



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We are interested in your thoughts and opinions about stories that appear in *The Skeleton Press*, and we invite you to contribute by writing a letter to the editor. Letters may be edited for clarity and space considerations.

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MANDATE

The Skeleton Press was initiated by the Skeleton Park Arts Festival to create a free print publication that captures the vibrancy and diversity of the neighbourhood. We are interested in how print media can communicate and build relationships differently than digital publishing, and in how the act of consuming and distributing the physical object can build community. We hope copies of *The Skeleton Press* will be passed from hand to hand, sparking conversation with neighbours over the fence or at the corner store, and strengthening our sense of place and each other.

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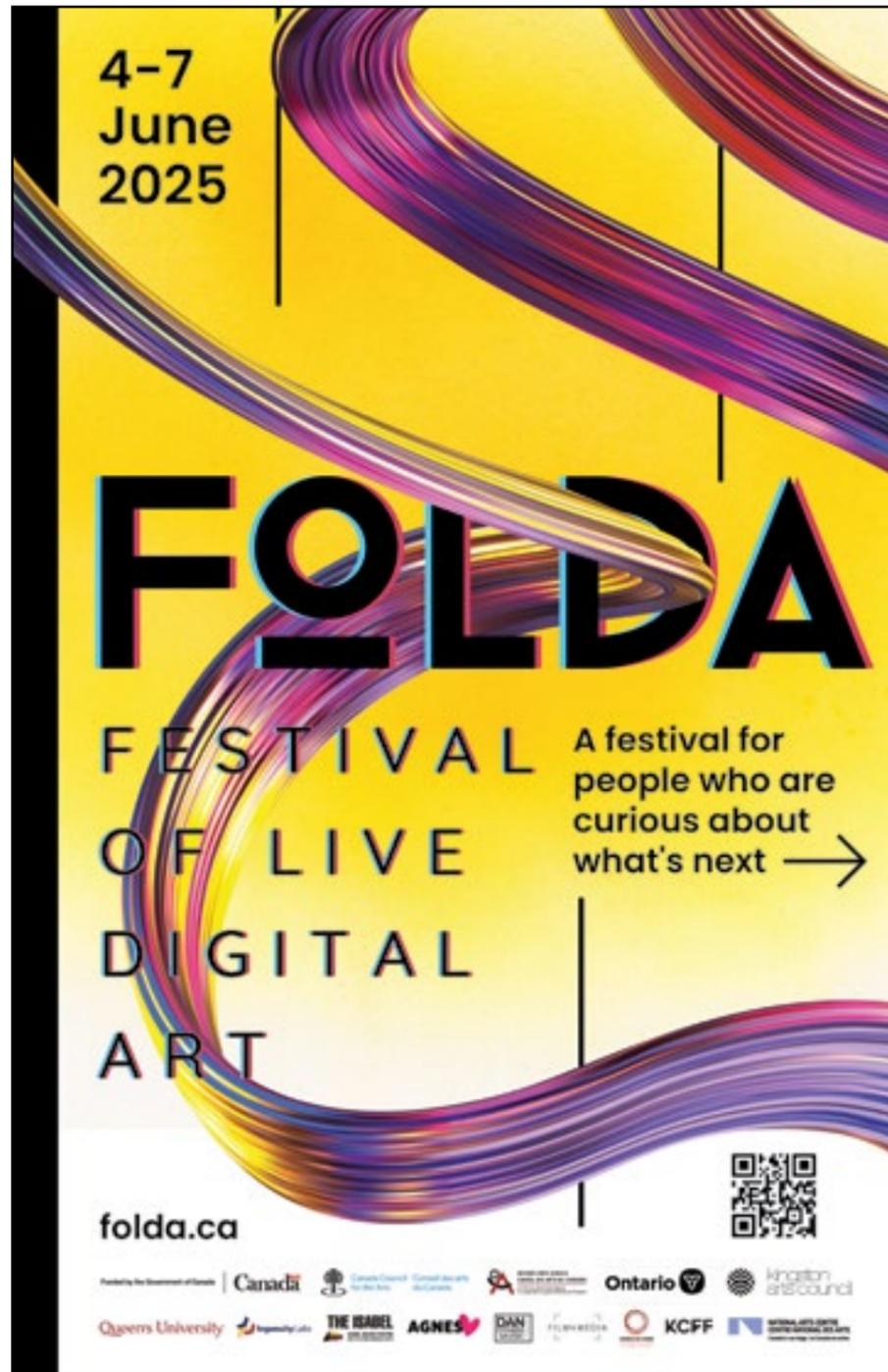
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ATTENTION WRITERS & ARTISTS

We invite pitches for articles related to the neighbourhood and welcome new and experienced writers. Send us your idea (max. 150 words). Most articles are maximum 800 words. We pay \$0.30 a word (\$240 per 800 words). We also welcome new illustrators and photographers and pay market rates. Our next theme is Neighbourhood Food. Please send inquiries with samples of your work: skeletonpresseditor@gmail.com.

A WORD AFTER A WORD AFTER A WORD IS POWER.

Margaret Atwood

Join Margaret Atwood for the
2025 Festival Kick-Off!
Sunday, August 24, 2025, 2:00 - 3:30 pm
The Isabel Bader Centre for the Performing Arts



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WATCH FOR
THE 2025
PROGRAM GUIDE
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Gathering

BY ANNE THÉRIAULT



I once read a false etymology for the word summer that claimed it came from a Middle English source meaning “sum of the year”. In reality, its roots are at least 3,500 years old; there are similar-sounding names for the warmer months across many branches of the Indo-European language family. Still, I like the fake history of the word, because I do feel that summer is the culmination of my own personal year. I love the warm weather, the airy clothing, the long hours spent in parks and on patios. Most of all, though, I love the ease of getting together with others after hermiting my way through the winter. So it seems fitting to me that the theme for the summer issue of *The Skeleton Press* is gathering, especially since so many of us will gather at SPAF — which is, in many ways, the sum of our neighbourhood’s year.

In this issue, you’ll read about the various places and ways that our neighbours congregate, from cultural milieus like concert venues, WritersFest, and burlesque shows, to recreational spaces like gaming stores and an ultimate frisbee league, to more intangible sites like the unconscious plane. There are stories about a half-forgotten franco-phone neighbourhood that existed around present-day Main Street, the tantalizingly-named BBQ Committee (that does so much more than organize grilling sessions), and the history of Pride in Kingston. You’ll learn about places where neighbours gather for community support, like Yellow House, the public library, and a tent outside of the Hub where volunteers dish up hot meals. You’ll also have the chance to read some sage advice in the debut instalment of Tante Talia’s advice column.

It’s been five years since the first COVID lockdowns forced us to reckon with how we gather and the ways that our gatherings can impact the world around us. Out of that challenging period came a burst of creativity about how to be in community with one another. If nothing else, this issue shows just how inspired our neighbourhood continues to be when it comes to thinking up ways to be together.

See you at the park!

Help us put meat on the bones: Support *The Skeleton Press*

We love bringing *The Skeleton Press* to you every few months. But operating with a skeleton crew on a skeleton budget isn’t always easy. Currently, funding comes through funds awarded to the Skeleton Park Arts Festival (SPAF) by several granting bodies. But the publication has no independent source of income and relies heavily on volunteers. You can help by donating to SPAF, a charitable organization that can issue tax receipts. Scan the QR code or visit canadahelps.org/en/charities/skeleton-park-arts-festival to get started.



Thank you to our supporters.



We’d like to thank those special benefactors who have committed to substantial and ongoing donations. Currently, these donors are: **Cam-Rog Enterprises** and **Jonathan Rose**. In our next issue, we will list all donors as The Friends of *The Skeleton Press*, whether it’s a \$5 or \$500 monthly donation. Please consider giving today.

ERRATUM: A draft version of Danny McLaren’s article on inclusive language was mistakenly published in *The Skeleton Press*, Issue 17. For the final version, please see the online issue at skeletonparkartsfest.ca/the-skeleton-press.

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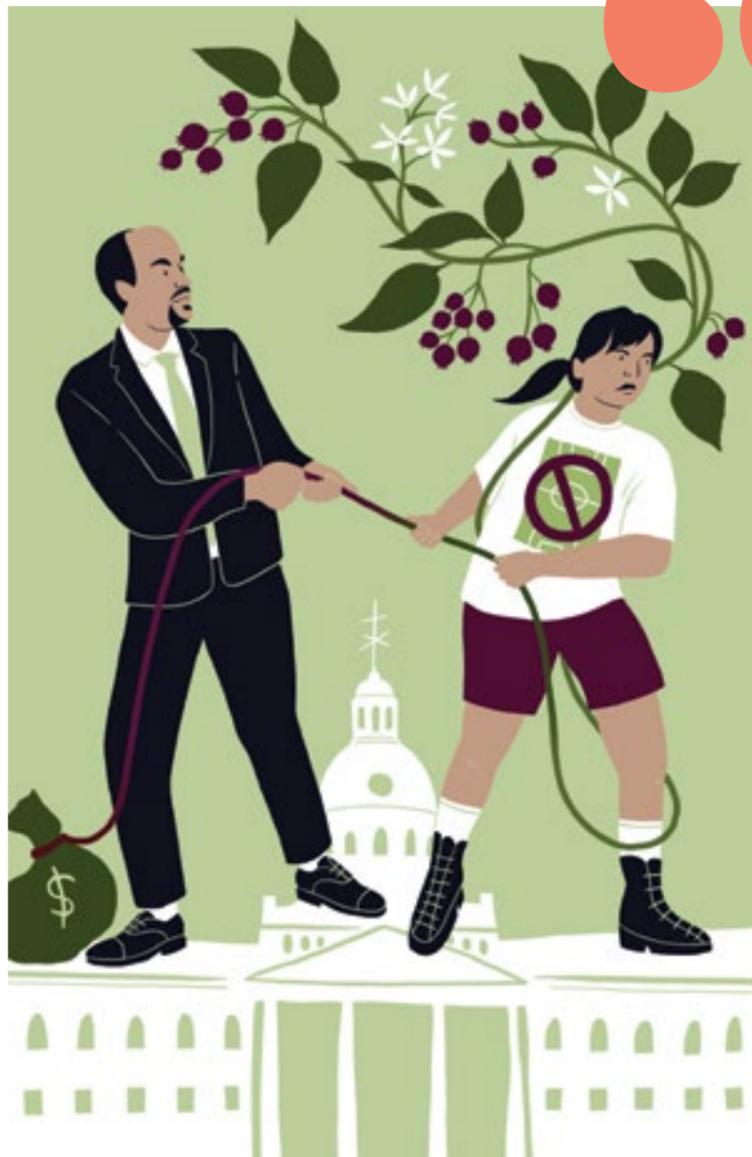
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The Stadium Controversy



A Lesson in Civic Engagement

STORY BY **ALAN GUMMO** ILLUSTRATION BY **ABBY NOWAKOWSKI**



“To be effective in the neoliberal era, civic movements need to think beyond textbook movement-building tactics.”



ALAN GUMMO is retired from senior positions in public administration (municipal sector) with specializations in city and regional planning, and corporate and community strategic planning. His career memoirs are titled *Everything is Temporary — A Career in Long-Range Planning*. He lives a block away from the Memorial Centre. He is also a resident of Brazil where they play a lot of soccer.

Mobilization

Kingston has just witnessed a remarkable textbook exercise in civic engagement and mobilization.

This past winter citizen organizing and legal migraines stopped the proposed privatization of public land at the Memorial Centre.

But popular opposition didn't by itself stymie the proposed soccer stadium. The promoter admitted that it was “potential legal challenges” that stopped him in his tracks.

Leaving it at that would be a lost opportunity. We now have a fine chance to boost sorely-needed transparency and accountability at City Hall.

The integrity of our local government and safe custody of our public assets are at stake. Should our public parks, recreational venues, and open space be up for grabs? How do we make sure that this kind of debacle doesn't happen again?

Democratic Action

The attempt to colonize public space was a case study of business-friendly government (read, neoliberal government) trying to have its way with property held for common use.

The civic mobilization was a case study with roots going back to strategies developed by the social justice organizer Saul Alinsky, active in urban America in the fifties and sixties. This was prior to today's neoliberal era.

The neoliberal colonization of governments, beginning with Margaret Thatcher in 1979, has made Alinsky's strategies obsolete. That's because neoliberal governments do not listen to the citizenry. They bolt the doors and shutter the windows, governing as they see fit.

(City Hall watchers have noticed steady reductions in Council committee meetings, more in camera meetings, fewer opportunities for public input, and biased engagement efforts.)

To be effective in the neoliberal era, civic movements need to think beyond textbook movement-building tactics.

Citizen action needs to focus more than it has on the tools provided by our system of government itself. These tools are intended, ideally, to support transparency and accountability. They also provide consequences for sketchy behaviour.

At the local government level, citizens have access to a menu of possible actions to respond to a situation like the stadium controversy.

Citizens can demand that their local council arrange for a forensic process audit to be conducted by a neutral third-party expert in public administration.

Citizens can trigger investigations, seek accountability, and identify consequences through three direct actions:

- freedom of information requests for all records relevant to the issue.
- a code of conduct complaint to the municipality's integrity commissioner asking for review of an elected person's conduct in relation to relevant code provisions.
- consideration of the possibility of breach of trust by public officials including staff with a view to formal prosecution.

Citizens can also apply for investigations by the provincial ombudsman. Or through judicial review.

The stadium controversy demonstrated egregious lack of good judgement. We saw wilful ignorance of historic and legal facts. What about simple, not-up-to-the-job incompetence? Citizens could call for the following actions by city council:

- termination of the employment of the senior staff who were involved.
- a motion of censure expressing lack of confidence in the Mayor. A demand for his resignation.

Reform

The sad truth is that democratic action requires determined effort. It often requires money and lawyering up. Citizens should not have to bear these costs.

To avoid a slow-drip drain on time and resources, and endless repetition of ineffective protest, why not just elect a progressive Mayor and council by a broad-based movement to reform city hall?

They say that a change is as good as a rest. Here is an opportunity to meet new people and work in new coalitions. Successful results will certainly be worth celebrating: a more democratic city freed from mean-spirited austerity.

Reforming city hall would involve a newfound respect for democracy and the public interest. Replacement of a business-friendly government with a citizen-friendly government. Reform would require replacement of the Mayor and majority of the Council, an agenda for procedural and organizational change, and a fundamental change in the culture of civic administration.

Such a movement requires forethought and commitment. Fortunately, other Canadian municipalities demonstrate that it's possible.

The Montreal Citizens Movement (founded 1973) unseated the entrenched Drapeau administration. A Toronto reform movement elected David Crombie as Mayor in 1972 and John Sewell as Mayor in 1978. A reform coalition elected Olivia Chow in 2023. In Montreal, Valerie Plante was elected Mayor in 2017 as the leader of *Projet Montréal*. Vancouver has had a dynamic civic movement since the founding of COPE (Coalition of Progressive Electors) in 1968; it elected Larry Campbell as Mayor in 2002. Other progressive organizations such as Vision Vancouver and OneCity Vancouver have also fielded candidates for city council.

There's clear evidence of the potential for progressive movements to improve democratic life in our cities. All that's needed is a network committed to collective action; a city-wide perspective; a slate of candidates including a candidate for mayor; and a shared agenda.

A similar approach in Kingston might well work.



North King's Town Secondary Plan Approved After Long Delays

STORY BY **GREG RIDGE**



PICTURED: A key map for the North King's Town Secondary Plan detailing the areas subject to redesignation, intensification, and Cultural Heritage Studies.

Cultural Heritage Studies involve expanding the Heritage Character Area in the Montreal Street corridor to areas highlighted in the map. Additional heritage studies have been done to identify other heritage assets, including the area around McBurney Park.

The plan also has financial and implementation considerations. How does the City balance necessary capital investment with its other obligations?

CONSTITUENTS' CONCERNS

Important questions about the plan came up at a March 6th Planning Committee meeting.

There were questions about the need for fifteen-storey buildings. Why has this changed from earlier versions of the plan?

Height considerations have been changed over time due to the increasing cost and risk of development on contaminated land. The City also faces projections of population increases. At a 2023 City Council meeting, staff projected possible population increases of thirty-two per cent by 2051.

Personally, I prefer building upwards where possible instead of outwards and expanding our urban boundaries.

There were questions about the lack of parklands in the area.

The current plan would require that ten to fifteen percent of each lot of land would have some form of park or grassland. City staff hope that these lots will be utilized to create larger areas for recreation across multiple lots by combining the required parkland over multiple lots much like putting together pieces of a puzzle. There is, however, no guarantee that this would happen or that the lots would be planned and developed accordingly or even within the same period of time. With this much growth there needs to be a better plan for parks in place.

I share these concerns, emphasizing to staff that the Belle Park Restoration Master Plan also needs to start so that it can be completed in anticipation of future development.

What is New Road #1 and will that move forward?

New Road #1 is the northern part of what was the Wellington Street extension. The City has conducted several studies to determine whether this road is feasible. With approval of NKT, New Road #1 will be subject to further study under the Transportation Master Plan.

While there is a benefit of potentially activating additional commercial lots and diverting commercial vehicle traffic off Montreal Street, I remain unconvinced of its necessity. Whether or not this moves forward will depend on Council's future decisions about our traffic infrastructure.

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

I am excited about the potential of NKT. Having grown up in the area, rejuvenation is needed. There are still future opportunities for constituents and Council to provide input — for instance, in the development of our Transportation Master Plan which can address issues surrounding additional roads and active transportation.

No plan is perfect and there's not enough space within this article to touch on everything proposed in NKT. But I believe that the NKT offers us the possibility for exciting and necessary changes for the district.

AT ITS MARCH 18TH MEETING,

Kingston City Council unanimously approved the North King's Town Secondary Plan (NKT). It was long in the making. The initial community consultation and visioning exercises began in 2016. It was delayed in 2019 to reallocate staff to the Williamsville Main Street Study and further delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Work began again in 2023.

WHAT IS A SECONDARY PLAN?

A secondary plan is a specialized framework of policies focusing on one specific area of a city. In this case, the area includes the Inner Harbour and the Old Industrial lands. It borders John Counter Boulevard in the north and extends southwards to north of Queen Street. The timeline for completion is ten to fifteen years.

WHAT ARE THE FOCUSES OF THE PLAN?

The plan has five main focuses: land use, transportation, servicing, cultural heritage, and finance and implementation.

Land use focuses on rezoning multiple areas for intensification and commercial activation. For example, land near the intersections of Railway Street, Rideau Street, and Montreal Street will be rezoned on specific lots to allow for buildings up to fifteen stories (with an option to take proposals to the Committee of Adjustment for up to 20 stories). This intensification could add up to 7,380 units of housing, accommodating an additional 13,000 people.

Transportation will focus on increasing all kinds of travel through the area. This includes the addition of new sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, and active transportation networks. I'm among those who believe in walkable communities and have emphasized it during the input process.

Servicing involves ensuring that the City's infrastructure is updated to match intensification needs such as improving stormwater and sewage infrastructure. Where possible, green options for drainage will be incorporated.



King's Town Councillor **GREG RIDGE** has lived in the district for some 35 years. **If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please feel free to contact him at gridge@cityofkingston.ca.**

KFPL Updates Their Code of Conduct With an Eye to Inclusivity

STORY BY ANNE THÉRIAULT

PICTURED: KFPL CEO and Chief Librarian, Laura Carter PHOTO CREDIT: Courtesy of KFPL



When Mike* was sleeping rough on Kingston's streets,

he spent a lot of time at the Central Branch of the Kingston Frontenac Public Library (KFPL). Not only did it offer him shelter from the elements, it also gave him the chance to charge his phone, access wifi, use the washroom, and put his bags down without having to worry about them being stolen. In the long, empty hours between health appointments and meetings with case workers, Mike liked to read the library's books, use their computers, or hang out with his friends. "When you're living on the streets, it's a good place to meet up with people you know — to bring them stuff, or just be together," he says.

When asked how important the library is to the unhoused community, Mike is both succinct and emphatic: "Very."

The indispensability of the services the library provides to unhoused people is part of why there was such an outcry when, in 2016, KFPL tried to update their Patron Code of Conduct. Some of the proposed changes, which forbid things like "lingering aimlessly without using library services" and "offensive body odour", as well as "bag odour", seemed specifically aimed at unhoused library patrons. Organizations like Addiction and Mental Health Services of Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington, and the Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul, urged KFPL to reconsider. Due to the pushback, the library chose not to implement a new Patron Code of Conduct at that time, and when they began to gear up for a new code of conduct to be put into place March 31, 2025, they were determined to do better.

Laura Carter has been Chief Librarian and CEO of KFPL since 2019, and has long recognized that the key to creating inclusive library spaces lies in hearing from as many groups of people as possible. Guided by KFPL's Community Engagement Committee and their Community Engagement Policy, both of which were created after the 2016 update was shelved, she came up with an extensive plan to formulate the new code of conduct.

"This time, we had three staff info sessions even prior to launching the public engagement, discussing why we're doing this, what we're doing, what ideas they have, and how we should frame them," says Carter. "We did a board survey, and a staff survey, and then a public survey that had 1,400 people. We held drop-in sessions where people could come and share their ideas. We really tried to get feedback on our current code and what people thought was working and not working, what they might like to see."

Lack of affordable housing, the overdose crisis/drug toxicity crisis, and cuts to services for marginalized groups have left many without safe spaces to go to during the day. Often they'll end up at the library."

Some of the changes that came about as a result of these consultations include the removal of clauses from the current Patron Code of Conduct that prohibit loitering and allow the library staff to conduct bag inspections on patrons, both of which could be seen as disproportionately targeting unhoused people. Other clauses that the consultation flagged were edited for clarity — for example, a clause restricting sleeping at the library was amended to include the line, "To ensure KFPL patrons are well and not in need of emergency services, staff will conduct wellness checks where there is a concern about a patron's well-being."

Part of the tension surrounding the Patron Code of Conduct, and how KFPL space is used more generally, stems from ongoing social challenges experienced by many people across Kingston. The lack of affordable housing, the overdose crisis/drug toxicity crisis, and cuts to services for marginalized groups have left many without safe spaces to go to during the day. Often they'll end up at the library.

KFPL is doing its best to figure out how to be a space for all patrons. They're also trying to navigate a world in which their staff are not formally trained as social workers or crisis intervention workers, but often have to fill those roles due to the scarcity of those services in the broader community.

"Libraries are one of the only free, democratic spaces where anyone can come," says Carter. "And we truly want to welcome everyone. But that does bring some challenges. And so staff do get de-escalation training that's specific to the library context, because we do have patrons who are dealing with a lot of things — people with severe mental health issues, people with addiction issues, people experiencing homelessness. And we're not a shelter or a social service. So our focus really is on providing connections to those services that can help them."

Carter notes that all of this is fairly new ground for public libraries. When she started out as a librarian eighteen years ago, her role mostly focused on connecting people to the books or information they needed. Things have changed — and changed rapidly — since then, and she acknowledges that libraries don't always get it right when trying to figure out how to welcome patrons with various (and sometimes conflicting) needs. Still, she's hopeful that KFPL's updated Patron Code of Conduct is a positive next step, one that she sees not as a set of rules to be strictly enforced but as a conversation between the library and the public.

As for Mike, who is no longer sleeping rough but still doesn't have permanent housing and still spends many hours a week at the library, he's never felt harassed by KFPL staff. He's always felt comfortable at the library, and says that the security guards at the Central Branch have always gone out of their way to be kind to him. However, he is glad to see the rule about bag searches changed.

"We carry everything we own with us. They shouldn't just be able to go through it. People don't think about that."

Over the course of this update, though, it looks as if at least some people did.

**Last name withheld by request*

ANNE THÉRIAULT is a neighbourhood scribbler with bylines at the Walrus, the London Review of Books, Longreads, and many other outlets.

Feeding the People Through Thick and Thin

STORY BY **CAITLIN NEWEY**

ILLUSTRATION BY **GRACE DIXON**

Every Wednesday, I have a few friends over to help me prepare food. We're cooking for fifty or more people, so many hands are always appreciated. The menu varies — we've made things like pierogies, and fried rice, and, shortly before writing this, a big pot of stew — and so does the group of friends. The ingredients are provided by local farmers and community members, and the meal is served at noon on Thursday to those living rough around Belle Park.

Food is, of course, always a critical issue for the unhoused community, and here in Kingston it recently became even more so. After two murders were committed near the Integrated Care Hub (ICH) in September 2024, the City made the snap decision to immediately close down the site and surrounding area. This meant that dozens of people living there no longer had access to not only their belongings and their tents, but also ICH services like showers and the safe-use space. Perhaps most grievous of all, they no longer had access to the meals provided by Feed the People (FTP), a grassroots organization that had long been dropping off food for the ICH staff to distribute.

But in the wake of the closures, FTP stepped up to make sure that no one went hungry — even though this meant providing their own equipment, such as tables and chairs, to feed people outdoors.

“When the Hub closed down, the folks in tents were not about to leave the corner property, outside the fence line, as their lives’ belongings remained inside the tents,” says Michelle Schwarz, coordinator of FTP. “They still needed to be fed. The next day we started doing pop-up service right there on the corner.”

For three weeks after the Hub's initial closure, Schwarz was told that FTP could soon resume dropping off food to the canteen inside ICH. That never happened. Instead, FTP and the residents were evicted from the corner where they'd initially set up shop and directed to move to Belle Park. As of the time of writing, FTP is still operating out of there.

A group of volunteers — some with lived experience, some for whom this is their first time interacting with those who are unhoused or in active addiction — make and serve meals for approximately fifty people, seven days a week. The main meal varies, but there are always sandwiches, snacks, hot chocolate, and buttered bread. Initially, meals were served in the open air, but with the colder weather, money donated by local community members was used to purchase a portable carport, and meals over the winter were served and eaten indoors. There is an immediate feeling of camaraderie upon entering the tent — smiles are shared and food is passed around, mittens, socks, and blankets are handed out, and hugs provided as needed.

I first began cooking for the unhoused members of our community during the initial COVID lockdowns, when another local organization, Loving Hands, put out a call for home cooks on social media. As I am an avid cook and someone who likes to help people in a way that feels tangible, I jumped at the chance and began making lunches for 35-40 people every other week from my home; I continued this for a year or so, until communal spaces were opened back up.

While I very much enjoyed the cooking aspect, I longed for a more direct connection with those I was feeding. Several years later, I began working at Tipi Moza, a transitional home for unhoused Indigenous people; it was while I was employed there that I saw Feed the People's call for volunteers, and was given approval by my superior to have residents of Tipi Moza prepare the meals for the encampment with me every Thursday. Friends of the residents, some of them unhoused, were welcome to join us in the kitchen.

There is an immediate feeling of camaraderie upon entering the tent — smiles are shared and food is passed around, mittens, socks, and blankets are handed out, and hugs provided as needed.”

When I ended my employment at Tipi Moza, I kept up with the weekly lunches, cooking again from my home kitchen. I do, however, greatly miss cooking with those I'm feeding and am hoping to secure a larger, separate space in the near future from which to do this. Often when people are unhoused, or formerly so, there is a great lack of self-worth and confidence; learning new skills like cooking and working together to accomplish a goal are valuable on many levels.

The news from home and around the world can feel so heavy and overwhelming right now, and I know that many people believe that their individual actions can't make a difference. But when we combine all those individual actions together, real change can happen. This doesn't need to be a commitment as big as cooking a meal for fifty people once a week — it can be as small as smiling and saying hello to someone you see sitting on the sidewalk downtown, letting them know that you see them as a human being and not as a “homeless problem”.

If you are interested in donating to Feed the People, e-transfers can be sent to Mike.schwarz@kingston.net. For any questions or other offers of assistance, please contact Michelle Schwarz at (613) 770-6333.



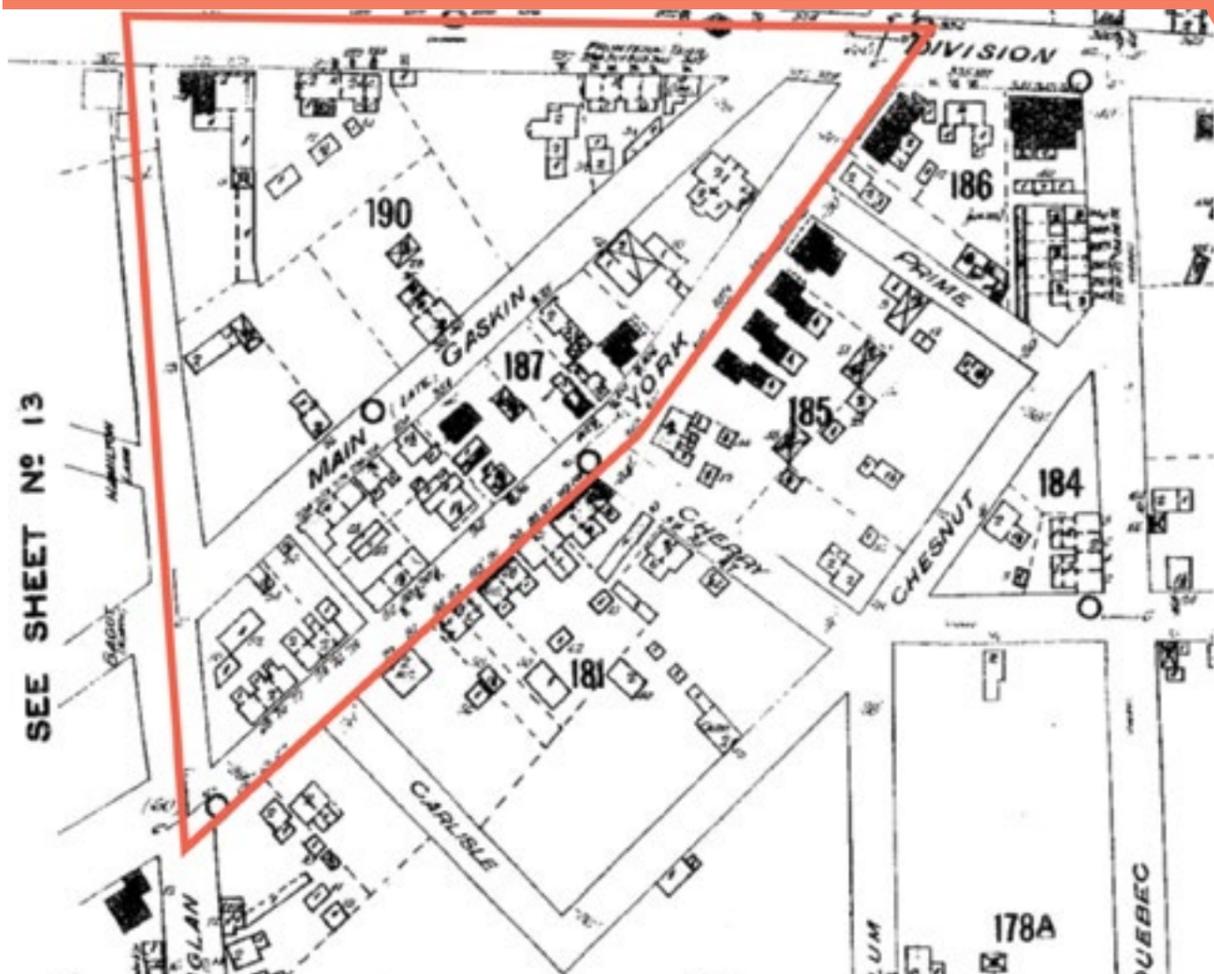
CAITLIN NEWEY is a many-talented, compassionate being who lives in the Kingscourt area.



A Forgotten Village, A Thriving Community

Beneath Picardville's surface lies a colourful past

STORY BY **SAM GRAY**



Picardville has not always had a reputation as a hospitable and friendly community — in fact, for much of its history, it was anything but welcoming.”

Kingston is a small city with a big history.

Decorated with its historic churches, limestone masonry, and intricate street layouts, which at times feel as though they were deliberately designed to cause headaches, the city holds numerous untold stories. Reminders of Kingston's roots are present in the stately stone buildings, old boarding houses turned into gorgeous homes, and, yes, the street layouts.

Like Kingston, the historic neighbourhood of Picardville has a rich past that exists just beneath the surface of the thriving family-friendly community that it is today. Geographically, Picardville is a small area consisting of Main Street sectioned off by Division Street, York Street, and Raglan Road. The former George and Green Streets, which once connected Main Street with Raglan Road and Division Street by two roads resembling a “T”, have since been converted into residences.

Yet Picardville has not always had a reputation as a hospitable and friendly community — in fact, for much of its history, it was anything but welcoming.

The village was founded in 1810 when Jean Baptiste des Trois Maisons, dit Picard, purchased the land from Molly Brant's daughter with the intention to subdivide it into building lots. Known early on as the French Village, residents of Picardville in those days consisted of labourers, washerwomen, carters, and tavern-frequenters. Laura Murray, a local historian and professor of English at Queen's University, has described the neighbourhood's reputation for trouble. In 1839, a man died “in consequence of a

wound, received in a scuffle in the French Village,” and in 1847, two individuals were reported to have died from “excessive drinking.”

Jeanette Ione Rice, whose Master's thesis examined historical land development processes in Kingston, has also shed light on Picardville's seedy reputation: “Throughout the 1840s and 1850s,” she wrote, “news items and letters to the editor advocated that the city ‘cleanse itself of this leprous spot.’” By 1858, so debauched and derelict was its reputation that editors at the *Daily British Whig Standard* called for the French Village to be “set on fire and burnt up.”

Laura Jean Cameron, a historical geographer at Queen's University and a resident of former Picardville, is intimately familiar with the village's past. Her investigation of Picardville's curious history began when she was looking to buy what is now her house in the neighbourhood. “Confusing as it may sound, the City of Kingston had the house listed as a street,” she recalls. Intrigued, she found evidence of the missing George and Green Streets — the latter of which ran adjacent to her home on Main Street. “It is fascinating,” Cameron says, “Picardville being so small yet having such a name for itself”.

Today, Picardville has a different story to tell. The whisper of forgotten history is present in modernized boarding houses, refurbished residences, and the Bishop's Folly — the magnificent stone building at the corner of Main Street and Division Street, which was built by Archdeacon George Okill Stuart in 1861. But aside from the physical changes, the best outcome of the modernization of Picardville is the flourishing community. Picardville, once an area known for scandal and violence, is now a tightly knit and welcoming neighbourhood with deep community values.

Catherine Lord moved near former Picardville in 2007. As a French-speaking person, Lord is “constantly reminded that I'm not from here, but somehow in this neighbourhood, thanks to the community spirit, I did not feel that.” This is the spirit of the Picardville neighbourhood today. Lord continued to describe the many neighbourhood gatherings that made her feel “that this is my community, too.” Some of these include gatherings at her and her neighbours' homes, where she made meaningful connections and fostered closer ties with her new community. She fondly recalls a Canada Day celebration in 2010 held on Main Street — the heart of Picardville. What began as a small event quickly grew into a community-wide celebration complete with games, a parade, and live music. This event sparked a tradition of social gatherings, and during the COVID-19 pandemic, residents continued to gather, holding socially distanced events such as a choreographed dance party in the summer of 2020.

Cameron also partook in the Canada Day festivities then, melding her interest in the village's past with her love for the community's present by creating a poster about the area's history. Adorned with maps and an information sheet, she used this to share the fascinating history that lies beneath the community's surface.

Picardville shows how the even most precarious of places can become a thriving community. It makes one wonder what history might lie beneath their front door.

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SAM GRAY, a graduate at St. Lawrence College in the School of Business, grew up in the heritage town of Perth, Ontario, and is an avid coffee drinker.

Iftar at 99 York

Collaboration between
**SADIQA DE MEIJER AND ATTENDEES OF AN
 IFTAR AT 99 YORK ST. IN MARCH 2025**

Pulling the room's chairs out in a widening circle,
 repeating names: it's with a *ch*, it means the sickle moon.
 Foil-wrapped dishes, gleaming cans of Orange Cream Coke Zero.
 Quick glances at the time on glowing phones.

In Urdu they say children fast with half their jaw.
 My father would do magic tricks to make the waiting shorter.
 That longing to hear the azan in Tashkent.
 The minute comes: Medjool are thick, Sukkari dates are sweeter.

The conversation is the whole room, is in pockets.
 Bowls of Algerian lentil stew, plates of pakoras, shepherd's pie.
 They won't divest, they said that it would only be symbolic.
 The moon's a symbol and it makes the tides.

Where to find fatty meat in this city? Yogurt turns everything good.
 Tea is steeped, poured into mugs. A circle moving fluidly apart
 into the neighbourhood's slush-edged streets. In shadows,
 early crocuses, holding their saffron hearts.

Iftar is the evening meal eaten during Ramadan, and is often an occasion for friends, neighbours, and strangers to come together. This poem was written based on an Iftar that took place at Kingston Community House in March, and is a community poem in the sense that it consists partly of fragments of the night's conversation. My thanks to everyone who attended for their contributions.



This Be The Verse is *The Skeleton Press's* poetry page. Each issue features an original poem by a local poet, selected (or occasionally written) by Kingston/Katarokwi Poet Laureate **SADIQA DE MEIJER**. SUBMISSIONS ARE OPEN for the next issue, themed NEIGHBOURHOOD FOOD. Please send up to three poems for consideration to ygkpoetlaureate@gmail.com by July 15th 2025.

The BBQ Committee

STORY BY HAZEL TAYLOR-QUICK PHOTOGRAPHY BY AL BERGERON

WE'RE NOT A CHURCH, A CHARITY, OR AN ORGANIZATION — WE ARE TRULY A DIS-ORGANIZATION". — KRISTA STARES & JOHN CASNIG



I first met the BBQ Committee for an interview about tackling community fractures. I had no idea what to expect. All I knew was that the name was a built-in excuse to take a step back. Sorry, I can't make it to your mentally-exhausting, emotionally draining Zoom call; I have a committee meeting. I had no way to expect the jaw-dropping work they put into creating community.

The core of the BBQ Committee is Krista Stares and John Casnig, who've opened their doors (literally and figuratively) to hundreds of people over the years, creating, in every meaning of the word, a home. And the Committee is deeply bound to the idea of relational (not transactional) community. They make space for utter strangers to reach out, and play, and drink warm beverages and grin together. Maybe it's volleyball. Or Sunday dinners. Or tobogganing. Or Halloween toy giveaways. Or movie nights. Or moonwalks. Or animal rescues. It's not about what's happening. However small and informal, it's about connecting never-to-be-again-strangers.

The BBQ Committee (and its many related and interwoven bodies) takes care of over 1,800 people, from over 62 countries, speaking umpteen languages, with dozens of religious beliefs and all the full spectrum of gender and sexuality identities. All of this in informal Kingston gatherings and acts of kindness.

They witnessed how our institutions do not provide the support people need, and resolved to foster that support within communities. That is how the Committee began in 2006, as a quasi-

public extension of a support network outside of institutions, originally intended for international students struggling with isolation, culture-shock and a systemic/societal lack of support. Since then, and in response to demand, it has broadened its micellial-like network further, to Kingston individuals of all ages and backgrounds, visitors and newcomers.

When I asked what kind of activist organization they ran, John and Krista laughed. "We're not a church, a charity, or an organization — we are truly a dis-organization". A *dis*-organization with one defining rule: mutual respect and tolerance. "It is simply an extension of our home".

If you strike up a conversation with Krista or John, you will undoubtedly find yourself grounded and uplifted. They might tell you about how they brought a prank protest outside the window of a woman in quarantine during the lockdowns on her 84th birthday: "Free Norma!" — cars honking in laughing support. Or helping international students navigate grocery stores, and tackle governmental and institutional bureaucracy. Maybe you will hear stories of the slow disintegration of individuals' prejudice over the course of decades. Or you might learn of the late night phone calls, bringing 3 a.m. omelets to a caregiver of the dying, editing resumes, making COVID masks, and bringing meals to hungry house-bound humans.

They tell me it's too easy to interact with only people who are like-minded. That, in current times, people's sense of community is unravelling. Isolation is exceedingly hard to fight, what with a digitizing world prizing private success. It's easy to

get sucked down pixelated rabbit holes, order meals to door-steps, pull on headphones: tune out the world. But the Committee believes that community isn't some saccharine homogeneous ideal found in coloured lights and printed text, it's people, those around you, wherever you are.

"We need to start speaking to each other. There are 8 billion strangers to fear in the world, or there are 8 billion potential friends to embrace."

They tell me that kindness is a necessity of the human spirit. Open smiles to neighbours, taking out their recycling when they've missed it. It's part of who we are, and who we need to be. To bake bread with someone you met last week and bring it to a friend who hasn't been outside since last month. Play music on your porch and chat up whoever slows their step. Because this is how we all stay afloat, in the midst of the many crises. We make a community, outside of crumbling institutions and bureaucracy. It's homemade and organic.

They once did it all. Now, after a life-changing accident in 2023 that all but ended the Committee's once-daily activities, they can only do a fraction: "only what is most needed".

John tells me he's not looking for more members; he's looking for more groups. More spaces for strangers to connect. A more fluid society, informal, dis-organized, or spontaneous. Here's their advice:

Go grab a volleyball. Or a Frisbee. Or just some snacks. Find a park and start up a game, inviting passers-by to join. Play with people you've never met. And when you go to the grocery store, talk to workers and shoppers like you already know them. Chat them up, and soon you won't be doing chores, you'll be seeing friends. Keep your fences down and your doors open. Create your own ramshackle community.

Talk to strangers.



HAZEL TAYLOR-QUICK
(They/She + E/Em) is a 17-year old zine-maker, canoe-tripper and chicken-enthusiast, and may alternatively be addressed as "Benevolent Dungeon-Master". In life, e enjoys savouring the mundane, from the beauty of dust bunnies, to the first sip of warm tea, to the final notes of a good song.

Yellow House Nurtures Joy for QTBIPOC Student Communities

STORY BY **TIANNA EDWARDS** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **KING-DAVID OLAJUWON**

I grew up in Kingston. I was often the only Black girl in class and craved connection to my culture and community outside of my immediate family. Once I was a teenager and it was time to apply to university, I knew I wanted to live somewhere that I could blend in. Somewhere I could find good Jamaican food and a stylist that knew what to do with my textured hair. I was tired of being the spokesperson of my culture by default due to lack of representation.

When I moved away, I told my parents I wouldn't move back. Twenty years later, I am proving my seventeen-year-old self wrong; I am living in Kingston and working at Queen's University. And while Queen's University continues to reflect the population of Kingston, which is still predominantly white, I get the pleasure of supporting students facing challenges on campus that my younger self would have experienced if I had chosen to stay in town.

I work as the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Coordinator at the Yellow House Student Centre for Equity and Inclusion. A place where Queer, and/or Trans, and/or Black, and/or Indigenous, and/or Students of Colour come to build community, feel empowered and celebrate their culture and identities. In this role, I get to bridge the identity-affirming gaps that can be found when students are away from the comforts of home.

Founded in 2019, and officially launched in 2020, Yellow House — a reference to its first location, a yellow cottage on Stuart Street — is a by-product of a committee that was formed to address acts of racism and discrimination on campus. In the spring of 2017, the Principal's Implementation Committee on Racism, Diversity, and Inclusion (PICRDI) released a report to make campus a more inclusive space, including a centre that represents these efforts.



I'VE HEARD MANY STUDENTS SHARE THAT YELLOW HOUSE HAS SAVED THEIR UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE AND NURTURED MEANINGFUL FRIENDSHIPS."

Our initial small but mighty team — Director Deanna Galeano, Admin Assistant Saranya Navaratnam, and myself — started connecting with student clubs virtually during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022 we were back on campus connecting in person.

What Yellow House has managed to accomplish over the past five years is hard to put into words. The way I've witnessed students grow into the most authentic, vibrant versions of themselves and pay it forward by affirming and encouraging their peers has been one of my greatest joys.

Yellow House is a proactive effort to allow QTBIPOC student communities to come together not just in challenging times but for connections to be rooted in joy. If something inflammatory happens on campus, the connections are established, making it easier to find support, resources, and peer guidance.

With the addition of a Sexual and Gender Diversity Advisor, Kel Martin, in 2021, the team launched various programs that address the nuances of many queer and students of colour.

Some of our more popular programs are the Solidarity Swims and Black Swims, both collaborations with Queen's Athletics and Recreation Centre which provides Yellow House private access to their pool.

The Solidarity Swims welcome gender-diverse students and community (and their invited loved ones) to swim together in an affirming and caring space.

Black Swims address the systemic and historic barriers that many Black folk experience when it comes to swimming by offering free swim lessons to Black students (staff, faculty and community members pay a small fee) by predominantly Black instructors as well as free access to the pool for Black community and invited loved ones of any background to join for a free swim. These swims create an environment in which Black students, staff, faculty and community members can come together with one common goal.

Roots and Recipes is another well-liked program that provides students with meals that are healthy and free, while also introducing to or reuniting them



with culinary traditions from all over the world. It aims to create a culinary experience that gives BI-PoC students a taste of the world.

In the spring of 2024, the Gender Diverse Wellness retreat gathered a group of gender diverse students and selected community members together to explore nature and practice wellness rituals. The retreat was so successful that registrants have nearly doubled for its second annual gathering this spring.

Our Black at Queen's programming creates many opportunities for Black students to connect with each other, Black faculty and community members — a highlight being the Black Welcome that gathers the community to connect at the beginning of the academic year.

Beyond our programming, our physical spaces allow various QTBIPOC student communities to find each other, empower one another and enrich their university experiences. I've heard many students share that Yellow House has saved their university experience and nurtured meaningful friendships.

My role at the Yellow House has healed my initial relationship with this city. It's shown me the importance and long-lasting impact of intentional community building. I am grateful to be in a space that continues to centre the wellness of underserved student communities.



TIANNA EDWARDS is an Equity, Diversity, Inclusion Coordinator at Queen's University, host of podcast, *Kingston, The Black Experience* and the creator/author of a blog, keepupwithkingston.com. She lives in Kingston with her husband and two daughters.

Youth Gatherings: KSS Student Art & Writings

From mosques to parks to waterfronts, these are the places that hold our memories and make us feel at home

STORY AND ILLUSTRATIONS BY **KSS STUDENT CONTRIBUTORS**

A Place of Faith and Friendship

Rawan K., Grade 10 | Islamic Centre of Kingston

On Sydenham Road, where the mosque is located, Strive, a Muslim youth organization, meets biweekly on Fridays. It is the perfect spot to connect with other Muslim teens and learn more about my religion. This gathering is especially meaningful to me because I used to live in a very isolated area before moving to Kingston, where youth gatherings like this didn't exist. Now, I have found a community that feels like home.

I still remember the first time I attended the group. It was midwinter, and I only knew one or two people there. But the warmth of the community, the shared prayers, and the insightful lectures that Imam Abu Bakr Mulla gave felt so comforting.



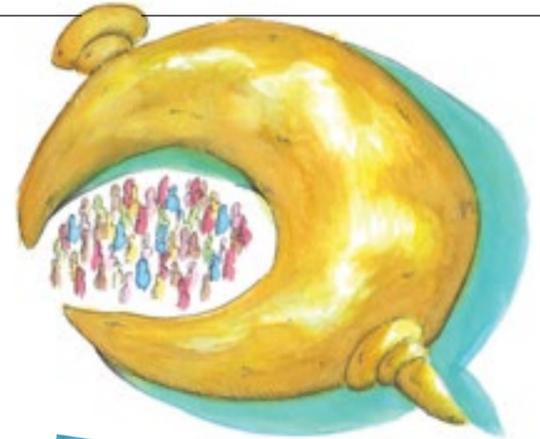
The Crescent That Holds Us

Lujain K., Grade 9 | Islamic Centre of Kingston

The mosque is like a crescent that transforms the shiny, cold, metallic moon into warm, golden arms that encompass all those who walk through its doors. In the mosque, I see rich multifariousness at every turn — faces from Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and America — and feel the power the building holds, unifying tethered communities.

This place, and the people within it, feel like burning stars in the sky with the moon, each one shining individually, yet glowing brighter in crafting a gorgeous constellation.

It is a place where I go to learn and teach others, sharing our light with everybody around us. It is a haven of safety and indiscriminate togetherness. It is the crescent within which I can glow amongst the light of others.



Summer at the Basin

Carmen A. O., Grade 9 | Confederation Basin

Growing up in Kingston, it has been a summertime tradition for my family to go out for gelato after dinner and go to Confederation Basin. Here, we'd walk by the water and look out at the boats in the marina, and see the rest of the community sitting in the park and enjoying quality time with their friends and family. As a kid, I loved climbing on the miniature "Engine 1905" at the park or running after seagulls by the water with my siblings.

Now that I'm older, Confederation Basin is still a place I go with my friends. After shopping downtown we'll go relax for a few hours by the water, and maybe get Mio Gelato. Many of my summer memories have been made here, and I am sure many more are still to come.



The Park That Raised Us

Charlie B., Grade 10 | Maple Elementary Park

My goal with this art piece was to show a place people gather that is close to my heart: Maple Elementary Park. During the day the park is used by school children, but when the school day ends it becomes a hangout spot for people of all ages. Whether it's basketball, hanging out with friends, or any other activities, it is a staple in the Greenwood Park community.

This park is close to me both because I used to go to school there, and because it is the main spot where my friends and I hang out. Every part of this park holds a memory, some old, some new. It was the place where I met my friends, the place we grew close to one another, and the place where we still share laughs.



Where We Gather

Izzy B., Arya B., Miley G., Grade 10 | Skeleton Park and Memorial Centre

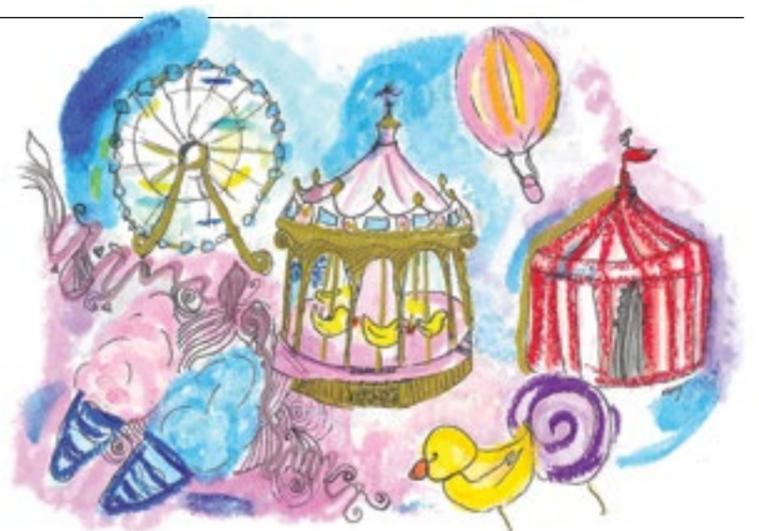
Beneath the trees, the music plays,
Guitars hum in golden haze.
Hands keep time, feet find the beat,
Laughter rises in the heat.

Sticky fingers, ticket stubs,
Rushing heartbeats, carousel thuds.
We know these nights will fade away,
But still, we try to make them stay.

We sit on grass, the nights drift by,
Songs and stories, open sky.
A moment held, a fleeting sound,
But here, together, we are found.

These places hold the past we share,
In music, lights, and summer air.
Not just a park, not just a fair —
But home, and us, and memories there.

The fair arrives, the summer fades,
Lights reflect in window shades.
The Ferris wheel spins us high,
Our voices tangled in the sky.





Migratory Birds and the Gathering Sun

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY HILBERT BUIST

Right now, there's a major international conference being held in Kingston. Participants have flown in from places as far away as South America to meet all over the city. Most of the assemblies go unnoticed, under our noses and over our heads. It's the great spring bird migration!

Beginning in March, birds begin to fly north. Red-winged blackbirds are among the first to arrive, vying for the best cattails. They are followed by raptors, waterfowl and sparrows. By April, the sun, warming the soil, pushes sugars through shrubs and trees, causing them to burst into leaves and flowers. The sun is also waking up insects who are taking advantage of the new food. Eggs, larvae, and moths are perfect protein packets for baby birds. Without the foraging services of birds, we would suffer an insect apocalypse, causing an ecological collapse. By the end of May most of the migratory birds will have arrived. An estimated 3 billion birds across more than 400 species fly into Canada each year.

Sitting on the confluence of a lake and two rivers, and inside the western edge of the Atlantic migratory flyway, Kingston is an ideal place for birds to refuel or stay. Waterways, wetlands, surrounding forests, and pasturelands make rich ecosystems for nesting birds. Within the city, along with our resi-

dent birds, we see returning gulls, terns, hummingbirds, flickers, falcons, swallows, wrens, catbirds, warblers, sparrows, orioles, finches, and others. Ornithologists believe that Kingston plays host to well over a million migratory birds.

Migration comes at a great cost with high risks and great gains. Why migrate? There are two main drivers of migration: food and length of daylight.

One individual bird, Yellow Warbler AA5505 was captured in northwest Colombia, South America, April 13, 2017, and then recaptured June 24, 2017, at Lansing, New York. Yellow warblers are gregarious, inquisitive tiny yellow neotropical birds with a vast breeding range from Appalachia to Alaska. It is estimated that 53 million of their total population of 97 million come into Canada. Belle Park is an excellent place to experience yellow warblers. The male adult is deep yellow with chestnut streaks on its breast. Even if you've never seen a yellow warbler, you probably have heard it sing, "sweet, sweet, sweet, I'm so sweet!" The females are a duller version to the male's colouring. Both have a dark beak and striking black eyes. By inverse proportion to the size of their breeding range, their non-breeding range is small. It is comprised of Central America and the northern region of South America — areas known for growing coffee and chocolate.

Back in late August, AA5505 left New York to arrive in South America along with its kin, now with juveniles in tow, as coffee and chocolate beans are maturing for the first harvest. Plantations rely on warblers and other birds to feed on the insect pests of their crops. Not surprisingly, yellow warblers leave in April after a smaller second harvest, coinciding for a competition with other birds for food and breeding space.

Within the city, along with our resident birds, we see returning gulls, terns, hummingbirds, flickers, falcons, swallows, wrens, catbirds, warblers, sparrows, orioles, finches, and others."

Lengthening of days brings neural changes in the brain controlling hunger, signaling that the bird must eat prior to migration. Migratory birds gain as much as 50% of their normal weight, storing the fat under the skin in the abdominal cavity affecting flight muscles, allowing them long periods in the air with minimal fatigue. Yellow warblers range in weight between 9 to 11 grams, or a handful of paperclips. When AA5505 left Colombia, it came in at a hefty 12.6 grams, or twenty-five paper clips. Its journey north included a nonstop 24-hour flight across the Gulf of Mexico, a distance of about 800 km to Florida. That wasn't its only obstacle. It had to avoid many others: crashing into human-made structures, getting off-course due to city lights, and getting caught in stormy weather. It also had to flee predators. Flying at night and foraging by day, AA5505 was believed to have made the trip in three weeks and travelled close to 6,000 kms, making a circuitous route as it searched for familiar foraging sites. When it was recaptured, it weighed 10 grams, having lost the equivalent of five paper clips. Upon arrival in New York, it set straight to work establishing territory, mating, nest building and raising young.

In Colombia, yellow warbler is known as *reinita dorada*, literally "little golden queen." The wonder of *Reinita Dorada* is that it follows the lengthening of days and warming sun and the burgeoning insect population northward.

It's spring! Humans also follow the sun. As you gather with friends over a coffee, remember to raise your mug to the little sun bird who eats thousands of pests to make your coffee possible.

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HILBERT BUIST is a part-time pastry chef, part-time wildlife guide, and a full-time nature noticer.



The Return of the Neighbourhood Dream Diary

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY **HALEY SARFELD**

This article is a sequel to 'Dream Diary', which appeared in The Skeleton Press Issue 15, 'Neighbourhood Rest', Winter 2024.

It's February and my dreams are becoming stressful again. Loved ones die, my hair falls out in clumps, I kiss the wrong person, I fall asleep for five years and nobody bothers to wake me up. I'm in a play and don't know my lines, but then I read the script and am devastated to find that there are no lines for me. So I get out of bed, print more "DO YOU DREAM ABOUT THIS PLACE?" posters, and embark on another neighbourhood dream diary.

The first dream-mail I received after last winter's article was from Hannah Kaufman. Hannah's dreams tend not to have discernible settings, but she recalls one where she was hiking with a close friend somewhere that resembled both Richardson Beach and Gould Lake. "It was a chilly and gorgeous fall day. We got to a little dock and started talking about not having our swimsuits, and suddenly she dove into the water, shoes, clothes and all. She surfaced as happy as a clam."

Hannah wonders why people don't talk more about their dreams. "Perhaps it is because they are quite personal but puzzling, so to speak of them might reveal something we don't even understand ourselves, or could be misunderstood which could leave us vulnerable," she suggests. "I used to excitedly tell someone, 'I had a dream about you last night! You/we were...' only to be met with complete disinterest. Perhaps that's because our dreams are about us, not about the other person?"

"I used to excitedly tell someone, 'I had a dream about you last night!', only to be met with complete disinterest. Perhaps that's because our dreams are about us, not about the other person?"

In late autumn, another dreamer reached out. "My dream started out in a dark place," wrote Danielle Coles. "There was rubble and we were initially facing a parking garage where you could see multiple humans in each section laying on the ground. Someone came up to me and said they needed support with fixing up the garage to create more adequate housing for the people staying there. They had pulley systems that brought down items to the people."

The scene shifted suddenly, as dreams tend to do, and Danielle found herself on a ship with her friend Katie's boyfriend. "At one point, he got up on the ledge of the boat to get a better look at something, and then the wind pulled him into the sea." It was dream-Danielle who had to break the news to Katie. "She grabbed me, with tears filling her eyes, and said, 'Please bring him back to me.' I left immediately and headed to the ship. Somehow I ended up in a hospital, and he was there, and I remember feeling such relief. I knew if I came back without him it would have been a really difficult situation for my friend to process."



Recently, another dream about friendship and housing — though no water submersion this time — emerged by algorithmic providence. When Clelia Scala commented on one of my dream-seeking posts online, Pamela Ann Cornell replied, "Oddly enough, Clelia, I had a dream about you just a couple of nights ago. In it, I was walking along a dirt road, with woods on one side and a stream, with a waterfall, on the other. At the end of the road was a two-storey unpainted cedar house, with a wrap-around veranda. All around it were ponds and gardens. Sunlight filtered through all the trees and cast a green glow over everything. You greeted me, and explained that while you had inherited the property, you didn't live there, because you rented it to the tenants who had lived there for decades — a vigorous couple in their seventies.

You said you visited whenever you needed to feel peaceful, and added that I was welcome to immerse myself in the ambience, too. That dream was a soothing antidote to the disquiet seeping across the border...To clarify, you weren't expecting the couple to pay rent, because you regarded it as their home, for as long as they could manage."

Pamela and Clelia, who have known each other for years, formed a special bond recently when their cats both struggled with kidney disease. "This was a dream about meeting needs," writes Pamela, "which is what you did when you passed along for Angus, the meds that had prolonged Marmalade's life. Isn't it strange how our subconscious takes disparate details from our daily lives, and concocts a little story?"

Clelia agrees. "It is so strange how our minds work things out in our dreams — how things that we assume we have thought through play out in our dreams."

Meanwhile, my friend Rysia is moving back to Kingston this spring, and her dreams are working overtime to find housing. "In my dream, I am looking for an apartment and I'm searching and I'm searching, but I can't find a place to live. I settle down in the Food Basics, sleeping behind the cereal boxes. When I wake up, I remember that time that the Food Basics doors automatically unlocked on a holiday and shoppers came in and left money on the tills, even with no cashiers on shift."

I remember reading about this — Family Day 2019 at Barrack Street. People moved gently, took what they needed, left cash and IOUs. Even though it happened in real life, the events of that day seemed almost dreamlike — a waking dream about meeting needs.

HALEY SARFELD (she/they) is a writer, composer-lyricist, and theatre critic who loves to sleep in late. Tell Haley about your dreams: lucid.skeletons@gmail.com.

PRESENTS: WITCH HAZEL

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WITCH HAZEL

The hit independent, Kingston-born comic book series is going BIG this summer! The new issue of Witch Hazel hits comic shops worldwide this August. But that's not all! Witch Hazel will also be taking over the Elm Café this September with a magical art installation and live reading. Don't miss it!

WITCH HAZEL © COLTON FOX & BEIGE BLUM | FOLLOW @COLTONTHEFOX & ICETAHO FOR MORE!

Gathering for Games

Building community through play

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY **ABBIE MIOLÉE**

MINOTAUR GAME DAYS/NIGHTS

Working at Minotaur Games and Gifts, I've witnessed firsthand how board games bring people together and strengthen community ties. People who might otherwise never speak to one another find themselves laughing, sharing stories, and forming new friendships at our back table to play games like *Ticket to Ride*, *Scrabble*, *Codenames*, and *Catan*.

Minotaur hosts Game Days every Sunday from 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Game Nights on Thursdays from 5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. These events are open to everyone — feel free to bring a friend, but if not, you'll probably make one while you're here!

INTRO TO D&D SESSIONS AT MINOTAUR

My game-loving co-worker, Henry, runs monthly introductory *Dungeons & Dragons* (D&D) sessions at Minotaur for anyone new to the fantasy role-playing world. These beginner-friendly sessions are part of a continuing storyline known as *Shadeblight Marsh*, and you can find upcoming adventure dates on the Minotaur Games and Gifts Facebook page.

From what I've heard, D&D is a powerful way to connect with others, build lasting memories, and keep the inner child alive. Henry put it best when he said, "There will be people still talking about D&D sessions they had like 20 years ago." I was struck by the idea that certain games, especially those involving world-building and role-playing, can create memorable shared experiences that stay with people for life.

GAMES AND THE MIND

Archaeological records show that humans have been playing games for several millennia, with the oldest known playable board game, *The Royal Game of Ur*, dating back approximately 4,500 years. Inspired by the role of games in humanity, I asked Henry what he thought. He replied, "Being human, we've been figuring out puzzles for millennia — and games are often just that."

Our conversation moved into the impact of games on creativity, imagination, and communication. Henry explained that "If [the game] is something free-form like D&D where you're all deciding actions and plots together, you're engaging with the creative parts of your brain...If you're playing something like *Catan* where you're trading, now you're practising interpersonal skills... In [social deduction games] you're developing your intuition skills, watching people's reactions to see if they're lying, and if you're the bad guy, you're practising how to chameleon things to look innocent."

Henry concluded that "there's lots of things that are firing neurons, so kids and adults can benefit from board games." Games challenge the adolescent and adult mind, they are tools for mental exercise, emotional development, and creative growth.



GAMES BUILD BRIDGES BETWEEN STRANGERS, WITH FRIENDSHIP MEETING IN THE MIDDLE.

QUEER BOARD GAME NIGHT AT NEXUS

Cherished as one of Kingston's best sources for comics and games, Nexus hosts a variety of events including Queer Board Game Night on the last Thursday of every month from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. One of Nexus' friendly staff members, Connor, expressed "we're really happy to provide an open and welcoming space... everyone's always having a good time when they come out."

The monthly event started during Pride Week of 2022, and has offered a safe and lively space for queer folks to enjoy each other's company over a game ever since. The three most popular games at Queer Board Game Night are *Lovecraft Letter*, *Camel Up*, and *The Gang*. The welcoming atmosphere ensures that newcomers feel comfortable and included.

Throughout the month, Nexus also hosts Open Miniature Wargaming, Pokémon League, Yu-Gi-Oh!, and other social gaming events. You can learn more about Nexus and their various events at kingstonnexus.ca.

PLAY AT SKELETON PARK

Skeleton Park is a very special and vibrant place. It's a hub for music, art, poetry, journalism, gardening, activism, and much more. What really brings it to life, though, are the children at play. As kids run and hide, chase and freeze, the soil breathes beneath their feet, and the trees carry the echoes of laughter

in their roots. My friend Jasper also holds the space dear to their heart, reflecting that "a fun example of how [games at Skeleton Park] build community is when there's a game of manhunt with a ton of kids, and more neighbourhood kids join in even if they don't know the others." Games build bridges between strangers, with friendship meeting in the middle.

During a potluck at Next Church, I asked Jasper's cousin, Oscar, what his favourite game at Skeleton Park is. "Manhunt," he answered, "but Grounders is second." I asked, "What's Grounders?" to which he responded, "what's breathing?" Clearly, I had a lot to learn. He kindly explained the rules, which revolve around the park's spider web climbing structure.

That conversation led to a deeper one about children having freedom to navigate risk through play. Challenging games and equipment like the spider tower help kids develop social skills and exercise their imagination, while having a safe space to discover their own boundaries and expand their comfort zones — all while having fun.

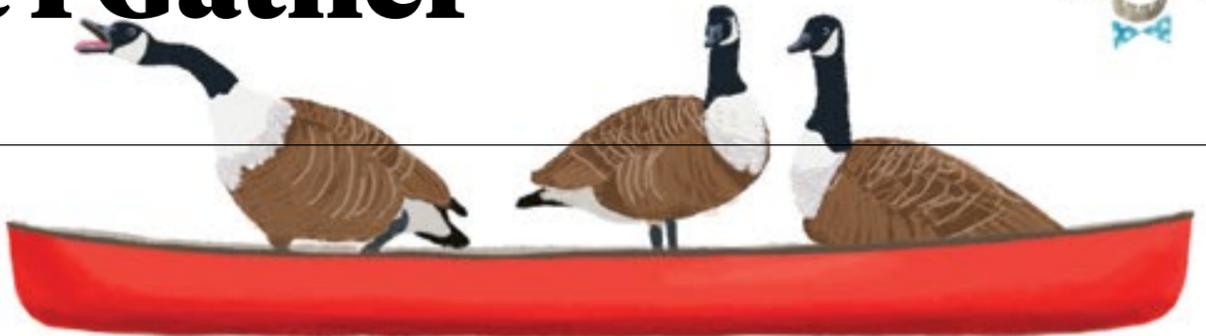


ABBIE MIOLÉE (aka Abbie Louise) is a Kingston-based musician, artist, writer, and community organizer from Atlanta, Georgia. She is a strong believer in the power of the arts to connect hearts and open minds. Abbie uses creativity as a medium of community building and change making.

From What I Gather

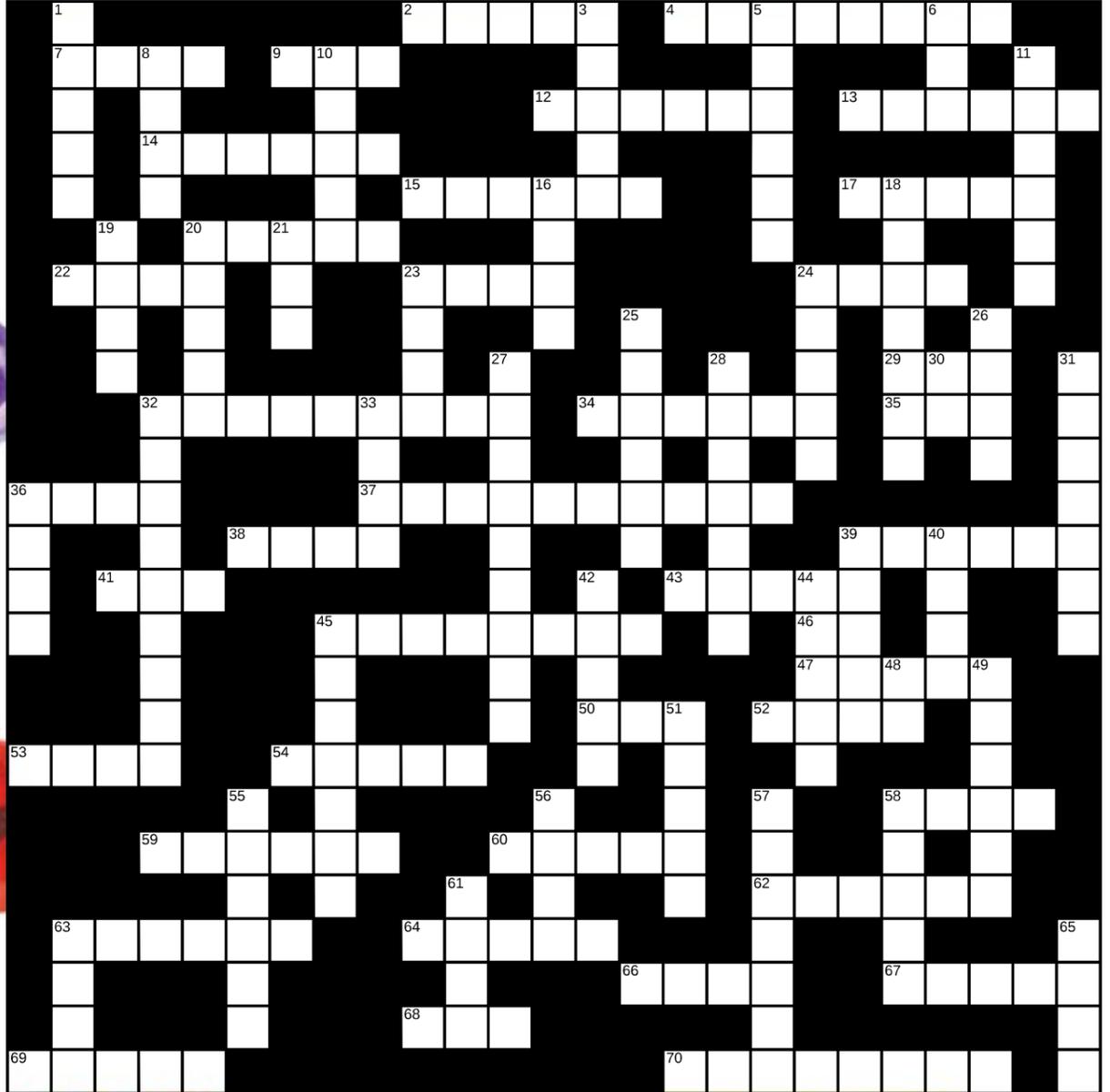


PUZZLE BY **HALEY SARFELD**
ILLUSTRATION BY **JILL GLATT**

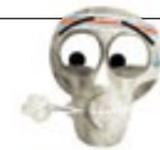


- ACROSS**
- 2 When given a bracelet, I _____ed my hands together in delight
 - 4 The _____ Centre has an off-leash park for 23 across
 - 7 Grumpy utterance from the porch: "Get off my _____!"
 - 9 I don't always _____ your jokes
 - 12 Where you go to buy and sell
 - 13 _____ of Legends
 - 14 Hang around without making a purchase
 - 15 The crows invited me to their _____ mystery party
 - 17 Bronze medalist's ranking
 - 20 Workers of the world, _____!
 - 22 Indoor shelter for farm animals
 - 23 See 4 across
 - 24 _____ & Oates
 - 29 Gathering place for lions
 - 32 Kool & the Gang want to _____ and have a good time
 - 34 He was still mad at me when he got on the Ferris wheel, but I'm sure he'll come _____
 - 35 When family gatherings get too loud, my dad turns off his hearing _____
 - 36 The Screening _____: Kingston's independent movie theatre
 - 37 I have a hard time _____ furniture without instructions
 - 38 "I love RKY!" "I agree; we're in the same _____"
 - 39 Extroverts tend to enjoy _____ situations
 - 41 Centre part of a wheel
 - 43 Group of bananas or grapes
 - 45 We'll be gathering for a _____ on June 21st and 22nd
 - 46 Self-help group for people who want to stop drinking
 - 47 They always play this song; it's a _____ pleaser
 - 50 Put on the kettle; I have some _____ to spill
 - 52 At the home of, en Français
 - 53 In 2021, a Revolution of the Heart took place at _____ Park
 - 54 Hillside, Riverview, Tugwood, Friendship, etc.
 - 58 _____ Moons Events hosts concerts, karaoke, and DJ nights
 - 59 Tegan and Sara want to get a little bit _____
 - 60 Could be for hair, nails, or reading poetry
 - 62 The Cranberries' question: do you have to let it _____?
 - 63 Group noun for our hissing, honking friends at Doug Fluhrer Park
 - 64 Subgenre of electronic dance music; if played too loudly, it could annoy your _____ mates
 - 66 According to our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Canadians are _____ to gather peacefully
 - 67 It's too hot to go out; let's _____ at home
 - 68 We've _____ before, but I can't remember where
 - 69 Sandy, sunny spot to gather
 - 70 Tailors and comedians gather this

- DOWN**
- 1 Birds of a feather _____ together
 - 3 Philosophy-driven sitcom *The Good* _____
 - 5 With 35 across, a system where community members exchange resources and services to support each other
 - 6 Blue Heron Books is found at the _____ Autonomous Social Centre
 - 8 I missed the bus, so I'm _____ing to work
 - 10 "It's getting late! Are you coming to the party?" "_____ually"
 - 11 A little chat among football players
 - 16 What gathers on unused possessions
 - 18 Waste collection will be a day late if there's a _____ on Monday
 - 19 Prepared food is expensive, so I _____ my own lunch
 - 20 Do this to turn a knot into a string
 - 21 In person, per Internet slang
 - 23 Brent Spiner's iconic *Star Trek* role
 - 24 A large group of people; not to be confused with the act of gathering too many things
 - 25 Netflix show where contestants may only interact through social media: *The _____*
 - 26 On a tight budget, it can be hard to make _____ meet
 - 27 I'll call you back, the _____ here is terrible
 - 28 "Did anyone show up to the ballerinas' social?" "Yes, there was great _____!"
 - 30 Funds gathered at tax time and disbursed in case of unemployment, for short
 - 31 Disney's Rapunzel movie
 - 32 Kingston _____ House can be found at 99 York Street
 - 33 You _____ what you sow
 - 36 A host may request that you _____ so they know how much food to provide
 - 39 Don't take more than your fair _____
 - 40 Short haircut or round neckline
 - 42 A political or celebratory group
 - 44 If the page isn't reloading, try clearing your _____
 - 45 I went looking for mushrooms every day but I didn't find any _____ (2 words)
 - 48 Home of the Scarecrow, Tin Man, and Cowardly Lion
 - 49 Could mean lunch or supper; either way, don't call me late for it
 - 51 That sounds like fun! May I come _____?
 - 55 Made by more than one artist, for short
 - 56 _____ = density x volume
 - 57 People do this with coins, stamps, and cool rocks
 - 58 _____: *The Gathering*
 - 61 The word "forum" comes from gatherings in this ancient city
 - 63 "Want to see the Frontenacs tonight?" "Sure, I'm _____"
 - 65 Haley and Jill are your local cruciverbalist/illustrator dream team. Together, they host Grad _____ Trivia on Thursday nights.



HALEY SARFELD AND JILL GLATT are your local cruciverbalist/illustrator dream team. Together, they host Grad Club Trivia on Thursday nights.



Find Community in Kingston's Ultimate Frisbee Scene

STORY BY KATIE FIZZELL

A local player shares how this fast-paced, inclusive sport fosters a sense of community



“Having played the sport for over twenty-five years, I've been privileged to have so many positive experiences that have helped me evolve as an athlete, friend, coach, and leader.”

Did you know that Ultimate frisbee is one of the fastest growing sports in the world? Commonly known as Ultimate, it is played in over 90 countries, and here in Kingston we have a thriving Ultimate community, with youth and summer leagues held at Caton Fields, right in our neighbourhood's backyard!

As teens in Aurora, Ontario in the 90s, my friends and I didn't know much about Ultimate, but we thought tossing a disc was a great way to spend a lunch hour, and through a lot of trial error we eventually evolved from behind the back “Dad” throws, to laser backhands and blading flicks. Soon, I was off to university in Kingston where I bumbled my way through tryouts for the women's team at Queen's University, made the B-team, and absorbed as much as I could about the strategic nature of the sport. The next year I made the A-team and haven't looked back since. And that's, in part, what makes Ultimate so great — even with its growth, it is still an easy entry sport. In Kingston and across Canada, youth and adults of all ages can find leagues to match their skill levels, and the community is always excited about the prospect of someone new wanting to get involved.

Kingston Ultimate, founded by our Williamsville neighbour Joel Yearsley in 1998, began as a four-team summer league with forty players, and now has 350 adults and 150 youths playing in its various leagues each year. Our Ultimate community is closely connected to the Queen's University community, with many of our experienced players volunteering their time as coaches for the university's competitive teams. In return, Queen's University students bring their youth and energy to our summer and winter leagues as players and as volunteer youth coaches. They play an important role in building and sustaining Local 613, Kingston's competitive summer touring team, and have helped earn bronze medals at two Ultimate Canada Championships and a fourth-place finish at the first ever Pan American Ultimate Games, held in Mexico in 2015.

When I started playing Ultimate as a young adult, I remember being motivated by the possibility of learning a new sport and being able to see constant improvement while building a close and supportive network of friends, many of whom I still bump into at tournaments across the country. I've continued to play on competitive women's and mixed teams for the past twenty years, representing Canada at two Pan American Ultimate Games with my partner and teammate Miles, and more recently in the Grandmasters Mixed Division at the World Ultimate Club Championships in 2022 and 2024, with very welcoming teams from Toronto and Victoria. There's something special about being able to join a new team in a foreign country and feel immediately at home doing one of my favourite things. Not to mention that Ultimate has been a great conversation starter over the last ten years as I've bumped into my Skeleton Park

neighbours at league games or chatted about the sport with neighbourhood friends in the park.

Sharing a post-game beverage with my teammates in early March, I asked them what they loved most about Ultimate, and they unanimously said, “sense of community”. In many ways, I think this sense of community finds its roots in the fact that the game is self-refereed, even at the highest levels of competition. In addition to the ever-evolving strategy, skill, and athleticism involved in cutting, defending, throwing, and catching the disc, the sport is governed by Spirit of the Game, a concept that establishes players as responsible for knowing the rules and calling their own fouls, violations, and line calls. Upholding this spirit, especially when the stakes are high, fosters a deep commitment to sportsmanship both on and off the field, requiring players to remain calm, engage in discussion, and come to resolutions in a timely manner.

Ultimate is also unique in that it can be played as a mixed-gender sport at all levels, including international competitions such as the World Games. The World Flying Disc Federation has taken important steps to establish protocols to make the sport inclusive for LGBTQ2IA+ players, and the Kingston community has been quick to adapt to new norms for how players identify themselves and match up on the field. Our national governing body, Ultimate Canada, has also established an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion committee, which includes Kingston Ultimate alum and Team Canada player Remi Ojo Jr, and the one and only Rob Langridge, a Kingston resident, Ultimate Canada President, and epic Ultimate player who dispels any myths about how long an individual can keep playing the sport. I believe these ongoing efforts are another big reason people stay connected to Ultimate — the sports' alignment with their values contributes to the unique sense of camaraderie that comes with loving and promoting a game not everyone knows about.

Having played the sport for over twenty-five years, I've been privileged to have so many positive experiences that have helped me evolve as an athlete, friend, coach, and leader. Whether I've been coaching high school teams, playing recreational tournaments in a Halloween costume, starting competitive local teams in Kingston (two so far!), or coaching three-year-olds on summer evenings, this sport has been the backbone of my physical and social life. I'm excited to welcome any neighbourhood friends who want to toss a disc in the park or join one of Kingston Ultimate's many opportunities.

To learn more about our adult and youth leagues, junior competitive program, or our two competitive mixed teams, Local 613 (18+) and King Bear (30+), check out the Kingston Ultimate website. Our youth leagues have an anonymous sliding scale pay system to make the sport as accessible to our community as possible — come join us!



KATIE FIZZELL (she/her) has lived in the Skeleton Park neighbourhood since moving to Kingston in 2010. She is grateful for the community that surrounds her through Ultimate, Queen's University, and the Skeleton Park neighbourhood.

The Broom Factory Creates Space for Entertainment and Cultural Expression

STORY AND ILLUSTRATION BY ADAM MACKENZIE SMITH



I used to drive an hour to Kingston every Tuesday to play fiddle at the Toucan.

In 2024 we made the jump and moved to the Inner Harbour. Now it's only a few blocks. My new office is the other way, down Rideau Street to the Broom Factory. For me, this is a kind of dream, walking to the pub, or to work, down residential streets to an old brick factory. I am an architect. I could dream of tall buildings and big cities. I could dream of steel and glass. But I dream of edges, of grit, of walking, and I dream of people and place and culture and the slow evolution of community.

The Broom Factory sits at the corner of Cataraqi Street and Rideau Street, beside a collection of empty lots. Cataraqi Street is marked with "No Exit." Plenty of people head that way, to the Woolen Mill and the Waterfront Trail, but beyond the empty lots, the other road out is closed. That closure once connected the Waterfront Trail to the K&P Trail, the woods, and Belle Park. Was the closure meant to be temporary? The land around the Broom Factory is tangled up in stories, stories reaching beyond this one, but visible, all part of this corner of the world.

The National Grocer's Building, another remnant with its old concrete walls, sits across Cataraqi Street from the Broom. Both might have been overlooked; this part of town still feels windswept. But someone recognized a possibility, and this pocket of urban life did not disappear. Demolition was halted, and possibilities started to become real. The National Grocer's Building is now NGB Studios, home to makers and community organizations. In addition to us architects at RAW Design, the Broom Factory houses Kingston Punk Productions (KPP) and the Kingston Canadian Film Festival (KCFE). KPP, Flying V Productions, and others bring in a lot of music. And all year long, KCFE brings in the local film community through numerous workshops and classes.

The corner of Rideau and Cataraqi Streets helps bridge the gap between future developments in North King's Town and the city's core."

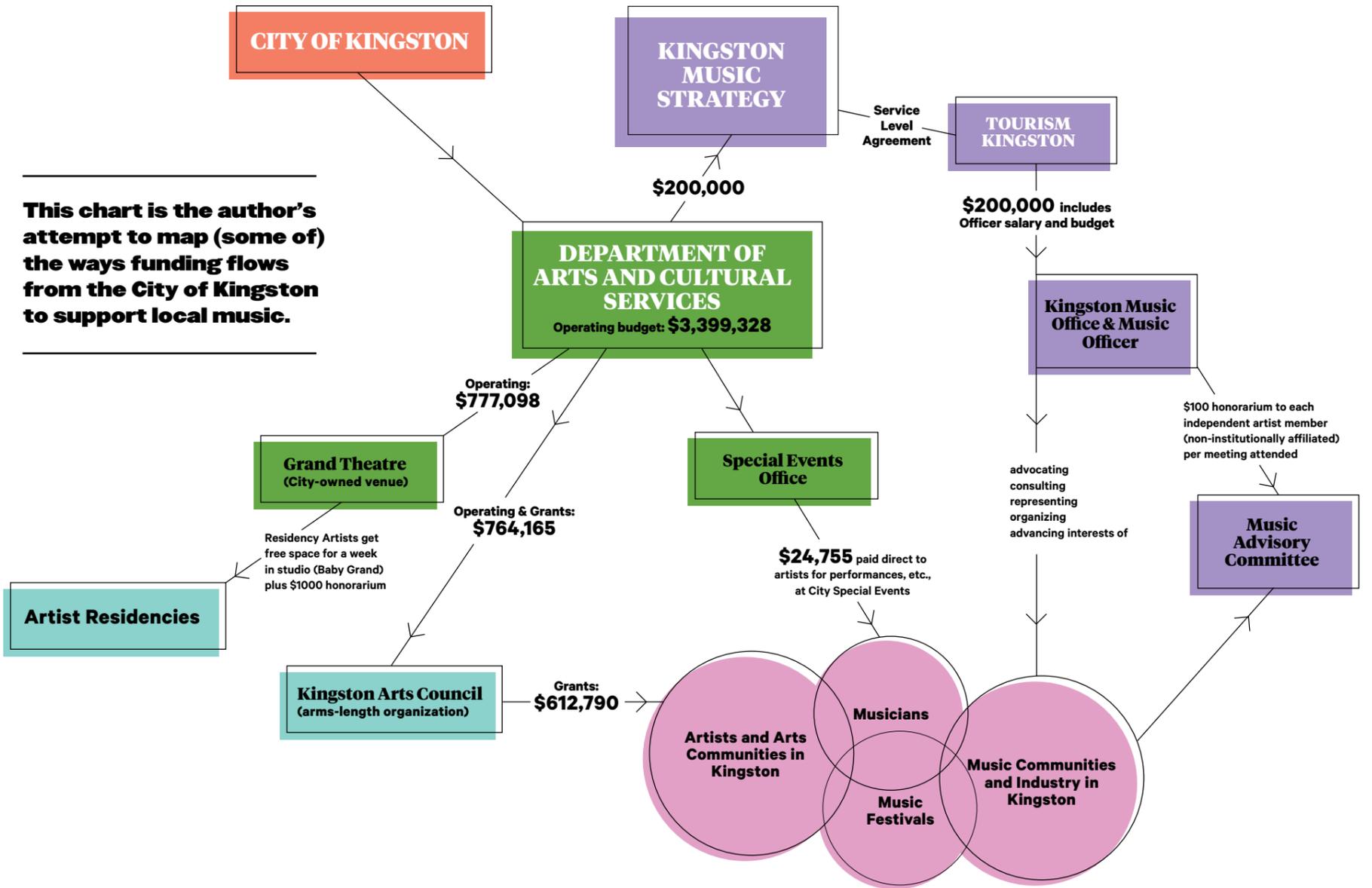
This corner is located at the southern end of lands newly designated in the North King's Town (NKT) Secondary Plan as mixed-use, lands that stretch north past Belle Park along Rideau and Montreal Streets as far as John Counter Boulevard. The point of the mixed-use designation is to facilitate this kind of development, everything from retail and personal services to recreation and entertainment. Many of these uses serve a communal purpose as third spaces, places of gathering located on main streets and at nodes of activity, all within walking distance of each other. That's the idea, anyway; we cannot know what will come, but we can continue to anticipate and encourage possibilities. Lying where the lands of the NKT start, the corner of Rideau and Cataraqi Streets helps bridge the gap between future developments in North King's Town and the city's core.

As a music venue, the Broom Factory bridges another gap, this one in Kingston's live music scene. The Broom accommodates more concert-goers than smaller venues like the Toucan or the Mansion. It also provides a more intimate space than larger venues like the Spire or Kingston Grand Theatre. For many events, this is the right fit. The fit makes the Broom an important space for live music, and a key offering for local cultural and economic life.

In addition to the activities they house, buildings also play a symbolic role. Collectively, they shape our lived sense of the city as a whole. When this symbolic dimension is clear and direct, buildings are easier to understand, locate, and remember. The city is easier to navigate. The buildings at the corner of Rideau and Cataraqi are small, but identifiable. I don't have to walk down a side street to get here. They make up part of the industrial layer along the old rail spur of the Inner Harbour, yet lie in plain view.

Stepping back from these possibilities made real, we find another possibility, and another gap. The Broom Factory sits beside barren ground, part of a larger empty lot. This is the possibility. And Kingston's lack of a larger music hall, something between mid-sized venues like the Spire and the arena (currently Slush Puppie Place), creates another gap. As architects, we work with possibilities. Can we bridge this second gap? The unexpected success of the Broom Factory as an all-ages, inclusive event space underscores how well a music hall on the remaining ground at this location could work. In relation to the life of the city, this corner already serves as a kind of node of creative practice, a place of making, music, film and cultural expression. From a specific land use standpoint, the idea of a larger music hall is feasible. From a design standpoint, the possibilities are exciting.

ADAM MACKENZIE SMITH is an architect and occasional musician and illustrator who lives a few blocks from the Broom Factory. He has performed at the Broom, and enjoys live music there and elsewhere in the city. Adam works with RAW Design and volunteers in support of natural building and other practices rooted in shared knowledge and skill.



This chart is the author's attempt to map (some of) the ways funding flows from the City of Kingston to support local music.

Liner Notes: A Review of Kingston's Official Music Strategy

In the City's efforts to raise the economic potential of Kingston's legendary music scene, housing and affordability loom large.

STORY BY **EVALYN PARRY**

“Cities have been embracing Music Strategies since we hit the affordability crisis.”

— CBC Radio, Victoria, Feb 2, 2025

[Kingston's Music Strategy can be found online at www.visitkingston.ca/music]

The City of Kingston's first official Music Strategy was adopted by City Council in December, 2023.

My initial research into the development and implementation of the new Strategy quickly revealed that there was a lot to unpack. As a musician and theatre artist who has recently relocated from Toronto to the Kingston area, I was interested to discover that while there's a lot about the Strategy that is specific to Kingston, many of the issues it aims to address are part of a much larger national and even global picture.

It is news to no one that cities throughout Canada — including Kingston — are in the midst of a housing and general affordability crisis. And across the country, the music industry finds itself between the proverbial rock and a hard place; in the era of Spotify, when most musicians can no longer make money off recordings, musicians are left trying to find other sources of revenue. Playing live is one of these other sources, but to play live musicians need performance venues to play in, many of which are also caught in the same web of inflationary effects of the real estate and rental markets.

The Strategy

Kingston's Music Strategy was developed by the City in collaboration with the international consultancy firm Nordicity, which has created Music Strategies for numerous municipalities across Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom. These strategies all have a strong common theme: they make the case for music as a driver of the economy and tourism for a city. Kingston's Strategy “builds on the rich activity already taking place within the city's borders... celebrates Kingston's past successes, addresses where there is room for improvement and cohesion, and ultimately paves a coordinated path forward towards a shared vision: for Kingston to be recognized as a hub and incubator for musician development, music careers and a strong music scene, where music is ubiquitous and can be seen and heard by all.”

The forty-two page Strategy is based on lengthy consultation with local music community stakeholders, including musicians, promoters, and venue owners. It outlines a series of recommendations, supporting actions, and timelines to “enable economic development, support economic recovery due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, maintain activity, and facilitate growth.” A foundational recommendation is the creation of a Music Officer position “to lead the implementation of the Kingston Music Strategy, in collaboration with the City's Arts & Culture Services Department, while acting as a contact point between the City and the music industry.” The Strategy recommends establishing an advisory group of stakeholders from local mu-

sic communities, to consult with and inform the Officer's planning. And, in order to expand the impact of the Music Officer's role, the Strategy recommends "establishing a standalone Kingston Music Office," with a mandate "to assist in the execution of music strategies (such as this one) and to nurture the growth of the local music industry and those who work in it."

When the City approved the Strategy in 2023, a \$200,000 budget was allocated to cover the first year of the Music Officer's salary and start-up for the Office and its activities. The longer-term recommendation of the Strategy is to build toward a budget of around \$450,000. Kingston's new Music Office is situated within Tourism Kingston, rather than the City's Department of Arts and Culture, something that has caught the attention of several musicians around town.

To better understand this positioning, I spoke with Danika Lochhead, the Director of the Department of Arts and Culture. She explained to me that, while many municipalities structure their offices to directly link arts and culture with economic development, Kingston separates these into three distinct entities: the City's Department of Arts and Culture, and two agencies — Tourism Kingston and Kingston Economic Development. (The City is governed by Council and funded by tax dollars, whereas Tourism and Economic Development each have their own board of directors and are funded through a variety of public and private sources). Both agencies receive a significant portion of their funding from the City as Service Level Agreements (SLAs), through which they deliver services, projects, and priorities on behalf of the City — such as, in this case, The Music Strategy. So while Tourism houses the Music Office and Officer role, the City retains the ability to modify the agreements and structures of reporting and accountability with these partner agencies.

The Music Office/r

Kingston's new Music Officer, Moira Demorest, is well known in Kingston as a musician, educator, and a founder of Kingston Punk Productions (or 'KPP', a prolific indie concert production company). Prior to running the Music Office, Demorest spent a year as the Music Commissioner working alongside the Film Office — another office that sits at Tourism. She describes her new role as focused on "creating the conditions for a thriving local music industry": similar to the Music Commissioner position, but the difference being that now she has the official Music Strategy from the City to support her work. She laughs when she tells me her "Office" began as a one-person operation, but it was titled with the larger vision in mind. She notes that Tourism saw the Music Office as an opportunity while no other city Department or agency seemed to have the resources.

Her job, Demorest says, is to "advocate for music not just as entertainment, but as an economic and cultural driver." For her, that means policy where there is currently none. "This is an industry that relies so heavily on other policies — noise bylaws as a simple example," she says. "Until now, music hasn't had a voice at the policy table." Policy, she says, "needs to invest not only in talent but also in venues. The music sector was established on a model of bar sales — and that is shifting." It turns out that not only are bars dealing with inflation and rising rents, but they face an additional challenge: "plummeting alcohol sales, which have been steadily declining over the last decade."

This was a factor I had not considered. The symbiotic relationship between bands, bars and alcohol sales has functioned until recently like a kind of unofficial, invisible support structure, undergirding a precarious industry. But if live music doesn't increase the bottom line of bar sales, there is less incentive for bars to book bands — especially new bands — or to pay them well. This can lead venues to adopt the insidious "pay to play" model, whereby artists pay a fee to perform and promote their art, rather than the other way around.

When I ask Demorest what she has learned in her first year on the job, she immediately responds, "learning to work within bureaucracy." Her many years working in the local music scene means she has a strong network of connections and partnerships, and her previous role as Music Commissioner gave her a primer in policy-making. But in this role, she says "I've had to learn patience. I can't leap straight into DIY problem-solving the way I used to. I see the issues, but instead of being reactive, I have to learn how to step back, look at the larger systems, and ask myself: what policy or resource could be put in place here to improve the conditions in the long term?"

Both Demorest and Lochhead are quick to acknowledge that we are still in early days of the Strategy's implementation, and that this kind of work — both the relationship-building and policy change — take a lot of time. When I ask what the biggest challenges are, Demorest provides a concise summary: "The music industry is the challenge: the systemic problems in the industry. Such a small portion of resources trickles down to musicians. I'm trying to figure out how to lead incremental changes to shift that percentage. I wish I could say we have fair wages for everyone. We don't."

“While there's a lot about the Strategy that is specific to Kingston, many of the issues it aims to address are part of a much larger national and even global picture.”

In May 2025, Lochhead will report back to City Council on what has been achieved in the first year of the Strategy's implementation, anticipating the City will renew the SLA with Tourism at the same \$200,000 amount for a second year. Both Lochhead and Demorest note that a Fair Wage campaign is a priority for the second year of the Strategy. Lochhead also says that in the coming year, the call for the Music Advisory Committee will be renewed; it needs to be revised to ensure representation, membership, and term limits.

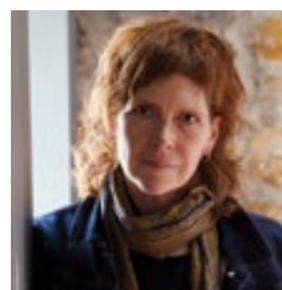
The Big Picture

Music Strategies much like Kingston's are now in place in cities throughout Canada and around the world: Toronto, Hamilton, Ottawa, Vancouver, Victoria, Mississauga, London (Ontario); abroad, Melbourne, Glasgow, Austin...the list goes on. When I ask Demorest to identify the biggest success so far of Kingston's Strategy, she says, "that this Office is here now." She acknowledges that "there have been bumps. It's a new organization. Putting arts into bureaucracy is like fitting a square peg into a round hole."

But if budgets are a storytelling document, then Kingston is beginning to tell the important story about the role music plays in the health and vitality of the city. By implementing the Music Strategy, the City is signalling that it values music in Kingston, not only for its cultural and social benefits, but also for its role in the urban identity of Kingston itself.

However, I also see a strong critique to be made of what seems to be a foundational premise of Music Strategies: that a thriving music industry promises to be a revenue generator, attracting more tourism, and helping to build a more desirable and liveable city. This argument aligns with the neoliberal economic philosophy that promises that the market will provide solutions to socio-economic problems. I would argue the systems failure that we are currently living in is the result of the last thirty years of this neoliberal economic thinking, coupled with decreasing public investment. A Music Strategy, while it may bolster the sector, will not solve the housing crisis: radically new housing policy is what is needed. When we think of many of the country's most renowned musical acts — Kingston's The Tragically Hip, or The Arkells in Hamilton, Montréal's Arcade Fire, Sloan in Halifax — a common theme is that they came up in a time and place where rent was cheap and life was affordable enough that artists could put time into their "emerging" careers without having to work another full time job or a million side hustles.

In light of the big, underlying problems of our moment — namely, affordability and housing — I wonder if Kingston's Music Office could lead the way toward even more innovation. What about putting musicians on EVERY committee at the City? Put artists on a housing advisory, transportation advisory, climate advisory, and more. Pay them an honorarium to sit on committees that allow musicians to influence not just music, but the many intersecting systems that impact our communities. By leveraging the uniquely creative approaches and practices of artists, Kingston could blaze a real trail: collaborating with artists to help find new solutions to the interconnected crises that no government in the country currently seems to be able to solve.



EVALYN PARRY is a theatre artist and songwriter, recently relocated from Toronto to the Kingston/ Cataraqui area.

Picture Perfect Pastimes

An art exhibition at The Elm Café

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY **EDWIN SIMHA-WEBSTER**

For just a minute, let me sneak you into the confidential moments and gritty onstage antics of several local music legends. This collection captures snaps from my lens, bringing them to your eyes with as little pageantry and fluff as possible. Real people, real photos, in real scenes.

As a lifelong photographer, I collaborate with friends and familiar faces, forging a niche through film photography that lends my work a certain timelessness and unique intimacy. A collection of film photography and a few digital pieces, my first solo exhibition is a peek behind the scenes and into the eyes of vulnerable authenticity.

All works have been converted into greyscale in an attempt to make the images equal, honest, and primarily about the composition and subject matter. Most of these images are being printed for the very first time and have yet to be seen by the public. I hope you enjoy my lifelong collection of visual souvenirs as much as I do.

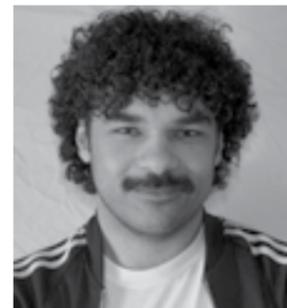
Picture Perfect Pastimes will be exhibited at The Elm Café, at 300 Montreal Street, from June to September 2025. The Elm Café (@theelmcafe) is open 7 days a week, from 7:30 AM to 5:00 PM.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

Luella and Almond Milk, 2025
Taylor Adams, 2021

Tarek of the Blue Stones, 2024



Philadelphia born **EDWIN SIMHA-WEBSTER** (@Tedwin92) is known within the downtown Kingston community for always having a finger on the pulse of the local arts and live music scene. Regardless of whether he is shooting film photography for local musicians (@tedwintookthis), DJing a festival or an event after party, keeping Tedwin on your radar, you will always be in

the know about the next big thing happening around the city. Ted is thrilled to be presenting his first solo photography exhibit in collaboration with SPAF at The Elm Cafe.

CANTABILE
CANTABILE CHOIRS OF KINGSTON

NIGHT AT THE OPERA

SONGS OF ROMANCE AND DRAMA

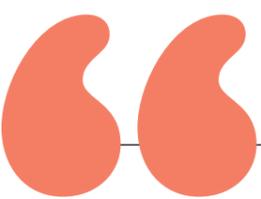
JUNE.07
7:30PM
THE SPIRE



Film Review

Still Alive in Kingston is a love letter to the local music scene

STORY BY **KELLY O'DETTE**



IS NOSTALGIA POISON, OR CAN POTENT RETROSPECTION HELP DIRECT OUR PRESENT DESIRES? THAT IS FOR ANYONE TO DECIDE.

Still *Alive in Kingston* (SAIK) premiered on March 2nd at The Kingston Canadian Film Festival to hearty applause and a warm hometown reception. The Grand Theatre was the perfect venue for screenwriter/director Jay Middaugh's second feature film, which is a sincere love letter to the music scene in Kingston.

SAIK is a sequel to Middaugh's 2017 *Live in Kingston*, which also showcased local bands, while following a fictional narrative set in the city. In an interview with Middaugh, he described it as a "non-canonical sequel," meaning that the films only share a stylistic similarity. SAIK doesn't continue the same storyline as its predecessor — the characters are different, but both films balance scripted comedy with live music documentary.

SAIK follows former MuchMusic VJ Bill Welychka in his present-day job as a local TV host who is trying to regain some of his former fame. Bill moved to Kingston on the advice of his agent, who called it a stepping stone to bigger things. Though he has a regular morning show on KKWS, he also has a side gig sending personalized videos on a Cameo-like messaging service. While sending one of his fans a shout-out from a strip club, Bill gets pulled into a scandal.

We see some romantic comedy: Bill's former producer and old flame, Amy (Anna Sudac), comes to dig him out of trouble and hatch a plan to relaunch his career. They find financial backing from a plug-in air freshener tycoon: Jonathan Sperlman (Jesse MacMillan). A huge fan, Sperlman has sourced some vintage broadcast equipment and plans to recreate 90s MuchMusic in all of its analogue glory. Amy lines up bands to perform, and Bill works his magic doing Q&As. An interview with The Tragically Hip's Rob Baker makes you believe they could really pull it all off...

On the documentary side, the film features live performances and interviews with local acts such as Jason Erb, Monach, Oakridge Ave., Kasador, Ka-Kaow, Abby Stewart, Keaton, The Diaries, Luella, Anthea Feaver, Emily Fennell Band, The Gertrudes, Luscious, The Frank Ryan Band, Piner, The Wilderness, and Emilie Steele and the Deal.

Middaugh's writing works well to blend these bands' performances with the broader narrative. In his words: "None of it is real, but it's all true." Bill Welychka, Rick Campanelli (MuchMusic's "Rick the Temp"), Rob Baker, and CKWS' Paul Soucy all play versions of themselves, blurring the lines between fiction and reality. The height of this blurriness comes when Baker imparted some wisely-scripted words about Bill's intentions in recreating 90s MuchMusic: "Nostalgia is poison. Time only moves in one direction. You can never get back the past. We are ethereal beings, Bill, we are born, we create, and we move on." Is nostalgia poison, or can potent retrospection help direct our present desires? That is for anyone to decide.

After watching the film, it was abundantly clear that Kingston's music scene punches above its weight. If one of the motivations behind making the film was trying to get people to check out more live music in Kingston, then its magic worked on me! I was struck by the range of genres and the youthful drive of all the featured bands. Their performances looked and sounded beautiful with nice close-ups and colour grading. There was an intentional contrast between the beautiful live footage of the bands, and the grit of Bill's everyday story.

MuchMusic in the 90s was indeed a different time. Music journalism had a prominent place on cable television and was a mainstream platform for introducing and promoting artists. Bill and Amy's mission to regain what was lost reveals that Kingston's music scene is still very much alive.



KELLY O'DETTE grew up in Kingston, but recently moved back two years ago taking a position as technician at Queen's, Film and Media Department. She previously worked as a picture editor in Toronto for the past 10 years with various genres such as comedy and music documentary.

We Are Trash Panda Brass!

We are here and we are queer!

STORY BY **TRASH PANDA BRASS**

Trash Panda Brass (TPB) will be appearing at the 2025 Skeleton Park Festival on June 21st and 22nd. Not only will they be sharing their upbeat and fun-loving music, they will also participate in a panel discussion with Tiny Horse on the topic of queer artists in the music industry.

TPB first appeared on the streets of Toronto in June of 2022, where they quickly garnered a following with their covers of familiar pop hits spanning from the 1970s to the present. The band was never shy about their identity and would often shout, “We are Trash Panda Brass; we are here and we are queer!” to the crowds gathering to enjoy their music. The band came together organically; while its members had gone to the University of Toronto around the same time, they only coalesced after working together as line cooks at a busy downtown Toronto music venue. The goal was to create a band where values and ideologies around community and music making lined up. It just so happened that these friends, soon to be bandmates, were also queer.

Busking was the logical first move for the band. Permits are relatively cheap, brass instruments do not need amplification, and what better way to gather some confidence and let the world know that there was another voice in the brass band scene than by setting up in the middle of some of Toronto’s busiest streets and neighbourhoods? Yet for all the liberties that busking has provided, there have also been drawbacks. Although TPB is typically met with enthusiasm from audiences when they expose their queerness openly, there have been instances where they have noticed people leaving and, on one occasion, they were even called the f-slur to their faces. Being openly queer with no cis-het white males as core members, TBP has at times felt vulnerable to the judgements and chill receptions of passersby. Even though the response to their presence is roundly positive, they often experience people crowding their space, attempting to intimidate them, and on a couple of occasions even stealing money from their tip jar.



Even though the prime busking spots had been vetted by their friends and colleagues from the high-energy, hard-hitting Big Smoke Brass band (BSB), TPB did not always reap the same benefits or feel as comfortable in those same locations. The core members of BSB are cis-het and mainly white-passing men, and are able to move more freely in these vulnerable spaces of bringing music directly to the street. (That said, BSB also experienced their fair share of harassment.)

After much trial and error, TPB found their favourite places to busk: in front of the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) and the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO). It is perhaps a mix of surprise and disappointment that in a city as big and boisterous as Toronto, there were only two spots TPB felt safe enough for busking. Just a few blocks down from these spaces were other infamous busking locations that TPB had tried: the southeast corner of Spadina Ave. and Bloor St., the northeast corner of Yonge St. and Bloor St., and Queen West in front of the MEC, but TPB often ended up feeling uncomfortable or unwelcome. They marvelled at how big a difference only a few blocks could make, and how much a neighbourhood’s reception could change.

Community has always been a pillar of TPB’s beliefs, and finding places to create and invite people into a friendly and accessible queer space is an ongoing pursuit. Each neighbourhood has had different reactions to the band. Balancing the positive feedback with the anger and annoyance directed at them is never an easy task. They continually try their best to be kind and respectful while still standing their ground in the spaces they know they are allowed to take.

Being invited onto stages in different communities and neighbourhoods has eased much of the stress of playing outside and being openly queer. Most often, the band’s ability to unapologetically be themselves, and the joy they exude while playing together, are what keep audiences coming back for more. Neighbourhood street and music festivals are a huge part of Toronto’s vibrant summer culture. It has been interesting to observe that when the band is in a curated setting, the response is always overwhelmingly positive. The community that live music pro-

“The community that live music provides is important, and clearly, many people crave it — but the package in which it is delivered seems to be a point of contention.”

vides is important and clearly many people crave it. However, the package in which it is delivered seems to be a point of contention.

But that’s the beauty of neighbourhoods — they are living, breathing, evolving entities. They are shaped by the people who inhabit them, the art that fills their streets, and the music that spills from their corners. TPB has come to see that their presence is just one part of a greater, ongoing dialogue. Some spaces embrace them wholeheartedly, while others resist change. And yet, they continue to play, to take up space, and to celebrate the communities that make room for them. Because at the end of the day, neighbourhoods are not just defined by their streets and buildings — they are defined by the voices, the stories, and the music that echo through them.



TRASH PANDA BRASS formed in 2022 with a mission to engage crowds and spread queer joy through vibrant, inclusive music. They’ve played everywhere from street corners to festivals like TD Jazz Fest and DoWestFest, and have been featured on the cover of *Whole Note* magazine. Their debut EP, *Opposable Thumbs*, dropped in 2023, showcasing

their signature upbeat arrangements of queer anthems. Committed to community, education, and representation, they continue to inspire through performances at schools, conferences, and pride events.

Etiquette Lessons for the Wayward and Stubborn with Tante Talia

STORY BY **TALIA ACKER** PHOTO BY **AL BERGERON**

Gentle Readers of Skeleton Park, As a grown-up lady who tends to learn things the hard way, I thought I would take some time to pass on a few of the hardest-won etiquette lessons I have gleaned over twenty years of living by Skeleton Park. I have made countless social errors, both major and minor, over the course of the nineteen Skeleton Park Arts Festivals I have attended (okay, fine, Gentle Readers, eighteen — more on that later). My fond hope is to help others navigate the social meteor shower that is our yearly beloved arts festival as well as the many other cherished gatherings that occur in the park over the year.

Babies

For decades, babies have ruled supreme as society's best year-round accessory, and nowhere is this more true than in Skeleton Park. A baby can be worn on your front, in an attractive carrier, sideways, in an even more attractive sling, or jauntily on your back. (Please read the instructions and be sure to check the baby's age before carefully applying the baby.) When it comes to baby-wearing, "beg, steal, or borrow" is my motto. Nothing will endear you to people more than a baby strapped to your person. Babies in strollers are also highly tolerated in the park, even during large gatherings, although they do take up far more than their share of personal space when compared to the actual size of a baby.

“My fond hope is to help others navigate the social meteor shower that is our yearly beloved arts festival as well as the many other cherished gatherings that occur in the park over the year.”



TANTE TALIA has been generously offering free advice by the park for twenty years. She has a string of much younger ex-husbands, many of whom are now happy members of her household staff.

Children

Children are to babies as cats are to kittens, and the people of Skeleton Park love both cats and children in large doses. There was a time, not so long ago, when people said *children should be seen and not heard*, but times have changed completely and nowadays we are all in agreement that adults are the problem and we would rather see and hear children most of the time. At the festival you will see children everywhere: on stage, on people's shoulders, and on your picnic blanket. Children are in their glory at the festival, galloping by in bare feet, faces painted like dragons, screaming, covered in food, with their assigned adult somewhere within the boundaries of the park.

Dog Math

Having grown up in a cat-loving family, I was unfamiliar with dogs until I moved to Skeleton Park and adopted my first dog. At the time I thought dogs were like cats, only bigger, louder, and messier. I now know that dogs are more like a quarter of a child than four times a cat and each one is as unique and potentially as needy as said quarter child. So the question of whether or not to bring your dog-child to the festival, knitting club, or song circle is really a self-administered psychological test you and your dog must pass: Is your dog good with children, men, and other dogs, even in the face of loud music and teeming crowds? Is your dog "a rescue", or do your neighbours wonder if perhaps your dog currently needs some rescuing from your overly permissive dog home? Gentle Readers, these are the sorts of questions to ask yourselves.

Partners — Past and Present

The fun of the festival can also be the hardest part of the festival in that everyone you know will be there. If life in our neighbourhood can be akin to living in a fish bowl, then the festival is like pouring everyone into a much smaller bowl on the same weekend, and adding music, flashing coloured lights and a rotating disco ball. Unless you are new in town, every fish you have ever swum with will be there dancing and wiggling, except for the fish who are safe at home, perhaps listening to the music from their window, taking this year off. See, I told you we'd be circling back around to that missing 19th year.

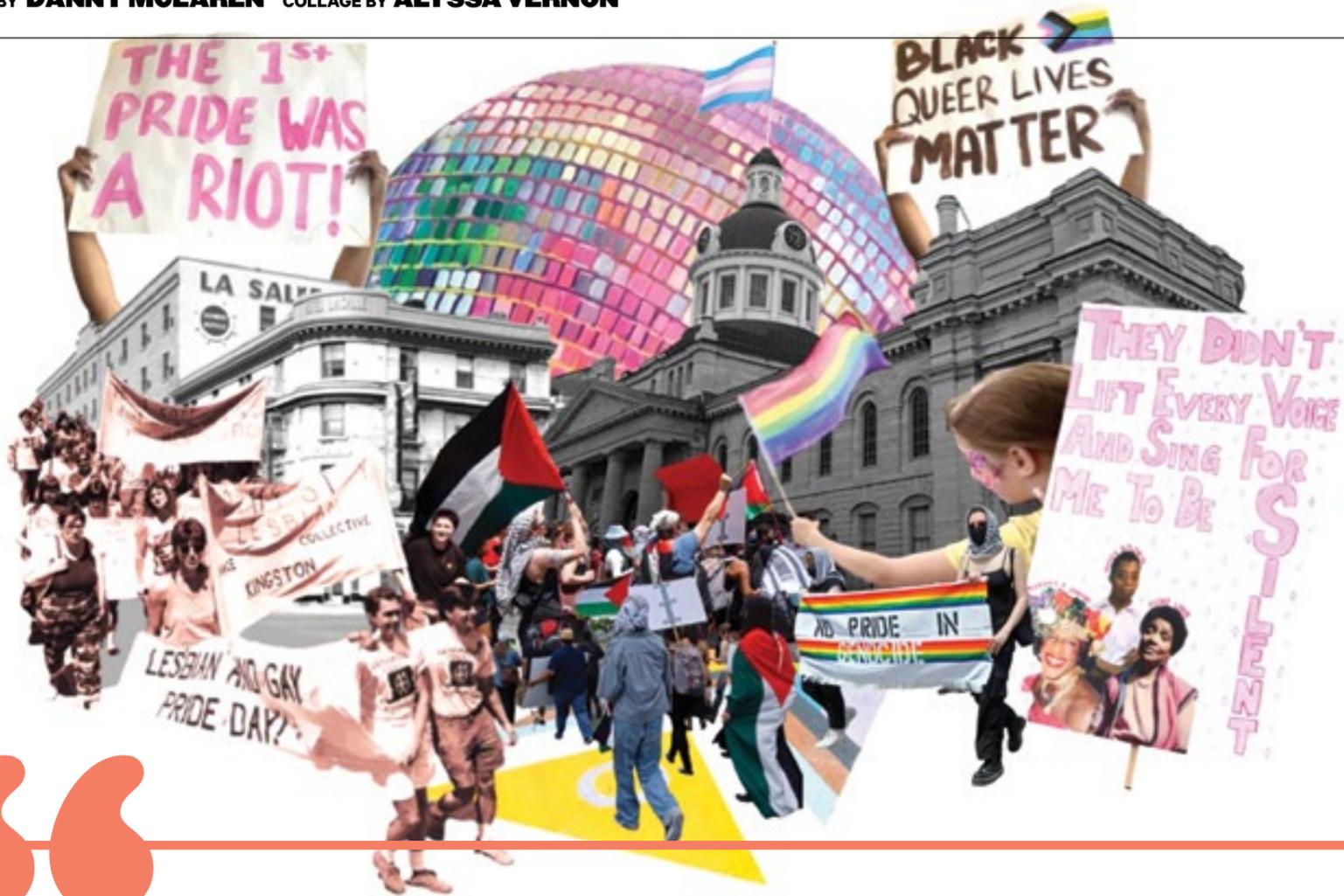
Attire

Festival weekend is almost guaranteed to be hot and very humid. There is a reason most ladies old enough to have a baby, dog, children, or long-term partners are draped in light-coloured linen. I start most festivals wearing my official Festival Volunteer t-shirt (brightly coloured, cotton-polyester) and a long black skirt, and as the day progresses, and I watch all the wiser women float past in linens of lilac, pale grey, sage green, and mustard yellow, I long for a shapeless sack-like dress in some sun-repelling natural fibre to help bring my body temperature down fast. In fact, Gentle Readers, the most important piece of advice I have for the festival — this summer, and beyond — is to stay hydrated. Try to visit the gorgeous blue water truck in the centre of the park between three and thirty times an hour to ensure adequate hydration.

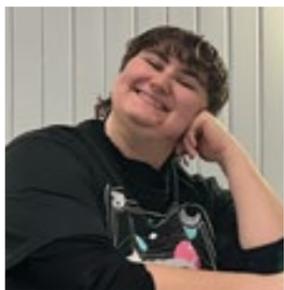
**Generously Yours,
Tante Talia**

Pride in the Neighbourhood

STORY BY **DANNY MCLAREN** COLLAGE BY **ALYSSA VERNON**



We get to enjoy our pride festival today because queer and trans people took to the streets and made it happen.”



DANNY MCLAREN is a queer, trans, non-binary, and Jewish poet and writer living next to Skeleton Park in what is colonially known as Kingston, Ontario. They are the author of two poetry chapbooks, *Two-Way Town* (2020) and *The Enby Manifesto* (2023).



ALYSSA VERNON (she/her) is a Jamaican-Guyanese collage artist, educator, and founder of the Queer Collage Collective. With degrees in Gender Studies and Education, she integrates art into teaching to inspire creativity, healing, and community. Her art explores Black girlhood, queer liberation, and collective care, drawing from Black histories to imagine liberatory futures.

Pride is, and always will be, political, wherever it exists.

The first pride in Kingston, much like its contemporaries in other North American cities, began as a protest march. In 1985, in response to rejected requests for the City to recognize a Gay and Lesbian Pride Day, an unsanctioned Pride March of less than ten took place on the sidewalks of Princess Street. It was not until 1992, when the march grew to 150 participants and took to the streets, too large to be ignored, that the Mayor of Kingston proclaimed an official Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Pride Day.

Today, Kingston Pride is an annual week-long festival of events, including a parade that shuts down Princess Street and a community fair on the waterfront. Every year, the City marks Pride on June 15 with a flag raising ceremony. This achievement was made possible only by those first few people who did not receive support or permission from their city, and marched anyway.

When we speak about social progress, a popular narrative paints acceptance as inevitable, if only we wait long enough for it. Eventually, Pride will be given to us, as it is now, tied up with a bow and proclaimed by the same city which once denied it.

This story however, allows us to forget our roots. Pride in Kingston became a reality after multiple failed requests to the City Council and the Mayor over the span of eight years. Pride means getting fed up with rejection and creating ourselves what no one would give us. We get to enjoy our pride festival today because queer and trans people took to the streets and made it happen.

So how do we honour this history? Within the privilege of a city-authorized Pride, what do our commitments to the politics of pride look like?

As of 2025, Kingston Pride announced that it will not be allowing any banks or political parties into its parade or community fair. As Pride has gone mainstream, banks, corporations, and politicians seek it out as an opportunity to promote themselves as

LGBT-inclusive in exchange for queer dollars and votes, without meaningful support for our communities. This change from Kingston Pride, and the decision to prioritize local businesses, Black, Indigenous, and artists of colour, and organizations whose mission is to directly support queer and trans communities is a valuable effort towards making a Pride that tangibly supports the local community it seeks to celebrate.

In 2024, community members marched in the Kingston Pride Parade under the banner of Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (QuAIA). Their presence drew on the history of the Toronto-based activist collective by the same name, who the Toronto Pride board attempted to ban from the parade in 2010 by prohibiting the phrase “Israeli apartheid” within the festival. The decision was later overturned, the group marched, and the phrase was acknowledged as a legitimate form of political expression.

The presence of Queers Against Israeli Apartheid at Kingston Pride was a protest, connecting us simultaneously to global anti-colonial and Palestinian liberation movements and to Pride’s own beginning as an uprising against police raids of the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in Greenwich Village, New York.

Outside the Kingston Pride festival, community members gather for celebrations like Liberation Day, a self-proclaimed “political love letter to the history of liberatory organizing.” Liberation Day 2024 took place in a public park, with nothing to buy or sell, but plenty of food, skill-sharing workshops, and harm reduction supplies. An independent queer and trans meet-up that puts political activism and mutual aid at its centre serves to remind us of where we come from, and the organizing we are capable of, should institutional Prides fail to meet our needs.

Pride can be face-painting in the park, but it is also marching in the street, blocking traffic with queer and trans bodies, and shouting loud enough to be heard. It always has been.



How Limestone City Burlesque Celebrates Self-Love and Acceptance

STORY BY LAURA CHAIGNON

PHOTO CREDIT: Two Roos Photography



As the weather warms and we start shedding layers of clothing, I chatted with four local burlesque performers from Limestone City Burlesque who are pros at disrobing with style. “Burlesque is a sister-art to drag,” says Rhapsody Blue, who started the Limestone City Burlesque collective and helped launch the Kingston location of the Rouge Studio of Dance. “It is a fusion cabaret art primarily designed for the consumption of adults. Burlesque uses dynamic costuming and stylized disrobing with the goal of storytelling.” Rhapsody, who moved to Kingston in the summer of 2020 after having been in the burlesque business for over 15 years, sees burlesque as an artform and is now successfully continuing to foster a vibrant burlesque scene in Kingston.

While there may be a perceived notion that burlesque (and stripping in general) celebrates traditional femininity and exists for the consumption of men, that is far from the reality. In fact, a lot of people find burlesque to be a wonderful medium to explore their gender expression in front of a mostly feminine and queer audience.

“Burlesque has helped me explore my sexual orientation and it has been healing for me as a feminine bisexual person,” explains Rhapsody Blue. “For a long time, I was working in a lot of corporate contexts in adult entertainment. When you are performing so much for the consumption of men, you have to think about your gender presentation according to that. Burlesque allows me to do that with myself in mind. What does femininity mean to me? One of the things I love to see in other burlesque performers is the way their gender presentation evolves the more they perform.”

Kopy Cat, a queer, Indigenous artist, refutes the idea that you have to be of a certain age or body type to do burlesque, saying, “There are incredible artists all over the world (and in Kingston!) absolutely killing it, of all ages, sizes, colours, genders, abilities, dance backgrounds, etc. There are no limits on what burlesque is and isn't, or can or can't be.”

Rhapsody Blue likens the burlesque community to an “island of misfit toys”, where inclusivity is paramount, noting that, “So many of our dancers came to us after feeling unwelcome in their art form. Ballerinas or pro athletes who had injuries, theatre performers who couldn't play straight enough. They find their stage in burlesque.” Rhapsody strives to put diversity on stage, and works to create more opportunities to showcase under-represented performers of all shapes, sizes, backgrounds, ethnicities, and styles of performance.

In celebrating diverse bodies and gender expressions, burlesque can help dancers find more self-love and acceptance. Performers Femme Powered and Miss Gemini were mothers of young children when they discovered burlesque. Miss Gemini believes that burlesque allowed her to love her body post-pregnancy: “It became a body-positive space and was very important to me. My journey of self-discovery and self-love would not have been the same without burlesque and

Burlesque is the art of striptease. But it is so much more than that. Burlesque is rebellious, burlesque is body positive, burlesque is queer, burlesque is political.”

the lovely folks who I share the stage with, as well as those who cheer us on!” Femme Powered was reminded through burlesque that there was more to her identity than being a mom. She wants everyone to know that “burlesque is for everyone. It doesn't matter what your body looks like.”

There is something powerful about being a woman, a queer person, a person whose body is not conventionally celebrated, and being in complete control over one's nudity while telling a story about one's body on stage. Kopy Cat believes there is political potential in burlesque: “Burlesque is the art of striptease. But it is so much more than that. Burlesque is rebellious, burlesque is body positive, burlesque is queer, burlesque is political.”

Femme Powered crafted a striking piece for a Valentine's Day show recently. She entered the stage in the now recognizable Handmaid's Tale red handmaid outfit complete with a bonnet, and disrobed to reveal a sexy corset. Under the corset were messages referring to bodily autonomy and women's rights.

With recent attacks on women's rights, and queer and trans rights in North America, burlesque is a safe and wonderful space for dancers to express their feelings, find resilience, and celebrate each other. A space for the community to come together and help celebrate and support these rebellious performances, which we need now more than ever. If your interest is piqued, come out for the Limestone City Burlesque monthly no-cover shows at Daft Brewery, happening every last Thursday of the month.



LAURA CHAIGNON
is an arts worker and a grateful neighbour to the lake.

Literary Futures in Kingston

STORY BY AARA MACAULEY

ILLUSTRATIONS BY HAYDEN MAYNARD



At the end of November, 2024, Kingston WritersFest suspended operations after sixteen years. This came as a shock to many, staff included, and raised questions about the future of literary events in our community. As someone who has had the pleasure of working with writers and book lovers for nearly a dozen years, I want to shine a spotlight on what made, and continues to make, this community such a unique and vibrant one for readers and writers.

The increasingly profound challenges facing the non-profit arts sector in Canada — and artists in general — cannot be denied. Kingston WritersFest was not the only arts organization to see audiences and funding plummet post-COVID. Here, though, I want to focus on the resilience and vibrancy of Kingston's literary scene. An organization like Kingston WritersFest thrived because of the enthusiasm of Kingston's readers and writers, and the scene is constantly evolving.

This neighbourhood has a particularly strong association with authors and poets, and is known colloquially as Writer's Block. Award-winning author and poet Sadiqa de Meijer notes housing prices have been a factor in the development of Skeleton Park. Initially a very affordable area, "writers and artists chose to live here, and found community with each other," de Meijer says. Notable residents include Helen Humphreys, Melanie Dugan, Julie Salverson, Nancy Jo Cullen, Mark Sinnett, and the late Steven Heighton — to name but a few. The

area is home to "people of diverse means, backgrounds, and identities," she notes, and this benefits writers, as does its proximity to "public and academic libraries, coffee shops, an independent bookstore, a cinema, a theatre, a river and lake." The things that make this area so special have also made it an increasingly costly place to call home. "Unfortunately," she acknowledges, anyone "making a living through writing or other art-making is unlikely to be able to move here now, and if already residing here, may have to leave."

De Meijer is currently serving as Kingston's Poet Laureate. Born in Amsterdam to a Dutch-Kenyan-Pakistani-Afghani family, she moved to Canada as a child, eventually arriving in Katarokwi/ Kingston. De Meijer praises the city's "thriving literary culture" and considers it a good place to be a writer. "I've seen standing room only crowds for readings at Novel Idea, The Elm Café, The Royal Tavern, Musiikki and other spots... I find the atmosphere at local literary events is enthusiastic and supportive."

As poet laureate, de Meijer savours the opportunity to present poetry in unexpected spaces, like "at a movie screening, a town hall meeting on climate justice, a convocation ceremony, or in a hospital department." Beyond creating and performing her own poems, de Meijer has provided new English speakers with a chance to translate

favourite poems from their mother tongue and share these works with new listeners. She also offers mentorship to emerging poets, in collaboration with the Kingston Frontenac Public Library, which, she says, "has been inspiring — seeing their love for poetry, and the range of styles and approaches, and working towards each voice coming into its own." Other initiatives in the works for lovers of verse include "a commissioned poem installation by Britta Badour" (who grew up here) at the Calvin Park Branch of the library, and a recently launched project inviting residents "to contribute to a community poem that documents people's memories of the Causeway."

De Meijer recommends checking out *and the journey continues*, poet Bruce Kauffman's open mic reading series at The Elm Café (more on that to follow), as well as the *Quirks of Human Nature Series* at The Royal Tavern, and the *drift/line* reading series, which takes place at various locations. She adds, "the best way to know about these and many other events in the Kingston literary scene is to sign up for Bruce Kauffman's weekly email list" by emailing bruce.kauffman@hotmail.com.

Kauffman is no stranger to local arts lovers. His popular open mic reading series, which runs on the first Tuesday night of each month at The Elm Café, just celebrated sixteen years.

I discovered Kauffman and I both arrived in the same year — 2000 — and stayed for a similar reason: the feel of the city. Kauffman came by way of Denver, Colorado, another university town with a vibrant community space and a popular weekly reading series. After the series' founder stepped away, Kauffman began to host. He brought this experience and passion with him to Kingston, where he struggled at first to find a scene, until, after moving into the Skeleton Park area, he discovered *Poetry and Company* at downtown's Coffee and Company. This open mic has had numerous homes over the years, from Sydenham Street Church, to the RCHA, the Artel, Meta Body Works, the Common Market, eventually finding its home of the past six years in The Elm Café. When asked why he thinks this current relationship has been so successful, Kauffman praises the space's atmosphere and ambiance, saying "we're here in the heart of a very artistic community. Turnout is always robust."

He acknowledges COVID impacted the series, with lower attendance in the first few years, but says people are coming back now, with a rebound especially noticeable in the last year, when several local authors saw their books finally published.

After a half-dozen moves, and many name changes, Kauffman settled on the title *and the journey continues* — a moniker that encapsulates the tenacity and passion of the open mic's host and performers, and demonstrates the appetite for spoken word and the wealth of local talent that has allowed the series to thrive.

A year after he started hosting his open mics, Kauffman developed the *Finding a Voice* radio program to allow listeners unable to attend the readings a chance to discover and appreciate local performers, and to give local artists the opportunity to reach a larger audience. The two hour show airs on CFRC at 4:00 pm on Fridays, 52 weeks a year, always featuring live recordings from local events. Kauffman acknowledges the absence of Kingston WritersFest will leave a gap in his programming — he aired 10 events in 2024, but he has creative ideas at the ready to fill the air.

CFRC is also home to *Close Reads*, hosted by Corey Martin and Madeleine Vigneron, managing editor and co-editor-in chief respectively of the Queen's student publication *Quilt*. Their show celebrates creative writing at Queen's University, drawing from student publications such as *Quilt*, *Collective Reflections*, and *The Undergraduate Review* and featuring interviews with local authors. *Close Reads* also airs on Friday afternoons, and you can tune in at 101.9 on your FM dial, or directly from their website at cfrc.ca.

In addition to his open mic series and radio show, Kauffman organizes Poetry @ ArtFest in City Park. The event showcases between 40-50 poets, around 75% local, with others travelling in from the Toronto-Montreal corridor to join the festivities. This summer, ArtFest runs for four days, meaning Kauffman can dedicate more space to open mic readings. Each year Kauffman kicks things off with an intuitive writing workshop for those hoping to tap into their own creative energy.

Skeleton Park Arts Fest is another space that has showcased written art over many years, from the Hillside Park Poetry Stage hosted by Kauffman, to centre stage readings, and multi-disciplinary collaborations with touring artists like author, musician and filmmaker Leanne Betasamosake Simpson.

For book lovers of all stripes, Novel Idea is an undeniable fixture of downtown Kingston. I recently spoke with Oscar Malan, who has operated this local

KINGSTON REMAINS A DYNAMIC SPACE FOR THE CREATION AND PRESENTATION OF WRITTEN ARTS AND SPOKEN WORD.

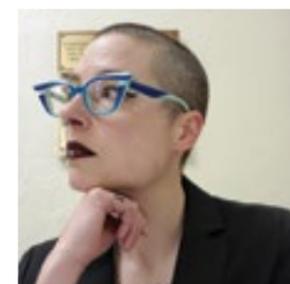


gem with his wife Joanna since 1988. In addition to providing a well-curated collection of books in all genres, the store hosts an impressive number of book launches throughout the year. "We're a platform for what's happening out there," says Malan. While they don't curate programming, there are always new books to be celebrated. In 2024, Malan estimates they hosted twenty-seven launches in store, as well as supporting around a dozen events in the community. Novel Idea also gives authors the chance to meet and greet with the public at events like the Princess Street Promenade, and with tables in-store over the holidays. This is not counting their long-standing relationship with Kingston WritersFest, where, as the festival's official book seller, Novel Idea offered an onsite bookstore at every festival and offseason event for sixteen years.

While the pandemic starts to feel like a more distant echo for some, its impacts are still being felt in the arts and culture sectors. Malan notes part of the reason for so many launches now is that many authors saw their book release dates delayed or cancelled by paper shortages, bankrupt publishing houses, and the absence of in-person events. Some authors had to wait years after finishing their work to see it in print.

When I asked Malan about the appetite for reading in Kingston, he pointed out that, on average, about 80% of people who sell books on consignment sell no copies. Personal marketing and community connections generate more attendance than any social media post or promotion the store can do. As a result, Novel Idea prioritizes local authors at its launches, and it is the author's community — friends, family, and fans — that makes these events so special. Launches are generally scheduled Tuesday-Thursday evenings. Check Novel Idea's social media for upcoming events.

As of writing, Kingston WritersFest is exploring new ways of being, and I am working with Kingston Literacy and Skills to facilitate a new local writing workshop and event series. While individual events and programs may come and go, Kingston remains a dynamic space for the creation and presentation of written arts and spoken word.



AARA MACAULEY is an avid supporter of arts and culture in our community, with over a dozen years of professional experience in arts administration in operational, curation, and programming roles. She is excited to be spearheading a new local series of writing workshops and bookish events in partnership with Kingston Literacy and Skills, and working with CFRC Radio as a project assistant to expand the arts and cultural programming on their station.

The Skeleton Park Arts Festival

20 Years in Photos

STORY BY **GREG TILSON**

As we approach the twentieth anniversary of the Skeleton Park Arts Festival, downtown Kingston's annual free grassroots, multi-disciplinary art experience, festival founder Greg Tilson takes the opportunity to look back at two decades of SPAF memories.

Come celebrate twenty years of Skeleton Park Arts Festival with us June 20-22, 2025. See you at the festival!



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
 Terrance Drake is one of many fire spinners who have brought the magic of flame and movement to SPAF. Dakota Ward and Jaylene Cardiner were two of several local muralists who took back the streets of Skeleton Park with brushes and paint. Some festival musicians, like Remesha Drummers, keep coming back year after year, by popular demand. Undertow Brass Band (formerly What Cheer? Brigade) continue to top the charts of favourite festival memories — performing not just for kids in the park, but on rooftops, fire escapes, and in courtyards. Skeleton Park's festival main stage has featured much more than live music over the years, including live painting by local artist Francisco Corbett. Sloan, Tanya Tagaq, Sarah Harmer, Shad, Rheostatics, and Alex Cuba are just a few of the big names who have played our little Skeleton Park main stage. Do-si-do-ing with neighbours at the annual square dance in Skeleton Park is always a joyous occasion — one that many folks look forward to all year long. Musician Claya Way Brackenbury from local band Piner has performed on the festival main stage, but she also attended the first festival with a feathered friend. When ugly City fencing blocked the park's splash pad area, SPAF did what we do best: covered it in art.



TOP ROW:

COVID didn't stop the festival from getting our art on — all summer long. We wandered, we admired, we chatted, and we held it together as best we could with SPAF's "Next Door" outdoor public art exhibition.

SECOND TO TOP ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT:

One of the festival's first ever musical acts was the popular neighbourhood band Swamp Ward Orchestra. SPAF artists are well known for performing in alternative venues, like the time Sheesham, Lotus and Son performed poolside at Artillery Park for excited aqua-fit audiences.

SECOND TO BOTTOM ROW, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:

The Lemon Bucket Orkestra led an epic festival parade from Skeleton Park to Princess Street for a memorable street party that included fire spinning, square dancing, and live music.

Dancer and Skeleton Park neighbour Broderick Gabriel (Lil'wat Nation) did an amazing impromptu dance performance with cellist Cris Derkson.

Lea Westlake has been organizing the Solstice Games in Skeleton Park for over twenty years.

Over the years, the Porch Jazz Parade has included giant puppets, dance choreography, steel drum bands, stilt walkers, and many, many parading brass bands.

BOTTOM ROW, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:

Neighbourhood artist Don Maynard's "Skeye Projects" provided festival audiences a very new experience for watching local short films with live music, while lying on our backs together in Friendship Park.

SPAF and Reelout Queer Film & Video Festival co-hosted one of the first Drag Queen Storytimes ever.

SPAF's Boxtopia Village by artist Krista Dalby is a yearly highlight that aligns with SPAF's waste-free mission.

Sharon & Bram brought out a lot of kids, but their parents were especially overcome with nostalgic joy.





2025 Festival Program Solstice Weekend June 20-22, 2025

All SPAF Programming
is FREE ADMISSION

LOCAL FOOD VENDORS!

PLEASE BRING YOUR OWN WATER BOTTLE & UTENSILS FOR A WASTE-FREE FESTIVAL

**LEAVE YOUR CAR AT HOME!
BICYCLE VALET PROVIDED**

7:00AM - 5:00PM Daily
The Elm Café (303 Montreal St):
Ted Simha-Webster
Photography Exhibition

Ongoing at the southeast corner of
Skeleton Park: "What is Community?"
Central Public School Art Installation

f Skeleton Park Arts Fest
@skeletonparkartsfest

FRIDAY JUNE 20

7:30pm - 9pm **Walks of Life Open Mic**
Hosted by Abbie Louise.
All ages welcome. Music, poetry,
short-stories, and stand-up comedy.
(Side Stage 1 - Next Church 89 Colborne St.)

SATURDAY JUNE 21 Skeleton Park

7:30am **Yoga by Jeb Thorley**
With music by Dave Barton

10am - 5pm
**Fat Goose Craft Fair,
Department of Illumination,
Community Info Booths**

10am **Opening Ceremony** (Main Stage)
By Grandmother Kate Brant
Featuring: Ollin Drum with
the St. Pierre Singers

11am **Splash'N Boots** (Main Stage)

11am **Fiercely OK Sing-along**
(Side Stage 1 - Next Church 89 Colborne St.)

12pm **Hezekiah Procter** (Main Stage)

1pm **Square Dance**
Callers Tom Henbest & Lauren Casselman
(Main Stage)

2pm **Anthea Feaver** (Main Stage)

2pm **Solstice Games** (Side Stage 3)

2pm **Workshop:**
Page to Stage: Voicing Your Verses
Feat. Cadence Weapon & Sadiqa de Meijer
(Side Stage 1 - Next Church 89 Colborne St.)

3pm **Almond Milk** (Main Stage)

4pm **Mimi O'Bonsawin**
Co-presented by Centre Culturel Frontenac
(Main Stage)

5:30pm **Zoon** (Main Stage)

6:30pm **Trash Panda Brass Band**
(Main Stage)

7:30pm **Cadence Weapon** (Main Stage)

9pm **Mimi O'Bonsawin**
(Sounds On Sydenham Street Stage)
Co-presented by Downtown Kingston

SUNDAY JUNE 22 Skeleton Park

7:30am **Yoga by Jeb Thorley**
With music by Dave Barton

10am - 5pm
**Fat Goose Craft Fair,
Department of Illumination,
Community Info Booths**

10am **Splash'N Boots** (Main Stage)

11am **Porch Jazz Parade**
Featuring: **Trash Panda Brass Band**
11am Brass Over Tea Kettle
(154 Ordnance St.)

11:30am **Fake Jazz Band** (6 Patrick St.)

12pm **The Goat Steppers** (Main Stage)

1pm **Cantabile Youth Choir**
with **The Gertrudes** (Main Stage)

2pm **Workshop:**
Sounding Off on Queer Joy
Feat. **Tiny Horse & Trash Panda Brass Band**
(Side Stage 1 - Next Church 89 Colborne St.)

2:30pm **Oakridge Ave** (Main Stage)

3:30pm **Moskitto Bar** (Main Stage)

5pm **Tiny Horse** (Main Stage)

6pm **Closing Ceremony** (Main Stage)

