are vulnerable for a number of reasons: they are alone, carry cash, and are not allowed to carry any kind of defensive weapons. Most importantly, they can't refuse a fare. "Fare jumping" is common and most drivers will not even bother to report it due to the time it takes.

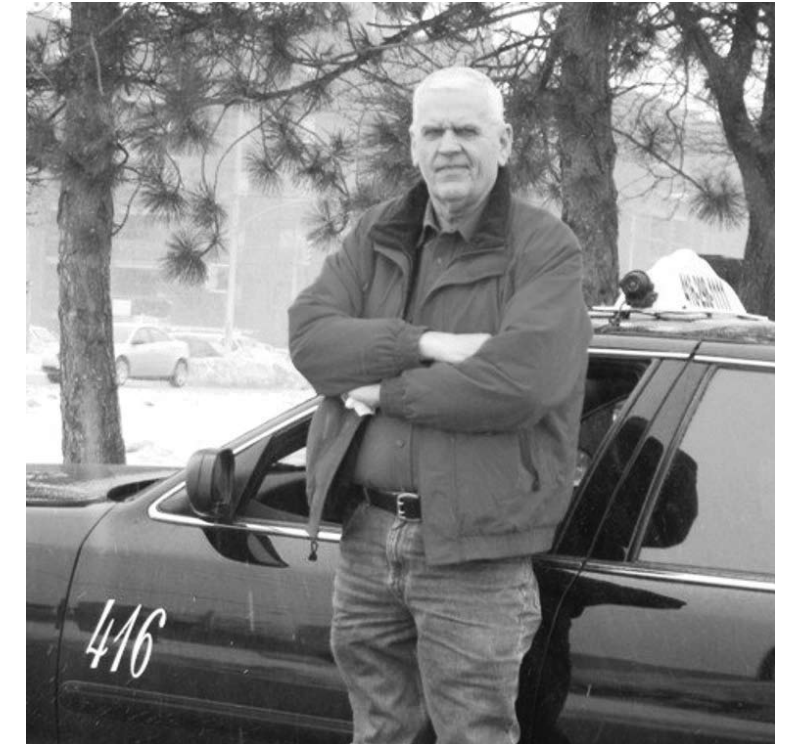
For Gerry, putting shields into taxis was never an option (although the bylaw permits it) because of the negative image it creates. In 1996, new technology became available which included GPS (global positioning system) and safety cameras. Gerry embraced security cameras designed specifically for taxicabs,

and was the first in North America to lobby successfully for their installation. His relentless quest paid off.

It took thirty years, but Gerry single-handedly changed thinking and policy at Toronto City Hall.

In 2000, a set of new bylaws pertaining to safety issues were introduced. The new rules mandated all taxicabs in Toronto to have either a camera or a GPS system installed, while leaving shields as an option. Today, the camera is mandatory, with a warning sign about it in every cab. The results were staggering: reported crime against taxi drivers dropped by 60-70 percent. Gerry is happy with the results.

When asked why he did all this without any compensation, his answer is simple: "I would like it to be known that I care about my



Gerry Manley and his new taxicab

fellow drivers. The existing system is designed to confuse, not assist new Canadians, who are the majority in the taxi business today. Because I knew the system, I was able to do something about it." When asked if he had any help over the years he stated that he did not. Despite the high cost in time and money, Gerry says he would do it again.

Gerry is busy tackling new issues now, but knowing him, he will prevail. Good News Toronto wishes him well.

Editor's Note: On March 3, Gerry had a meeting with Ontario's Minister of Labour The Honourable Brad Duguid regarding a possible pilot project for taxi driver safety.



There can be no vulnerability without risk; there can be no community without vulnerability; there can be no peace, and ultimately no life, without community.

M. Scott Peck (author of *The Road Less Traveled*)

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Toronto Tidbits

TORONTO - the name derived from the Huron word for "fishing weir"

OVER 140 LANGUAGES AND DIALECTS are spoken in Toronto

307 KM OF RIVERS AND CREEKS run through the city

OVER HALF OF TORONTO'S LABOUR FORCE has a university degree or college diploma

Next issue ...
Tuesday, April 8th

Prisoner in Tehran

BY NEDA PAJOOBAN

It begins in 1979, the Islamic Revolution, when an eager, studious thirteen-year old with aspirations of attending medical school spoke out against her teacher. Marina Nemat insisted on continuing to learn science and math, as opposed to religion and politics. She was unaware that her action would completely change her life.

"I had to break my silence and face the world."

Marina was raised in an ordinary household. Her father was a ballroom-dancing instructor, her mother was a hairdresser, and neither of the two was engaged in politics. She lived a normal life, attending a wonderful Zoroastrian school with girls from many different faiths and religions. Like any young girl, she spent summers at their family's cottage by the Caspian Sea, riding her bike, partying, dancing to the Bee Gees,

and wearing bikinis at the beach — everything a typical girl at that age would do. It wasn't until 1979 that Marina noticed there were another sides to this beautiful world she lived in. The Islamic Revolution began.

"It wasn't too bad at the beginning; there was some freedom of speech, and the political groups ... were everywhere, selling their books and newspapers. It was exciting," she says. But it wasn't long before the excitement came to an end. Books, newspapers, and political groups were declared illegal and teenagers became the first victims of the new government's Cultural Revolution. "Teachers were replaced by eighteen-, nineteen-year-old female Revolutionary Guards, and math and science were slowly replaced by government and religious propaganda."

Marina's protest is what led to her arrest at the age of sixteen. She was taken to the notorious Evin prison in Tehran where she endured torture and a close encounter with death, until she was saved at the age of

nineteen by one of her interrogators.

Marina then began a new life. She married her childhood sweetheart, started her own family, and eventually left Iran. "When we came to Canada, it felt like we landed on Pluto! Everything felt strange and foreign."

"I am very pleased with where I am today; I didn't choose to be here, but life guided me to this point, and I'm very grateful for it."

But they managed. Both she and her husband found work in the Toronto area and gradually worked together towards stabilizing their lives. They began feeling like "real Canadians," taking the kids to soccer practice and having backyard barbecues. It was her mother's death that forced Marina's past to catch up

with her: the thought that her loved ones were oblivious to what had really happened to her set Marina on the path to collecting her ideas in a journal, which ultimately led to her writing her book.

"I had to break my silence and face the world. It was a very painful process, but I'm very glad that I did it." She describes writing her book, *Prisoner of Tehran*, as a journey, not only emotionally but also physically, as it has taken her all over the world in the hopes of creating an understanding of what she went through and finding closure. She concludes that there is really no such thing as closure; the pain never goes away, but she has learned to accept it. Her book is about pain, hope, betrayal, love, hatred, and forgiveness. "I forgave the ones who tortured me, but I believe that you can never forgive a system that creates torturers. However, violence cannot fix anything. Look at history; if violence could fix anything, the world would have been the Garden of Eden by now."



Marina Nemat enjoying her life

"I am very pleased with where I am today; I didn't choose to be here, but life guided me to this point, and I'm very grateful for it."

Prisoner of Tehran
A Memoir

By Marina Nemat
Publisher: Penguin Group(Canada)
First published 2007
Copyright Marina Nemat, 2007

No Ordinary Teenager



Markhaven resident Edith Sumer and Vyshe Balendra

BY ALEXANDRA YEBOAH

Vyshe Balendra is no ordinary teenager. While most teenagers were lost in their own personal matters, Vyshe was giving back to others. At the age of 14, Vyshe was already very active in the community. She volunteered to visit patients at a local hospital, while still managing to keep up her exceptional average in school, and just last November, along with

eleven other students, she received a scholarship for \$1,000 from the Canadian Tamil Youth Development Centre (CanTYD) for community excellence.

Her love for helping people caused her to found the Habitat for Humanity South Africa, a project that she established with a volunteer council at her school called The Brother André Youth in the Community (BAYC). The project focuses on meeting the housing needs of South

Africans. The school, along with BAYC, currently does fundraising and raises awareness about the poverty stricken. The money they raise will go towards building a house in South Africa.

Even so, Vyshe knows this is not enough. "I know that one house cannot eliminate all the paucity in that nation, but that one house can positively change a family and a community forever. That's what I'm happy about."

"As a leader, I have learned that seeing the bigger picture is what life is about."

Now a Life Sciences major at the University of Toronto, Vyshe's love for helping people has only grown. One contribution she made was to donate twelve of her fourteen inches of hair

to the Canadian Cancer Society's Locks of Love to make a wig for cancer patients. Although sacrificing her hair was difficult, she doesn't regret it. "I knew it was going to a good cause. I knew someone else would benefit more than me."

When the director of the Markhaven Nursing Home for Seniors was unable to expand the volunteer unit because of her chaotic schedule, Vyshe offered to open up a volunteer sector in Markhaven. She proceeded to recruit new volunteers through BAYC — students who were willing to assist with gardening, feeding, and other such duties at the home.

Currently, Vyshe is a coordinator at the nursing home, where she has volunteered for three years. Some of her duties there include leading the Saturday morning exercise routines and partaking in the Sunday chapel services.

Vyshe's leadership experi-

ence has taught her many things. "I believe this experience has shown me that [being] a leader means putting other individuals and their needs before your own. As a leader, I have learned that seeing the bigger picture is what life is about."

As for her future plans, Vyshe hopes to become a general surgeon and become involved in Doctors without Borders, an organization in which doctors travel to poverty-stricken countries to offer healthcare.

Vyshe's advice to those who want to volunteer but don't know where to start is simple: "Look around the community [and] at your local school. Even within [your] school, you can be a community leader. And then from there, you can do good for the world."

Alexandra Yeboah is a high school student at North Park Secondary School in Brampton.

A Family of Heroes

BY KATE DEFREITAS

In January of 2008, siblings Jeremiah Stewart, Ellen Stewart, Sarah McArthur and husband Jason McArthur left their homes in Canada on a mission to lend a hand in poverty stricken Haiti.

With another team from the United States, Sarah, Jason, Jeremiah, and Ellen volunteered at the Faith and Love in Action Orphanage in Jacmel, Haiti, to help with the ongoing work that Orphans, Refugees and Aid (ORA) are doing there. While they were there, the four helped to set up a medical clinic at the orphanage in order for a local Haitian doctor to provide assistance to the orphaned children and the local community on a weekly basis. In addition to this, they helped to run a clinic in the mountains where volunteer medical professionals, including Sarah, attended to hundreds of people in need, passed out non-prescription medication, and provided information on health care to the Haitian visitors. The patients were given de-worming medication, clothing, personal hygiene products, and vitamins.

"It's one of those experiences where you realize just how much we have in Canada," Sarah says. "Unless you travel and see



From left to right: Jeremiah Stewart, Ellen Stewart, Sarah McArthur, Jason McArthur, Nicole Luymes, Jean Wiesner (Canadian ORA Director), & Norma Gould (ORA's Accountant).

for yourself what really is happening in other parts of the world, your mind knows but your heart really doesn't understand."

"It's one of those experiences where you realize just how much we have in Canada," Sarah says.

This experience impacted the family incredibly, and they have become more aware of their own luxuries: "In Canada we get caught

up in materialism; working all the time and allowing society to dictate what we should and shouldn't be doing. But then you see a child with a simple infection, malnourished, barely dressed, playing in the dirt because he has no toys and you think — what am I doing??? It makes you take stock of your life and change the course you are on."

As a result, the family has dedicated their time volunteering, fundraising, and travelling, all in the name of charity. On their return home from Haiti, the group of siblings put themselves to work, publishing a photography book of their

trip as a fundraising effort to support the orphanages they visited.

As a result, the family has dedicated their time volunteering, fundraising, and travelling, all in the name of charity.

In addition to this, they travel to local churches and community centers to share their story and

create awareness — this in conjunction with the many other charity projects they are working on. Husband and wife Sarah and Jason McArthur are Destiny Child Sponsorship Program Co-ordinators for Canada; they photograph children from Romania, Haiti, and South Africa and put together binders as a way to obtain sponsorship so that these children may access food, clothing, education, and health care.

It is people like these four brave individuals who provide hope for the millions suffering worldwide, and who force others to look at their own lives and luxuries and acknowledge that they too can help. Rather than ignoring the tribulations of the world and accepting the existence of poverty, this family has united together to make a difference in the lives of others. "I believe we see those things to create change in ourselves and the world around us," Sarah explains. And change they are making; this family is well on their way to impacting thousands of lives across the globe.

It takes a great deal of courage to step out of one's comfort zone and recognize the vices of the world; it takes a hero to actively take part in changing these injustices. Thank you to this family of heroes: you are truly inspirational.

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**Toronto
Tidbits**

There are **125 MUSEUMS AND PUBLIC ARCHIVES** in the Greater Toronto Area

YONGE STREET is listed in the Guinness Book of World Records as the longest street in the world, stretching 1,896 km from the lakeshore in Toronto, north to Rainy River, Ontario, near the Minnesota border

Children's Heroes

PROJECT OF HILLCREST SCHOOL Grade 3 Class

Hillcrest School is located in mid-town Toronto and has close to 400 students from JK to Grade 6. The school includes a Community Centre and presents a very welcoming environment that celebrates positive partnerships to enhance student learning.

"The students were very excited to have the opportunity to describe their everyday heroes, and put a great deal of effort into their writing. I love that there is such a wide variety of people that these children consider to be their heroes. Very positive, uplifting, inspirational pieces of work – happy reading!"
— Tristan Domelle, teacher

For their complete stories, please visit our website: www.goodnewstoronto.ca



My hero is
Kate.
By: R. K.

My hero is
my dad.
By: E. G.



My hero is Ike.
By: C. K.

My hero is
my dad.
By: E. R.



My hero
is Ike.
By: X. C.

My hero is
officer Andy.
By: E. G.



My hero is my teacher
named Ms. Domelle.
By: R. R.

My hero is
the crossing guard.
By: S. B.



My hero is
a crossing guard.
By: A. Z.

My hero is my
mom Carolyn.
By: A. R.



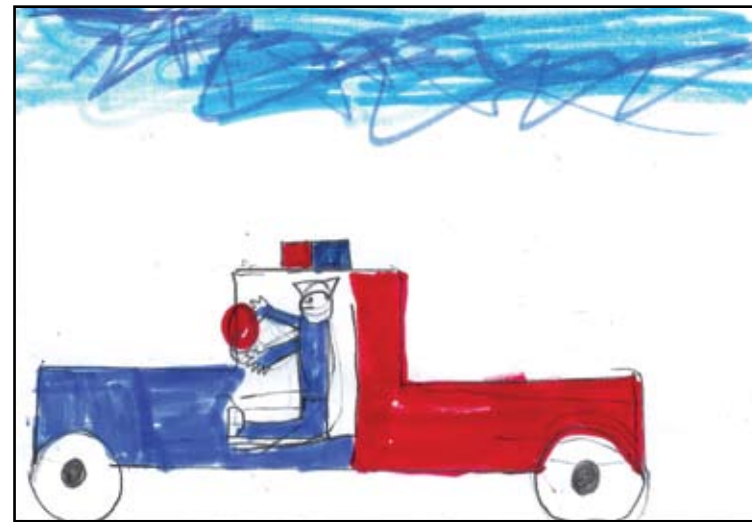
My heroes are
my parents.
By: L. R.

My hero is
Ike.
By: N. E.



My hero is my
doctor, Dr. Goodie.
By: C. V.

My everyday hero
is a policeman.
By: N. G. S.



My hero is
my dad.
By: C. U.

My hero is Thierry Henri.
By: I. T.



Caring for His Korean Community



John Lim at Summer Heritage Camp

By ROSA SOO YOUNG PARK

It is very easy to find people who think of John Lim as a hero. Over the years, this Korean man has participated in numerous volunteer initiatives and has done fundraising for sick children, seniors,

the disabled, and, most notably, for the adoptive families with children from Korea.

John founded the Korean Canadian Children's Association in 1991 after meeting some adoptive families at an event. Currently, there are about

3,000 Korean adoptees in Canada, with about 100 being adopted each year. Through the KCCA, he has held numerous cultural events, including summer heritage camps, lunar New Year celebrations, and Christmas dinners, among others.

John has also organized Motherland Tours which takes adoptive families to Korea as a group. Through the events put together by the KCCA, adoptees and their parents can learn about Korean culture through participating in various events.

John's dedication to the Korean-Canadian adoptees has brought many families together, helping them to connect with one another as well as with the Korean culture itself.

Currently, Korean language classes and cooking classes are offered free of charge in Toronto for par-

ents who are eager to learn about Korean culture for their children.

Through fundraising concerts, John has also recently started a scholarship foundation for adoptive students going into universities. John's dedication to the Korean-Canadian adoptees has brought many families together, helping them to connect with one another as well as with the Korean culture itself. Most families are now able to say a few words in Korean and use chopsticks instead of forks. The following quotes are from Korean-Canadian adoptees and their families, thanking John for his dedication.

"John Lim is my hero for many reasons. I am a Korean adoptee and was adopted at the age of two, and now I am twenty years old. He offered me and other adoptees an opportunity to learn about Korean heritage and culture, which at first was quite foreign to me. John Lim has done more than I could ever ask for, or even imagine. I thank him for everything he has done and I hope he continues to run this program and stays well and happy. Thank you, Mr. Lim, you truly are one of my heroes and of the Ko-

rean adoptee community." - Timothy Bennett, 20, Kingston, Ontario

"John Lim is an inspiration and mentor to all Korean adoptees. He treats us as his own children, and motivates us to find our Korean roots. He is a true hero in my book and makes the world a better place to be." - Rob Loebach, 21, Windsor, Ontario

"He is a true hero in my book and makes the world a better place to be."

"John Lim is a hero, as he has unselfishly provided my family and numerous other Korean adoptive families with life-enriching Korean cultural experiences that would simply not be possible without his unwavering support, dedication, and enthusiasm. John Lim has facilitated for our family a connection to Korea and Korean culture. His warm and loving support has made our daughter feel closer to her Korean roots, even in Canada." - Allison, John, Jenna, and Justin Pezzack, Toronto, Ontario

Be Productive, Not Destructive!



Johnny Apoku-Mensah at School

By MARISA AGOSTINI

It is often said that it takes a village to raise a child. In the face of increasing violence amongst our youth, this concept has taken hold of two Grade 8 students at St. Francis de Sales School at Jane and Finch, Johnny Apoku-Mensah and Eresha

Peira, who have immersed themselves in the Safe School Committee. "Bullying is a cowardly act of one individual repeatedly picking on another individually," says Johnny. "It hurts those who are the target of this insensitive act," adds Eresha. "It frightens me to think that it could happen

to me one day."

Four distinct types of bullying have emerged over the last decade: verbal, social, physical, and cyber bullying. "Cyber bullying is really big in this community. It is more serious than physical abuse," Johnny and Eresha explain. "To see targeted students' reputations slashed online, leaving the bullied feeling helpless, is really cruel," both students agree. Bullying jeopardizes the student's ability to transfer to other schools in the community, as the abuse cycle usually flares up again at the new school. "We need to be pro-active and stop any act of violence that happens in front of our eyes. To witness violence of any form and not take actions against it makes us accomplices," declares Johnny.

"I am in awe with Johnny's mission inside and outside



Eresha Peira at St. Francis de Sales School

our class," Johnny's teacher Antonietta De Santis proudly shares. "Whenever a bullying act occurs against a student in the school, Johnny steps in and stops the fight. He compliments any student with low self-esteem, praising their strengths. He is great," she continues. "He just takes charge as soon

as he sees a small incident; he has come to earn the respect of all the students in the class."

For some time, Johnny was a victim of bullying. Other students would make fun of his quiet, reserved ways. "It was not a pleasant experi-

Students continued on 11

Two Environmental Mentors

By TAMMY McQUEEN

Vanessa KleinHaar and Alesha Breckenridge have devoted countless hours of their time to developing and facilitating environmental education programs at a Toronto-based charity, Citizens' Environment Watch.

Vanessa KleinHaar, Program Manager of Education and Research at Citizens' Environment Watch, is a trained teacher and former board member for the Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario. She has experience working with students of all ages on environmental projects across Ontario. "Life becomes easier with positive thinking, and that's what we're offering these children — a positive outlook and a chance to get involved and make a difference," she says.

Through Vanessa and Alesha's leadership and direction, thousands of students across Ontario are jumping in and taking charge.

It's "making a difference" that also drives Alesha Jane Breckenridge, Environmental Education Program Associate at Citi-

zens' Environment Watch. Alesha is a recent graduate of York University's Master Environmental Studies program, and she also has a diploma in Environmental Education. "As long as we spend more time indoors and separated from the basic elements of life — air, water, soil — we are going to need more reminders of our biological connections, and that's what environmental education is all about," says Alesha.

Through Vanessa and Alesha's leadership and direction, thousands of students across Ontario are jumping in and taking charge with their Wattwise! and Changing Currents programs. These forward-looking programs give students a chance to make a difference by becoming local environmental heroes.

Despite only being at Citizens' Environment Watch for a short period of time — Alesha joined in October, while Vanessa started in January — both have achieved remarkable results. Wattwise! and Changing Currents had originally been offered only to Grade 9 students, but they have since been adapted for grades 5 and 6, as well as for college and university. As well, ten new schools have signed on to both programs. The organization has also started a journal, *Exploring Nature*, and is recruiting high school volunteers for its editorial board.

Wattwise! teaches stu-



Vanessa KleinHaar and Alesha Breckenridge

dents to use energy meters to measure the amount of energy their classrooms and schools use daily. "It's so quick and easy," says Alesha. "The students just plug an appliance into the energy meter ... and immediately they can see how much energy is being used, even when the appliance isn't in use! The students are thus able to measure their school or classroom's electricity use and work toward reducing their electrical footprint by creating an Energy Conservation Plan — it is all about mea-

suring success!"

Schools participating in Wattwise! can also enter the Conservation Champion Contest in which Citizens' Environment Watch donates \$1,000 to the school with the best Energy Conservation Plan. The winning school will be awarded the cheque at Citizens' Environment Watch's Student Science Conference in May.

The Changing Currents program is another example of a monitoring program Vanessa and Alesha offer. It teaches students how to become stewards of a

stream or watershed in their local community. "Changing Currents provides a chance for all of us to get involved and make vital connections to local water quality," says Vanessa. Madeleine Cosentino, Tiffany Yan, and Hanna Cho, three students from Leaside High School who are past participants in the Changing Currents program, agree. "As youth, we feel a responsibility to join the effort to make this dream a reality. This is our future and we want to take an active role in making it a bright future."

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like you have a second mom."

Michelle's sentiments are echoed by Dr. Sean Wharton, coordinator for the Canadian Bariatric Clinic treatment of obesity and cardiovascular disease. "As a medical student, I've worked with her on multiple organizations, including the Black Medical Student Association that she helped to start. She is this kind-hearted person who manages to transcend race; she's there to help guide people onto the right path."

Diana concedes the recognition is heart warming; however, her desire is not for accolades,

but to change lives for the better. She has faced many challenges: her mother suffered from a mental ailment, her beloved father and brother died in tragic accidents, economic constraints forced her to give up her dream of becoming a doctor, and she endured a severely abusive marriage for fourteen years. But Diana feels her experiences had purpose. "I learned, out of these tragedies, to understand the suffering of others. I always had God as my pillar and strength."

Diana co-founded seventeen of the Medical Faculty's community outreach programs, mobilizing the energy and humanitarian impulses of

the medical students she oversees. These initiatives — The Saturday Parkdale and Woodgreen Tutoring Programs, Woodgreen Homeward-Bound Programs, and Out of the Cold, amongst others, which range from tutoring for children of all ages to assistance for isolated seniors and new immigrants — offer support to marginalized people in Toronto's communities. Funding for these initiatives come from annual donations from final year medical students and faculty.

Alongside her supervisor, Professor Ann Jarvis, Diana has fostered several initiatives within the university. She co-founded the Summer Mentorship

Program (SMP) with Dr Miriam Rossi. She has also started several major fundraiser events for global health care initiatives, such as Earth Tones, and Rhythm and Dance.

"She's there to help guide people onto the right path."

A petite woman with a brilliant smile, Diana admits that her obsession with social causes may be a by-product of empty nest syndrome. Her daughter, Alexandria Haji, laughingly agrees. "Yes! She has too many projects,

but it's good she's really busy because her three children are all grown up. It's wonderful so many students appreciate what she does."

Diana says her future programs will focus on social accountability. "We're aiming to start a hassle-free clinic for the homeless, street youth, etc. I hope to start a mentoring centre for less fortunate youth to be more focused on their personal, academic, and spiritual development."

When asked about retirement plans, she smiles. "One never knows. I'm enjoying life so much at the university, and these are all passions that keep me motivated and fulfilled."

Living with Asperger's Syndrome

BY GEORGE MONTEIRO

At the age of 27, I was diagnosed with a form of high-functioning autism known as Asperger's Syndrome. Before this, I attributed my social awkwardness to simply being the odd one out. Learning of my disability has helped to explain a lot about who I am and why I act the way I do. To me, my diagnosis has been a saving grace; I came to realize that this personal mystery I had been living with for over a quarter of a century actually had a name and an explanation.

I first began noticing that I was different from everyone else during my adolescent years. I wasn't really someone who fit into society. I had trouble keeping jobs for a long period of time, and I was far from being considered popular, having very few friends and never dating. As a child, psychologists believed that I might be autistic; however, the evidence presented to my family at the time was a bit dubious, and was thus never given any serious thought. You see, Asperger's Syndrome did not formally exist until 1994.

At the time of my diagnosis in 2003, my therapist informed me that I would not flourish in a work environment that was overly busy or overly slow, and

even less so in an environment that dealt with many people. You see, my condition is very complex: I am of a small percentage of autistic people who have the intelligence to prosper in society, yet my social skills (or lack thereof) make working with masses of different people on a regular basis very challenging.

Anything is possible as long as you have the heart and desire to accomplish it.

Rather than accepting this diagnosis and giving into the advice of my therapist, I chose to fight for my right as a human and become who I wanted to be, despite my disability. I began familiarizing myself with my flaws, and I worked on becoming more acceptable to society. I didn't do this alone, however: I sought help from an employment agency specializing in people with my condition. Through this agency, I learned more about the traits common to people with my disability, and I slowly began making the transition from being unemployed to being an active member of society.

I landed a job working at the CN Tower: it was a dream job. I loved mingling with the tourists from all over the world. When the summer hit, as many as ten thousand people a day would visit the CN Tower to enjoy the view. I later worked at the Eaton Centre as a Guest Services Representative. The mall alone had over one million visitors daily, but I took the crowd in stride. By working at these places, I proved to myself that it was possible for me to be in a busy environment and prosper — all it took was perseverance.

There is a lesson to be learned here: anything is possible as long as you have the heart and desire to accomplish it. You are the master of your own destiny; do not let others tell you what you are and are not capable of. I was born with Asperger's Syndrome and it will be with me for the rest of my life, but in spite of this I am living a normal, prosperous life and I am content. I would like to educate the public about my struggles, and inspire those with this condition to shine and be the best they can be, because I know they can do it. People may limit you in your abilities, but always remember that you are the author of your own life, and thus you are the only person who can make or break your spirit.

Asperger's Syndrome

Asperger's Syndrome is an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and was first included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (American Psychiatric Association) under the general category of Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDDs) in 1994. It is thought that as many as 60 out of 10,000 individuals have some form of an Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Based on current population statistics for Ontario, this prevalence rate translates to 74,356 individuals in Ontario living with an Autism Spectrum Disorder. The traits attributed to Asperger's Syndrome may make it difficult for children to function well in school and for adults to find and keep employment. Many individuals with Asperger's exhibit extensive knowledge of a specific interest and therefore are capable of major accomplishments.

Although Asperger's Syndrome can be first detected in childhood, many individuals are not diagnosed until well into adolescence or adulthood. The cause of Asperger's is not yet established, but a leading theory at this time points to genetic causes. Many individuals diagnosed with Asperger's identify similar traits in their family members. Treatments may include counselling, psycho-education, social skills training, medication, family intervention, occupational therapy, speech-language pathology, and special diets, among others.

Without diagnosis, support, and intervention, children and adults, as well as their families, struggle to understand their puzzling profile of strengths and deficits. (Provided by the Aspergers Society of Ontario)

Condo continued from 1

"David had old ones that he had fixed and was able to replace them for me." David is quick to point out that they do the soft jobs. "We keep out of the way of professionals and contractors and do not do major repairs." Pam Churchill, David's very actively involved wife mentions, "The help might be in the form of a recommendation, such as suggesting that a resident get a plumber, or diagnosing a problem." Recipients are of all ages, but mainly the elderly use the service.

By the second year, the requests for help numbered 200. New residents are told about Condo Care when they move in, and word spread quickly. One of the benefits of this reciprocal system of help is that every participant has also learned from each other. They have taught each other computer

skills. They have jointly figured out how to put together Ikea furniture.

All this has created the most important benefit of Condo Care: a helpful and caring community. "This has brought wonderful friendships," says Ruth. The residents have formed a potluck club and group theatre outings. "It is nice to be neighbourly," says David.

High-rise apartments and condominiums can be perceived as cold, isolated dwellings. This generous group of residents has turned their building into a microcosm of a vibrant community where everyone is important, connected, and cared for. Condo Care: Neighbours Helping Neighbours is a model of what all our communities can be. Good News Toronto thanks these remarkable residents for making paying it forward a reality in Toronto.

Listen

by Sabina Bunin

Thank you, thank you, higher being you made me very keen in seeing...

we live in a country of all good... all good, all good...understood?

Imagine the capacity of our power... any evil we can devour...

So why focus on the hate and rage? This should be the beginning of a revolutionary stage.

Lets think about the luck we've had... and how other countries are uber sad... what makes me ten times more mad, is everyone notices the bad...

Maybe it's time to drench this drought, scratch that maybe... WITHOUT A DOUBT...

Drop you're mocha latte, and drop you're cancer stick, Go out and change the world, Time is but a tick.

The Strength of Maurizio

BY SAMIA TECLA

Maurizio Timelli's story began in 1995 in Italy, when his four-year-old son Ricardo was diagnosed with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, a disease that targets the body's muscles. While many choose to rely on existing services available to them, Maurizio felt they did not meet his son's needs and decided to be proactive. Less than one year later, Maurizio and his family were on a plane headed for Toronto in search of a cure for his son. After a failed contract selling electrical parts with an Italian company, he began working two jobs: forklift salesperson by day and bread deliverer by night. Despite the hardships, he was determined to make a difference.

Maurizio and his family were on a plane headed for Toronto in search of a cure for his son.

Maurizio faced a dilemma: his visions required money. While at work one day, some customers randomly asked him for advice on getting clothes with their company's logo embroidered on it. After preparing the research for his customers, he found that there was a profit to be made. With no expectations, Maurizio decided to

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give up their lunchtime and meet weekly at the school to discuss policies and procedures with other committee members. A Safe School Policy Document is presently in place, and a running record of repeated offences and of the offenders is kept in the office. Moreover, victims are given the opportunity to express their feelings in writing, and aggressors must give a written account of the incident. Eresha thinks that this will hopefully make them more accountable. "As a student rep, I've learned a lot," says Johnny. "For in-

stance, the short-term affect on some victims is a possible withdraw[al] from others and the experience of anxiety symptoms. Their school attendance usually drops in fear of possible attacks. Poor academic performance could shatter their future dreams. Some victims might retaliate and lash out [at] others in revenge, putting everyone in the school in danger."

Everyone at St. Francis de Sales follows the new school motto: BE PRODUCTIVE, NOT DESTRUCTIVE. A student's random act of kindness is acknowledged by the school,



Maurizio Timelli and his son Ricardo

set up Child's Strength, a non-profit business that would provide customized clothing. Understanding his duty to protect the environment, all clothing is produced using the most

environmentally friendly method of silk-screening. Despite the fear of losing customers because of this decision, he feels the issue of protecting the environment is far more important

than making a few extra dollars. All the profit made from Child's Strength is put directly towards helping improve the lives of disabled people. Just recently,

and certificates are given out monthly honouring those who practice exemplary qualities.

Johnny and Eresha are excited over the idea of rewarding the good deeds of others.

This endeavour has caught the interest of some local businesses: chosen students

he purchased an elevator which is to be installed at his son's former school in order for disabled people to access the school's gym. Convinced that disabled people can do measurably more than they think, his next goal is to open a gym for those with disabilities.

He imagines a place where disabled people, children and adults alike, can mix and mingle while exercising.

He imagines a place where disabled people, children and adults alike, can mix and mingle while exercising. "Disabled people are capable of doing more than they think," he asserts. Biking thirty minutes daily, his son is proof of that. Maurizio, who "believe[s] in the power of small things" is aware that he is far from accomplishing his next goal of a gym, but realizes that every success begins with a vision.

Maurizio, who has devoted his efforts and life to finding a cure, is dedicated to providing a better life for his son and all disabled people. Through Child's Strength, Maurizio shows us that perseverance and hard work are necessary to achieving any goal.

Child's Strength annually clothes over 10,000 Canadian students and workers throughout Ontario alone.

of the month, their families, and one friend can dine for free at Perkins Restaurant on designated Thursdays — another incentive, say Johnny and Eresha, to help promote good behaviour in students. The adult committee members see it as an opportunity for families in the neighbourhood to interact with each other. Johnny and Eresha are excited over the idea of rewarding the good deeds of others. What a wonderful way to build a strong and vital community, where all students can feel safe from harm.

Please share the GOOD NEWS – pass it on!



EARTH HOUR

MARCH 29, 8 P M

Turn your lights off for an hour and join millions across the planet who are fighting climate change.

I'm in. Are you?

Sign up at wwf.ca/EarthHour

