

This Week in the Annex:

September 27, 2023

Messaging a Culture

Late last Saturday morning a few of us gathered in the tranquility of [Paul Martel Park](#) to meet Head Gardener Paul Richard for a Circle Garden Teaching. We couldn't have asked for more perfect autumn sunshine.

On hand were two members of Councillor Saxe's office whom she had asked to make preliminary investigation of the site following the recent vandalism. Also present was [Joseph Sagaj](#) whose murals animate the park and amplify its Indigenous intentions.



Holli Butrimas and Jessica Miller from Dianne Saxe's office enjoy a moment with Paul Richard.

Habitat Loss

Originally designed by the late Paul Martel as [Ecology Park](#), this green oasis within the Annex reach of Taddle Creek is one of the few native memories of that river's watershed. In what was at the time a novel and controversial planting, Paul featured a natural rather than artificial landscape, with the two canoe-shaped beds a visual tribute to the Ojibwa who had lived along the Taddle's route.

For the past three years, Paul Richard has worked tirelessly to regain and expand on his predecessor's vision. For him the purpose is twofold – both to highlight habitat loss (an issue that he emphasizes is existential to the Indigenous community) and to provide a culturally sympathetic space for Indigenous activity.



His aspirations were made manifest on Saturday through the presence and teachings of Elder Donelda Ashkewe, pictured above, a residential school survivor who may have lost her native tongue through the traumatic experience of her schooling but was able to sustain her knowledge of Indigenous crafts and cuisine.

Donelda spoke of the four sacred medicines – tobacco, cedar, sage, and sweetgrass – and their cultural significance to the spiritual, physical, and emotional well-being of native peoples. She has carefully nurtured these plants in the circle garden at the rear of the park – taking special pride in the ceremonial tobacco which was grown from 300-year-old seeds given her by chiefs from out west.

Everything about her talk, indeed the entire exchange among all of us present, was serene and unhurried and thoughtful. The morning served to highlight the park as an oasis for everyone in the community — when treated with respect.

The Indigenous Annex

Given this coming Saturday's significance as [Canada's National Day for Truth and Reconciliation](#), it's fortuitous to be celebrating the substantial Indigenous presence in our community. Not all Annexonians are aware of the fact that Spadina Road north of Bloor is a major hub of Indigenous culture in Toronto.

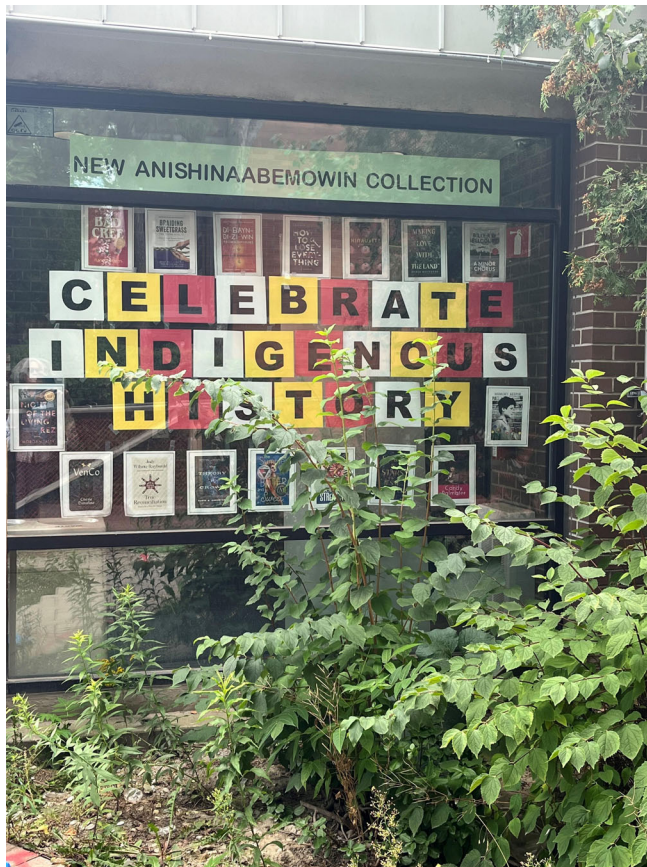
For example, both Paul and Donelda live at Wigwamen Terrace at 14 Spadina Road. It was the first housing built in the city specifically for Aboriginal seniors, opening its doors in 1979 with 104 units. Although it grew to 127 units in a recent expansion, there is still a lengthy wait list for this affordable, supportive housing.



Photo courtesy Mimi Tompkins

[Wigwamen Terrace](#) is a much more than a collection of apartments. It offers generous communal living space and activities as well as the assistance of a team of social and personal support workers.

Right next door at number 10 is the Spadina branch of the Toronto Public Library (TPL). Opened in 1980, the branch houses a large share of TPL's native peoples' resources.



The library's window advertises the [2023 Read Indigenous](#) list, a curated menu of books written by Indigenous authors and selected with input from TPL's [Indigenous Advisory Council](#).



TPL Public Service Assistant Wanjiku Wamugo displays books from the library's latest acquisition – materials focussing on the language, identities, cultures, and traditions of the [Anishinaabemowin \(ᐱᓆᓂᓴᑦᓄᓐ\)](#). There are books for all ages in the collection – and even some written in English for those who want to know more about the Anishinaabemowin.

Native Canadian Centre Toronto

But dominating the Indigenous presence along the Spadina stretch is the [Native Canadian Centre of Toronto](#) (NCCT) at number 16. The former home of the Ontario Bible College, this 1928 edifice was purchased in 1962 to serve as an Indigenous meeting place, one of the original [Friendship Centres](#) in Canada. And though its central mandate is to improve the quality of life for Indigenous people living in an urban environment, the building is open and welcoming to all.

We were lucky enough to be given a tour of the property by Fund Development Officer Richard Hunter when we dropped by a week ago. It happened to be just past noon and the halls were perfumed with the smell of that day's lunch of rice and chicken. Richard told us that anyone who is hungry is welcome to sit down for a meal at NCCT. No one is turned away.

There are several sizeable meeting rooms available for public rental that are decorated liberally with original works of art. Yet apparently what is on display is only a fraction of NCCT's holdings.



The West Coast totems on display at the Spadina subway station are part of the NCCT's extensive collection of Indigenous art.

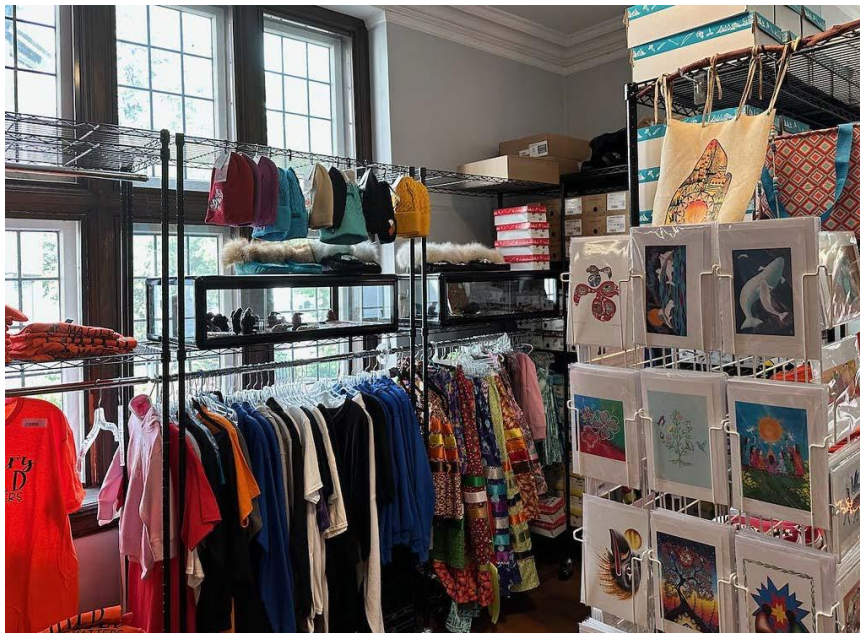
As well as offering social services support and counselling, NCCT has a spacious room specifically catering to Indigenous youth. You can see Richard in the image below posing in the corner barber's chair – haircuts are free of charge. And besides the popcorn and pop and candy, there are games and musical instruments, and a multitude of diversions on offer.



But the most strategically located enterprise in the building is the Cedar Basket Gift Shop – the store devoted to selling exclusive native crafts and products. Richard encouraged us to take part in the retail experience – and truth to tell, it was impossible to resist.



In addition to bright orange tee shirts ready for this Saturday, [Orange Shirt Day](#), the Cedar Basket carries a host of hand-crafted items from coffee mugs to jewellery, note cards to moccasins, herb mixtures to dream catchers.



Cedar Basket photos by Mimi Tompkins

It offers the perfect opportunity to promote native artists, support the centre, and celebrate Indigenous culture – all while giving yourself a treat. There's no

better time than now to go for a visit.

Notes and Queries

Community Barbecue

As he was giving us a tour of NCCT, Richard Hunter told us about the community barbeque scheduled for this coming **Friday September 29** from **11:30 am to 1:30 pm** in recognition of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Everyone in the neighbourhood is encouraged to come and enjoy the food and entertainment. Be sure to wear orange to show that every child matters.



Photo by Mimi Tompkins

TAS Outdoor Film Night

You're reminded that also in honour of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, TAS, the developers of Walmer Road Baptist Church, have organized a screening of three Indigenous films to be shown in the church parking lot tomorrow evening (**Thursday September 28**) at **6:30 pm**. You're asked to bring your own mug, chair and a cozy blanket, but free snacks and drinks will be provided. There's still time to [register on Eventbrite](#) so that organizers can gauge catering needs.

WALMER MOVIE NIGHT

HONOURING NATIONAL DAY FOR
TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

THURSDAY
SEPT 28
6:30-9PM

Walmer Road
Baptist Church
(parking lot)

Beans - Tracy Dear (Feature Film)

Secret Path - Gord Downie & Jeff Lumre (Short Film)

Jordan Gordon's Guide to Kuuguaq (Short Film)

Join us for an outdoor screening of three Indigenous made movies in honour of National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Free snacks and drinks. Bring your own mug, chair and a cozy blanket.

<https://walmermovienight.eventbrite.ca>

TAS Walmer

A Home is One's Castle

The premiere of *Charlotte's Castle*, Jamie Kastner's documentary on the fight to preserve the historic Spadina Gardens apartments, was warmly received by the crowd at Hot Docs Sunday night. Our own ARA Board member Charlotte Mickie starred in the film together with fellow resident Bobbi Speck who joined Charlotte on stage after the Q&A moderated by Atom Egoyan.



Bobbi and Charlotte flank producer Lauren Baron Kastner and director Jamie after the screening.

There's still time to [catch the film at Hot Docs](#) (today at **4:00 pm** or **Friday at 6:30**) – something you might want to do if you're interested in listening to the developer's presentation on the site. And if you don't mind the small screen, it's also showing tomorrow night (Thursday) at 9:00 pm on TVO.

You'll have a chance to listen first hand to the developer next **Tuesday October 3th at 5:30 pm** when [Prowinko](#) appears at the ARA Planning and Development (P+D) meeting. These meetings are public and held on Zoom. Anyone who wants to listen in is welcome to attend. Just write to info@theara.org on Monday afternoon and ask for the link to the P+D meeting.

Plan a Walk on Monday

Monday, October 2nd is International Tenants' Day, this year with the theme "A new deal for affordable rental housing." It's a perfect match for the tenants behind [No Demovictions](#) who will be on the march this coming Monday starting at **5:00 pm** outside New City Hall. The ARA has officially signed on to the group's mission. But what the tenants need now to drive home the message is shoes on the ground. Hope to see you there.



ARA Board Member Rebecca Gimmi and Chair Rita Bilerman outside the Hot Docs theatre after the *Charlotte's Castle* premiere. Rebecca's Tee – *If you don't mess with politics, politics will mess with you* – sends the message that we all need to get involved.

Frat Feedback

Well we sure hit a nerve last week! Our info inbox was jammed with messages offering comment, sharing misery, and even signing up for ARA membership. (That was fantastic – the larger our membership, the stronger our voice.)

Of course, some frats have no shame as was amply demonstrated this past Saturday night. The noise at 22 Madison was off the scale according to multiple calls made to 311. And if you want proof that the party was totally out of control, just examine the before and after images of the frat's front window.



Not such an exclusive club after all given the public invitation.



Shattered glass the morning after.

Councillor Saxe tells us she's on the case. That said, we know there's no easy fix for bad behaviour.



The Annex Residents' Association is a volunteer organization of residents committed to improving and preserving the distinctive character of our neighbourhood. Our strength depends on our base of support in a well-informed community.

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The Annex Residents' Association