



Birds in the bushes, bunnies in the tall grass, 8



"Fallen Men" critiques Western comic art, 5

THE CENTRETOWN BUZZ

Community activists defend Drag Queen story time

Alayne McGregor

A children's story time on February 8 turned into a re-hash of last year's convoy protests, as supporters of "Save Canada" clashed with local community activists and LGBTQ+ supporters in front of the National Arts Centre (NAC).

In contention was a free all-ages Drag Queen story time, with China Doll and Cyril Cinder telling stories and Monkey Rock Music singing children's tunes. The children's event was sponsored by Capital Pride, the NAC, and the Ottawa Public Library.

The community groups outnumbered the anti-drag protesters by almost 20 to 1, taking control of the event with banners to shield those going to the story time from the protesters. Bright, multi-coloured costumes and tinsel necklaces were everywhere, and a VJ provided upbeat music to which several were dancing. *The BUZZ* counted about 10 anti-drag protesters and several hundred community members.

The story time inside the NAC went ahead without incident. Police separated the two groups outside, and removed one person who had started to shove and scream at crowd members. They later reported they had arrested four people but released



When a small convoy-linked group protested the Drag Queen storytime at the National Arts Centre on February 8, a 20 times larger group came out to support the event and ensure parents and children could attend. ALAYNE MCGREGOR/THE BUZZ

them without charges.

Anti-drag placards carried messages such as "God made them male and female," "To all Mama Bears and Papa Bears, protect your

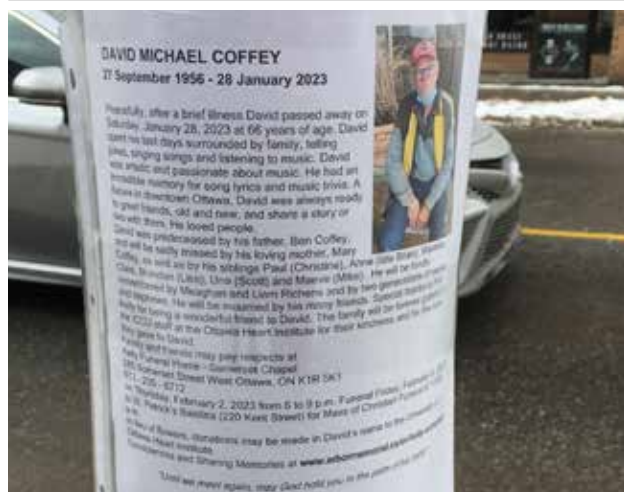
baby bears," and "Close the book on drag queen story-time," as well as attacks on Prime Minister Trudeau. At least one protester was seen wearing a "Save Canada"

baseball cap.

On Twitter, *The BUZZ* found messages saying "Join Save Canada as we make a stand to end the grooming and sexualization of children

at the National Arts Centre."

On Facebook, Cinder responded to a question about drag story time by explaining it wasn't about gender or **continued on page 4 "Story time"**



David Michael Coffey was a well-known presence on Bank St. for decades. His obituary was posted on a pole next to where he usually sat at the Bank/Lisgar corner. ALAYNE MCGREGOR/THE BUZZ

The smiling panhandler is gone

Alayne McGregor

He always greeted people with a smile, and often wore a bright red and white Dr. Seuss "Cat in the Hat" top hat.

David Michael Coffey panhandled on Bank Street for decades, first at Bank and Queen and, more recently, at Bank and Lisgar. He was a

constant friendly presence on the street, chatting with passersby regardless of whether they gave him any change.

He died January 28 after a brief illness, according to his obituary. The family thanked the ICCU staff at the Ottawa Heart Institute for their care. He was 66.

continued on page 3 "Happy"

Centretown was abandoned, People's Commission concludes in its first report

Alayne McGregor

Residents of Centretown felt abandoned and abused during last winter's convoy occupation, the Ottawa People's Commission (OPC) has concluded, and had to save themselves.

The community-led commission released its first report—"What We Heard"—on January 30. Its recounting of the effect of the occupation on residents was based on 14 public hearings, eight community meetings, and more than 75 written submissions, involving more than 200 local residents. A few supported the convoy; most did not.

The "entrenched occupation" was marked by "widespread human rights abuse, amidst a climate of threats, fear, sexual harassment and intimidation marked by rac-

ism, misogyny, antisemitism, Islamophobia, homophobia, transphobia, and other expressions of hate and intolerance," the report said.

The commission's mandate is to provide local residents with "a venue to share their personal experiences of the convoy's impact on their lives and livelihoods and to offer recommendations as to steps that would avoid or minimize the risk of a similar ordeal in the future."

It used "a human rights framework which upholds the importance of the right to peaceful protest while also recognizing that a wide range of human rights of residents, workers and business owners in Ottawa and Gatineau were at stake during the convoy occupation. ...That is where we have seen a colossal abdication on the part of

the municipal, provincial and federal governments."

For residents, "this was much more than a benign convoy, and was very different from a peaceful or even legitimately provocative and disruptive protest or demonstration. Consistently people describe what they went through as an occupation, and that they felt invaded and under siege."

The report directly quotes residents about their experiences of feeling imprisoned in their homes, being accosted for wearing masks, or being traumatized by blaring horns or the display of symbols and messages of hate, racism and discrimination. People with disabilities had essential programs and services cancelled, including Para Transpo. Many others **continued on page 2 "Convoy"**

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101-210 Gloucester St.
Ottawa, ON
K2P 2K4
Phone: 613-565-6012

centretownbuzz.com
twitter.com/centretownbuzz
facebook.com/centretownbuzz

BUZZ Staff

Managing editor: Alayne McGregor
editor@centretownbuzz.com

Associate editor: Eleanor Sawyer

City Editor: Robert Smythe
cityskyline@centretownbuzz.com

Distribution manager: Archie Campbell
circulation@centretownbuzz.com

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The Lighter Side of the Pandemic, by Karen Munro-Caple



Comment

The city budget - how to read it and what to look for

Alayne McGregor

Follow the money.

Ultimately, a city's budget is the best measure of its priorities. Which departments or community groups have to beg for money versus which get money as of right says a great deal about values. Which budgets are cut (transit) versus which get the full percentage amount (police) also is indicative.

The City of Ottawa's budget is both huge and complex, difficult for even councillors to understand. Because of that, it's difficult to budget.

This is made even more challenging by policies that prevent moving money between departments: you can't just reallocate police dollars to public health. On top of that, if a councillor wants to add anything, they must provide an offsetting cut within that department. And it's very difficult to move money between capital and operating budgets, especially if development charges are involved.

But it's not impossible. It just requires careful reading, good arguments, making specific proposals to change this or that budget line, and persuading councillors to agree.

This month, city committees are debating different parts of the budget, leading up to council's debate of the full budget on March 1.

Citizens can speak at each committee meeting, either in person or virtually.

A deep dive into Transportation

One of the most interesting debates will be at Transportation Committee, which will consider its budget February 23.

Here are some of the implications of that budget for Centretown residents:

- Two of the largest road projects included in this year's capital budget are the **widening of the Airport Parkway** from Brookfield to Hunt Club (\$20.2M) and the

- widening of Bank Street** south of Leitrim (\$18.4M). Both of these roads feed directly into Centretown.

The Airport Parkway widening has been historically opposed by Centretown communities for decades, and it directly parallels LRT Line 2. Councillor Shawn Menard describes it as "incredibly troubling... If it goes forward, we will be spending tens or hundreds of millions of dollars on a project that will increase traffic, increase congestion, increase pollution and contribute to climate change, and undercut the effectiveness of LRT."

- Any company that wants to **rent e-scooters** in Ottawa in 2023 will have to pay a \$10,000 application fee, double the 2022 rate. The fee for each scooter has doubled, too, to \$100 and a new \$130 per-scooter compliance fee has been added. This might be a disincentive to companies returning to Ottawa.

- Most fees – for ex-

ample, residential parking permits – are increasing by about 2.5 percent this year. But not **on-street and off-street car parking fees, which remain the same for the third straight year.**

- If you want to know **traffic or collision data** for your street, the price is up another two percent, to \$119.07 per report.

- Water and sewer mains are being replaced on several Centretown streets: **Albert/ Slater/ Bronson/ Queen** (already underway), **MacLaren (Bronson to Kent) and Lyon (Somerset to Florence)**, and **City Centre/Elm** Streets. The roads and sidewalks will also be completely replaced, and cycling facilities added.

- Design work is beginning on replacing the sewers and road on **Bay Street from Florence to Somerset.**

- A long list of roads to be resurfaced includes none in Somerset Ward, but **O'Connor at Cooper** will

receive vibration remediation.

- The extension of the **O'Connor bidirectional cycling lane from Laurier to north of Albert** is included in the 2023 cycling facilities budget.

- The funding for fixing **missing links in the city's active transportation networks** has gone down from \$1.2M in 2022 to \$700K in 2023.

- Funding for the **Cycling Facilities** program has increased from \$4.9M in 2022 to \$7.5M in 2023. **Bike parking facilities** has decreased from \$700K to \$500K. **Transportation Demand Management** has increased from \$100K to \$356K.

- A long list of sidewalks and paths to be reconstructed includes none in Somerset Ward. A proposed renewal of the **Percy Street cycle track** is "below the line" i.e., not funded in the 2023 budget.

You can read the full budget by going to ottawa.ca/budget and then choosing "2023 Budget Information."

Convoy occupation was violent, report says

continued from page 1

could not access grocery stores, pharmacies, or other services.

The occupation was violent, the report concludes. One of the many residents it quotes describes being beaten after he refused to do a "dragon dance," and having the police later reject his report.

In the midst of this violence, the commission said, attempts to report bylaw infractions and offences had no effect. Almost always the result was inaction by the police and the city. "Often people simply received no response. Many people were told by police that they were not taking enforcement action in the red zone and were waiting for further orders."

Residents were stunned that the occupation was allowed to take place. "The OPC heard repeatedly that this police strategy to essentially welcome and accom-

modate the truckers, seemingly with no restrictions, left residents feeling as if they did not matter."

In response, many residents mobilized to protect each other, the report said, with community safety walks and checks on vulnerable neighbours.

"People banded together, therefore, to assist those who were not readily able to access food, medicines and other essentials. That included remarkable efforts within the disability community to prepare and distribute meals to other people with disabilities. Within condominium and apartment buildings residents spearheaded informal arrangements to essentially share provisions with each other."

Others took part in counter-protests or in the legal injunction against the blaring horns.

The report was written by the four independent commissioners: lawyer Leilani Farha, director of housing rights group The Shift; human rights lawyer Alex Neve; Debbie Owusu-Akyeaa, the executive director of the Canadian Centre for Sexual and Gender Diversity; and Monia Mazigh, an author, human rights activist, and an adjunct and research professor at Carleton University.

The OPC will release a final report including further analysis and recommendations in late March.

The commission is an initiative of the Centretown Community Health Centre, which is accepting donations for its work. CCHC Executive Director Michelle Hurtubise said the commission's work has so far been fully funded, but they need more donations to produce its final report.

Heritage Skyline: The snows of yesteryear

Robert Smythe

Were Centretown's forebears a harder lot in the winter months?

Living in what were often draft-prone uninsulated dwellings and forced to travel snow-clogged streets in unheated convey-

ances, they were probably forced to be.

Yet the images of the neighbourhood from 125+ years ago also speak of pristine snow and a muffled silence unsoftened by the roar of motorized vehicles. At least that's the romantic view of winters past.

All photos from Library and Archives Canada.



1. Ottawa Electric Railway's streetcar number 17 is almost mired in snowbanks.

Photo 1

Almost mired in some mighty snowbanks, Ottawa Electric Railway's streetcar number 17 is trying manfully to perform its regular shuttle between the CPR Station on Broad Street in LeBreton Flats and Rideau Street.

Interestingly, for a time the route ran right down Wellington Street past the Parliament Buildings, which raises comparisons with the City of Gatineau's current attempt for a similar cross-river tram.

The photo's caption suggests that this was photographed in the early 1890s at Queen and Kent Streets before reaching Bank and the turn onto Wellington. The unheated and largely open interiors of these early cars would have offered its freezing passengers very few creature comforts. However, unlike some vehicles on our current rapid transit system, its trailing pantograph seems to be firmly attached to the wires overhead.

Photo 2

The wards of the Protestant Orphans' Home at play around their newly constructed snow fort during the cold winter of 1898, with what appears to be a flooded ice-skating surface in the distance. This was a moment of joy in what would have been a very bleak existence dictated by the stern group of society matrons who ran the place.

The Orphans' Home stood at the southwest corner of Elgin and Lisgar Streets between 1885 and 1929, when it was transformed into the less ominous-sounding Protestant Children's Village on Carling Avenue.

This grimly institutional building was abandoned and demolished for a block of commercial buildings facing Elgin and the Manhattan and Royal York Apartments.

Photo 3

The Ottawa Normal School, pictured from a corner of the orphans' play-

ground under a heavy blanket of snow in December of 1893.

Today, this is the Heritage Wing of Ottawa City Hall containing the mayor's and city manager's offices. When it was built in 1874-75, it was situated at what was then the edge of the city's built-up district.

Ontario's Normal School system was established to give its student teachers a consistent province-wide grounding in the methods of education, all in one year.

After graduation, they could move into the classrooms at the rear of the building: the Ottawa Model School where their teaching skills could be further observed before being dispatched to the city's growing network of public schools.

The keen-eyed may observe that snow-plowing was very limited – just enough to keep Elgin's streetcars running. Sidewalks were hand-shoveled in spots.

A happy face is gone from Bank St.

continued from page 1

“David spent his last days surrounded by family, telling jokes, singing songs and listening to music. David was artistic and passionate about music. He had an incredible memory for song lyrics and music trivia. He loved people,” the obituary said.

Coffey is memorialized in the mural on the hoarding surrounding the vacant lot at Bank and Lisgar: a small figure carrying a chair, a thermos, and a backpack, looking out over water.

Leigh Reid, co-owner of

the nearby social enterprise HighJinx, said she knew Coffey for more than 25 years. When she was working in a Bank Street bar, “he would come in and have his coffee and chat with us.”

She described him as the “happy panhandler. He was always in good spirits, always friendly, always cracking a joke. He was one person who actually made you feel happy about being around.”

Reid said she thought he wore the hat “to get people in good spirits, because he wasn't an overly serious guy.

He always sort of tried to make light of things or have a joke. I think it was just to put a smile on people's faces.”

Coffey remembered faces, she said, and cared about his neighbours and his community.

She said she had heard he didn't need to panhandle and did it more for socialization (“he loved to engage with people”), and gave money to other street folks.


“He's going to be missed. There will be a big hole in the Centretown community with him gone.”




2. The wards of the Protestant Orphans' Home at play in the snow.



3. The Ottawa Normal School in 1893, with Elgin sidewalks under a heavy blanket of snow.





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City to reopen Wellington to cars

Alayne McGregor

Despite eight of nine delegations asking that Wellington Street remain closed to motor vehicles, the city Transportation Committee voted unanimously to open it.

The decision was confirmed by City Council, with only two councillors dissenting. Since several traffic signals on the street need to be reinstated, the city said the street will not open until March.

Councillor Ariel Troster persuaded the committee to have a temporary segregated bike lane delimited by flex posts installed on Wellington. City staff will also look at closing the street between Elgin and Bank several times this summer “for special events and community programming or for the safety and well-being of the residents of Ottawa.”

The city will also continue negotiations with the federal government on the

future of Wellington, and to coordinate a traffic study of the area to be finished by Q1 2024. A parliamentary committee recently recommended a federal takeover of the street and closing it to traffic.

The staff report noted that the closure has not to date “had a significant negative impact to the transportation network.”

See centretownbuzz.com for a more detailed version of this story.

Community groups defend story time

continued from page 1
sexuality. “We’re just there to be our authentic selves in our most fabulous and sparkly states to show that it’s okay to be fabulous and sparkly!”

“The message is mostly in the books we’re reading, and we’re privileged to get to pick some beautiful children’s books to read about courage, acceptance, and strength, but it’s also in the medium of drag itself. We’re there showing that you’re never too old to have fun or enjoy playing dress up! But also that it’s okay to be a little bit different, that we love being different, and, in so doing, we hope to discourage bullying that can occur as kids get a bit older.

“Drag is a form of performance art, a medium of art, and so it too can be adapted

depending on the audience. Drag involves larger than life characters with our sparkly outfits and big, bright makeup, so there’s a lot within the medium that can be fun for everyone! Drag is very similar to the art of clown in that way.”

An organizer of the community response, who asked that his name not be used, said that community defenders came out after seeing Facebook and Twitter messages from Save Canada members about the NAC story time. This was the first time a drag story time had been targeted in Ottawa, he said, although there have been disruptions and cancellations elsewhere in Ontario.

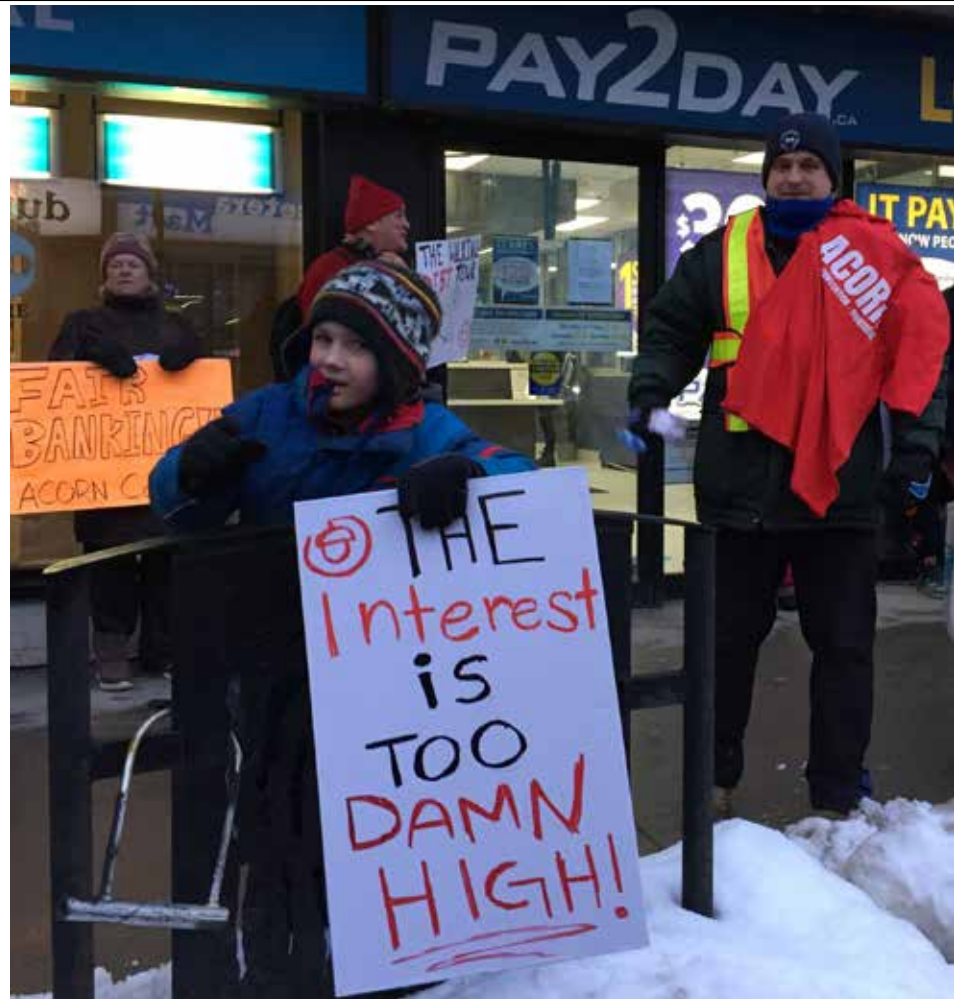
The Save Canada action “is very much not motivated by a desire to protect children. It’s just motivated by hate.”

He said that Save Cana-

da was one of the groups in last February’s convoy protests, as well as in follow-up events like Rolling Thunder and other anti-vax protests on Parliament Hill. The Save Canada website features videos from the Ottawa convoy protests.

Alex Johnston joined the community counter-demonstration because, he said, “these are the same people who occupied Ottawa and turned our neighbourhoods into hell” during the convoy occupation, and it was important to stand up to them.

Johnston lives just outside Centretown but frequently had to go into the Red Zone. He said he was called a “retard” by convoyers just because he was wearing a mask, which was particularly hurtful because he is on the autism spectrum.



On January 25, about 25 activists paraded in front of three payday loan companies on downtown Bank Street, calling for restrictions on the level of interest (up to 60 percent) and fees the companies can charge. The event was part of ACORN’s national day for fair banking, which also calls for greater federal control of lending, low-cost credit options in case of emergency, and more banking options for low-income people.

ALAYNE MCGREGOR/THE BUZZ

The Climatorian: Beans are cheap, and here’s how to cook them

Cathy Woodgold

I thought I knew how to cook beans, but I’ve just learned a lot!

There’s something comforting about a hot meal with beans in it. Beans make a satisfying, balanced vegetarian meal, but it sure takes some planning if you start from dried beans.

Let’s see. Step one: soak in water overnight. Oh, I see. We would have had to start yesterday.

The longer the dried beans have been stored, the longer they take to cook. Aha! That explains some of my experiences.

The purpose of soaking is to magically transform the beans – maybe not into a beanstalk that reaches the sky, but to start the germination process, which chemically changes the beans. Discard the soaking water.

It can take a few weeks of eating beans to get used

to them and for digestive inconveniences to settle down. Starting with smaller amounts can be a good strategy.

Other ways to reduce or eliminate problems such as – ahem! – flatulence include rinsing them thoroughly to remove a sticky substance from their surface, and stirring vigorously. It helps to cook the beans with cumin, turmeric, ginger, fennel, sage, or a bay leaf. Boiling the beans and discarding the water can also reduce embarrassing problems from this “musical fruit.”

Adding a teaspoon of salt and a teaspoon of baking soda per litre of water when soaking the beans helps. Acidic ingredients such as tomato sauce should not be added too early in the cooking process. The perfect bean is soft but not mushy.

Before slow-cooking, beans should be boiled a few minutes, and kidney beans

at least 10 minutes. Undercooked kidney beans can be toxic. While cooking times vary with the batch and type of bean, half an hour to two hours on the stovetop are typical times – or much faster in a pressure cooker.

To save time, you can cook a large batch of beans and freeze them in convenient-sized containers.

Alternatively, dried lentils or peas can often be cooked without presoaking. Tofu (processed soybean curd) can be tasty fried with spices before adding to other foods. Some vegetables have similar amino acids as beans: broccoli, cauliflower, collards, chard or especially spinach (remember Popeye?) ... or you can just open a can of beans!

(For more information:

Joe Yonan: *Cool Beans*.

Nik Sharma: *The Science of Cooking Beans*.)

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MPP, Ottawa Centre
joelhardenmpp.ca

109 Catherine St.
Ottawa, ON. K2P 2M8

✉ JHarden-CO@ndp.on.ca

☎ 613-722-6414



Ottawa artist takes figures from Western comics for new art exhibit



Some of the falling figures which Ottawa artist Shane Rhodes has cut out from Western comic books from the 1940s and 50s, from his website.

Ali Adwan

In the 1940s and 50s, a series of adventure comics portrayed the myth of the “lawless Western frontier.” Ottawa artist Shane Rhodes has used figures from those comics for his *Fallen Men* art project, now on display at the Manx on Elgin.

The project extracts single

figures from the comics as part of exploring those comics’ somewhat shameful history of colonization. It’s named after a Western novel written by Jack Schaefer in 1946.

Rhodes comes from a small farming town in Western Canada. He worked on his family’s farm as child, as well as working with cowboys and even living the cowboy lifestyle for a bit.

A poet and an author, he has written multiple books including *Dead White Men*, a telling of the Indigenous histories that have been long forgotten due to colonization in the United States.

For this project, Rhodes wanted to build onto his poetry but add a visual twist, based on his interest in the golden age of cowboy comics, to bring everything together.

“For me, it’s a larger theoretical idea around the idea of western heroes falling from their position of authority that we have put them on in the 1950s and 1960s,” Rhodes said.

He compared and contrasted both eras and specifically how people in today’s world view certain topics. When the comics were published, these cowboy characters – such as those portrayed by John Wayne in the movies – were truly seen as heroes and legends. Now people aren’t as likely to trust the narrative from that time period.

However, at the same time, Rhodes wanted to showcase the art style itself and as he puts it, “revel in the beauty that was created when you take a look at some of these figures.”

While some might say that the Western genre is far past its prime and isn’t popu-

lar anymore, Rhodes begs to differ.

“I think a big part of it all is that the strength of the Western story is still strong today. There are still all sorts of movies like *The Revenant* which came out a couple years ago so there is a real popularity even today.”

He said it was important that artists take apart stories from the past, especially those which continue to be told, and question them.

As a result, Rhodes explains, there already has been a shift of what the Western means.

“I think you can see Westerns now that are much more conscious in the way they historically depict Indigenous people when compared to all the cliches that the older ones do.”

Technically, the project was difficult. Rhodes used comics from both the U.S.

and Canada. He scanned the pages and lifted the figures out of them. The colours were corrected and cut-off bodies were made whole using scraps. The figures were printed onto acrylic or birch plywood with UV flexo ink and then laser cut.

Rhodes has also created limited print editions of the figures from the series for sale.

The exhibit will continue at the Manx Pub (370 Elgin near Gladstone) until early March. Rhodes can be reached through his website:

www.ShaneRhodes.ca

MPP report: save public health care

Joel Harden

On January 19, we sent a message to Premier Doug Ford: our health care is not for sale.

That’s the day over a hundred people met in Confederation Park, with less than 48 hours notice, to demand better for health care staff, better for patients, and better for our cherished public health care system. We heard powerful testimonials making this case.

We also did an outside tour of two fully private clinics operating in Centretown that give “fast lane” health care to those who can pay thousands in private fees.

ExecHealth and La Vie Executive Health promise access to crucial medical services in days, while public system lineups can take months or longer given funding cuts. This will only get worse if we allow public funds to subsidize the Ford government’s privatization plans.

Just a few days before our protest, Premier Ford had announced permanent changes to use private, for-profit clinics to clear Ontario’s surgical backlog. When questioned about his deci-

sion the premier went so far as to say that critics of this move “... are the ones that created hallway health care for many years.”

That’s a curious view divorced from reality, but I’ve come to expect that from this premier. He likes to blame others, avoid responsibility, and reward friends seeking to profit from services usually performed by the public sector.

The Herzig Eye Institute is a case in point. Herzig executives are major Tory donors and stand to benefit handsomely from the 5,000 cataract surgeries in Ottawa they will absorb per year from the current surgical backlog, if the Ford government’s plan goes ahead.

But, as Elizabeth Payne from the *Ottawa Citizen* noted in an article published January 17, most cataract patients in Ottawa are able to access corrective surgery within six months through our public system (though wait times for complex-care cataract patients can be different).

Payne noted that “...Dr. Kashif Baig, [a local] cornea, anterior segment and refractive surgeon ... [has] the longest wait times, pos-

sibly because he treats more complex cases. His patients can wait up to 1,402 days” for treatment at University of Ottawa’s Eye Institute.

But Dr. Baig is also the medical director for the Herzig Eye Institute Ottawa.

How long will cataract patients wait for Dr. Baig’s services rendered at Herzig? And how much will OHIP be billed for surgical procedures done there? These are important questions that, as I write these words, have no answers.

We are also at risk of losing staff from an overburdened and underfunded public health care system to private care. Upselling and price gouging in private health care are common. These trends are great for private health care executives but terrible for everyone else.

So let’s build a movement to save public health care. Keep an eye on our social media for upcoming events and actions to join. It’s time to get organized and make good trouble.

Ontario’s education workers showed us how to do that in 2022; inspired by their example, we can save public health care in 2023.

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What's on in Ottawa and beyond this month

Tony Wohlfarth

In this column: two Ukrainian films which premiered at the 2023 Sundance Film Festival festival, the recent Folk Alliance International Conference in Kansas City, and some entertainment options this month in Ottawa and beyond.

Iron Butterflies

Iron Butterflies is an interesting documentary film about the missile system which brought down the Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 in 2014 over Donetsk in Ukraine. The BUK is a Russian built anti-aircraft system which was used by the pro-Putin paramilitary to destroy the civilian aircraft, killing 298 civilians.

A large part of the film is set in cyberspace. We learn the impact the downing had on the International AIDS Conference in Melbourne, Australia – since top world researchers died onboard. We also learn the outcome of the trial of the perpetrators before a court in The Hague. It is an important film about the historic origins of the current Russian aggression against the people of Ukraine.

20 Days in Mariupol

This film shows the devastating impact of the war against Ukraine, captured chronologically by journalists' coverage of residents of the besieged city of Mariupol in the south of the country.

It is not for the faint of heart. The scenes are bloody and the human suffering very real. The footage was taken for the major television networks by a dedicated film crew embedded with the civilian population. We see firsthand the mass burial sites reminiscent of World War II. I found the scenes in the maternity hospital very disturbing.

When interviewed at Sundance, director Mstyslav Chernov, a reporter for the Associated Press, talked about how the film was made and reached the outside world: festival.sundance.org/program/film/638a18e377dd3d7624805938

20 Days in Mariupol won the Audience Award in the World Cinema Documentary Competition at Sundance. Distribution is pending.

Folk Alliance International (FAI)

Folk musicians gathered in Kansas City from February 1-5 for the 35th FAI Conference.

The showcases featured an abundance of talented Canadian artists. I was especially impressed by Terra Spencer. Spencer is a singer songwriter born and raised on the banks of the Avon River in Windsor, Nova Scotia. She performed songs from her latest CD, *Old News*. Her vocals are silky smooth and she is, according to Ron Sexsmith, "the real deal." www.terraspencer.ca

Ottawa's own Angelique Francis also performed at FAI. angeliquefrancis.net

Another highlight from FAI was the film *Take Me to the River New Orleans*, directed by Martin Shore. It's a visual testament to the mu-

sical sounds of The Big Easy, told by some of its most formative musicians – including Ani DiFranco, the Neville Brothers, and Dr. John. The film was created in 2018-2019 before the pandemic. It captures magical moments in the unique music of New Orleans.

Shore won The Audience Award at the South-by-Southwest Festival in 2014 with his earlier film *Take Me to the River Memphis*. His New Orleans tribute runs 1h45m and can be purchased via Amazon.

National Arts Centre (1 Elgin)

This month, the NAC stages are alive with an abundance of live entertainment:

- February 18: Angelique Francis, in an afternoon show for children 5+;
- February 19: The Peptides;
- February 19: comedian Jack Whitehall;
- February 24: Magi Merlin;
- February 25: Caroline Savoie;
- March 3: comedian Joe Gotta;
- March 3: Steven Taetz;
- March 4: DahkaBrakha, an "ethno-chaos" band from Ukraine;
- March 4: OK Naledi;
- March 8-25: *Fall on Your Knees*, Parts One and Two;
- March 11: Ballet Edmonton;
- March 11: pop-jazz group Damoizeaux;
- March 17-19: Shen Yun, ballet and dance from China.

See nac-cna.ca

Ottawa Public Library

The OPL is presenting a three-part workshop series to mark Black History Month beginning February 25, at its main branch at 120 Metcalfe Street. It's based on Tom Zoellner's award-winning new book *Island On Fire: The Revolt That Ended Slavery in the British Empire*. Advance registration is required: www.eventbrite.ca/e/island-on-fire-tickets-515294498717

National Film Board

The National Film Board of Canada (NFB) is marking Black History Month by releasing a series of films by black Canadian filmmakers. All the films are free. See www.nfb.ca/channels/focus-black-filmmakers/

Ottawa Trans Library (1104 Somerset West)

On February 18, the Ottawa Trans Library is holding a poetry night to share original poetry on the theme of "unmasking." Details can be found at: ottawatranslibrary.ca/event/poetry-night/

Montgomery Scotch Lounge (750 Gladstone)

This lounge has become a regular venue for local jazz artists. On February 23, the longtime duo of Don Cummings on Hammond A organ and Mike Essoudry on drums play strong grooves as Bumpin' Binary.

Vocalist Gerri Trimble and guitarist Kevin Barrett take the stage February 24.



A scene from the documentary *20 Days in Mariupol*, showing the human suffering there. (AP)

Art House Cafe (555 Somerset West)

On February 24, violist/composer Kathryn Patricia Cobbler and dancer/choreographer Elizabeth Emond-Stevenson reunite in *Re: Imagine* – a live dance-music collaboration to the music of J.S. Bach.

See www.thearthousecafe.ca/events

Live on Elgin (220 Elgin)

On February 22, Live on Elgin stages

the monthly Kino Ottawa Short Film Festival. See www.liveonelgin.com/collections/shows/products/kino-ottawa

Tony Wohlfarth is an Ottawa-based freelance film and entertainment writer. He covered the 35th FAI Conference in Kansas City and is currently covering the 73rd Berlinale in Berlin, Germany.

MP report: Share your ideas with the Downtown Revitalization Task Force

Yasir Naqvi

Downtown Ottawa has changed significantly over the past three years.

With hybrid work here to stay and affordability challenges driving up home prices and the cost of doing business, our downtown is facing serious challenges.

But there is also reason for hope. In the summer of 2022, I brought the Downtown Ottawa Revitalization Task Force together, comprising representatives of not-for-profit and for-housing developers, local business improvement area representatives, tourism stakeholders, Indigenous leaders, and affordable social housing advocates.

The main objective of the task force is to explore ideas and create recommendations that will assist policymakers in reimagining the future of downtown Ottawa.

To assist us in this effort, the task force is opening up the conversation to hear from a variety of different voices and groups across our community. We are hard at work developing our recommendations and, now, we want to hear from you! Interested individuals can provide their feedback through this link: downtown-ottawa.in.howspace.com/home-page

Let's reimagine downtown for people to live, work, visit, and play!

Child care fees reduced by 50 percent

We are off to a great start with reduced child care fees. Now that Ontario has signed on to Canada's Early Learning and Child Care Agreement, Ottawa Centre residents are seeing a 50 percent reduction in their child care expenses. I've heard from many families in our community how much of a difference this has made.

Parents should not have to choose between working and raising a family. Furthermore, this means having more flexibility as to how

Canadians spend their earnings. Whether it's to buy more groceries, enrol children in more after-school activities, or to be able to pay rent with greater ease. This is part of our overall plan to make life more affordable for Canadians and one step closer to ensuring families can access \$10 per day child care.

Additionally, on December 8, 2022, our federal government introduced Bill C-35 to further reinforce and protect Canada's Early Learning and Child Care Agreement. If passed, the bill would enshrine the principles of a Canada-wide early learning and child care system into federal law.

Protecting our environment by banning single-use plastics

In addition to affordability, our community cares greatly about our environment and tackling climate change. Our federal government made a commitment to ban single-use plastics to protect our environment and our waters.

Over the next decade, this world-leading ban on harmful single-use plastics will result in the estimated elimination of over 1.3 million tonnes of hard-to-recycle plastic waste and more than 22,000 tonnes of plastic pollution, which is equivalent to over a million garbage bags full of litter.

As of December 20, 2022, the manufacture and import for sale in Canada of check-out bags, cutlery, foodservice ware, stir sticks and straws, as defined in the regulations, are prohibited.

This bold action will result in cleaner parks and hiking trails for residents to enjoy, and a cleaner shoreline for our kids to play. I have been a strong advocate for climate action in our community and I am pleased to share this important news with residents.

As always, don't hesitate to contact my community office if you have any questions on these federal government initiatives, or if you need assistance. My team and I are here to help.

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Jack Hanna

Mary Huang is CCA president for 2023

At the CCA's AGM in late January, Mary Huang was acclaimed CCA president for a second term. She hopes over the coming year to build new activities for the already-busy community association. These include maintenance of outdoor rinks, social activities for seniors, and advocacy around the YMCA-YWCA site. (The Y is selling its building near the Museum of Nature.)

Huang, a management consultant, is an activist in housing and issues affecting seniors. In December, Huang was awarded the Canadian Platinum Jubilee Emblem for her volunteer work.

New Councillor Troster says she will protect the vulnerable

Recently-elected City Councillor Ariel Troster said her big priority is retaining services for Centretown's most vulnerable in the face of belt-tightening at City Hall.

"I'm very worried," she said, addressing the CCA AGM.

The city will experience a revenue squeeze because the province has slashed development fees and the mayor wants a tax hike of less than 2.5 percent, which, said Troster, "is far below the rate of inflation." As revenues tighten, the city cannot descend to imposing "more human suffering" for its most in-need citizens.

The opioid and addiction crises are out of control. They only got worse during the pandemic. The housing and homelessness crises, too. "Food insecurity is worse," she said. "More people are hungry and the price of food is higher."

Troster said some councillors "plan to hold the mayor to his promise; he has promised no cuts to frontline services."

Clear the snow already!

Troster said a big surprise since her recent election is the avalanche of calls and emails about snow removal in Centretown.

"I vastly under-estimated the number of emails I would receive about snow," she told the CCA AGM.

The city is reviewing snow-clearance policies and Troster said she is emphasizing "accessibility and pedestrian safety in Somerset Ward." She said this is a vital issue because Centretown's population is shifting towards seniors.

"We talk about 15-minute neighbourhoods but when people want to walk or roll (in wheelchairs, walkers and strollers) to nearby services they need, they can't get there when they are trapped by intersections that are not cleared. It is a human rights issue; it is an accessibility issue."

The peril of rising rooming house rents

Rooming-house rents are rapidly getting pricier, putting those who can't afford them in a perilous situation.

A rooming-house tenant, speaking at a recent CCA forum, said her situation became dire after the ownership of her rooming house changed. The new owners removed two of the three kitchens shared by 15 tenants. As well, they renovated the rooms and almost doubled the rents. Several long-time tenants, including the speaker, can't afford the new rents and are at a loss in a market with a shrinking stock of affordable housing.

The forum on rooming houses was hosted by the CCA's Housing Affordability Working Group.

Other speakers pointed out that affordable rooming houses are essential for a diversity of people, including single professionals, students, newcomers, persons on fixed-income, and folks with disabilities.

CCA elects veterans, new faces to board

So many talented people offered to serve on the CCA's board, there was an election at the recent AGM.

Seven past board members will continue into 2023: Rob Dekker, David Groves, Brenda Knight, Alice Nakanishi, Darlene Pearson, Mindy Sichel, and Chris Trivisonno.

The new directors are: Martin Canning (executive director at a sustainable cities NGO), Anne Lavender (retired senior civil servant), Stéphane Laviolette (advisor in federal politics), and Daniela Veisman (architectural designer).

Stuart MacKay (staffing consultant) returns to the board. He resigned as a CCA board member to run for City Council in the 2022 municipal election.

Earth Day party in the park

On Earth Day, Saturday, April 22, come to the CCA's annual party in Dundonald Park, at Somerset and Lyon.

For kids: a read-aloud story time, arts and crafts, and free popcorn. For grown-ups: learn how to green a house in the face of climate change, and how to create a pollinator garden.

Dalhousie Community Association report: interim parking, Booth Street, Victoria Island tree loss

Ed McKenna

A New "Temporary" Parking Lot in Dalhousie

Preston Hardware has a parking problem. They need more of it (for cars) adjacent to their business at Preston and Balsam.

On January 18, they took their case for a new parking lot on Balsam to the city's Planning and Housing Committee.

But how do you get more parking in an area where, according to the Corso Italia Station District Secondary Plan, future development will "provide liveable, family-friendly housing options..." where "[p]edestrian and cycling will become the focus of mobility and infrastructure to support active transportation as the primary mode of travel," and where an LRT station will be a few steps away?

Preston Hardware is the principal owner of the block between Balsam and Larch and, in 2020, the business obtained permission to demolish two houses on this property. The community was concerned about losing low-cost housing and what would replace it.

In response, the demolition permit prohibited the use of the site for a surface parking lot and required that the site be landscaped.

Now, two and half years later, city staff have recommended that Preston Hardware be permitted to put up a parking lot for 21 vehicles on the still-empty land. However, staff assured the Planning and Housing Committee, this change will be "temporary," lasting only three years, until the business launches a major redevelopment of the site.

Somerset Ward Councillor Ariel Troster and the Dalhousie Community Association, represented by Catherine Boucher, opposed backtracking on the conditions of the demolition permit.

"It is not the city's role to ensure that an individual private business is guaranteed private parking, especially in an

area that is already well-served by transit, and coming at the cost of building new housing in an expeditious manner," the councillor wrote.

Catherine Boucher, who attended the committee meeting in person, reminded members: "'Temporary' parking lots have been the scourge of Ottawa's downtown for decades. Using this extremely valuable land for surface parking goes against all we know about liveable cities."

Planning and Housing Committee amended the recommendation of city staff and will permit "temporary parking" on the site for a period of one year. The vote was 11-0.

The Booth Street Corridor

The Dalhousie Community Association's mobility committee has written to Councillor Troster to seek her assistance in making permanent the current "temporary" configurations of the intersections at Booth and the Sir John A. Macdonald Parkway, and Booth and Albert.

Since repair work began at Chaudière Crossing last summer, westbound drivers on the Parkway are permitted to turn left onto Booth. But once southbound, they are prohibited from continuing on Booth across Albert into the local residential area.

The changes have been well received by Dalhousie residents living north and south of Albert. They want them to remain in place after the reconstruction of Chaudière Crossing is completed.

A meeting to discuss the temporary changes to the Booth Street Corridor intersections is being arranged by Councillor Troster. It will take place on site in early March. The DCA, local residents, and city staff will attend.

Victoria Island Remediation Results in Loss of Trees

The DCA was pleased to receive advance notice of the next stage of the

National Capital Commission's remediation project on Victoria Island, but the message was grim. On January 30, workers began to cut down 100 trees to make way for the removal of contaminated soil.

The NCC has offered to discuss the project. The DCA will follow up, and a meeting between the NCC and the public realm and planning committees will be organized.

The project is described on the NCC's website: ncc-ccn.gc.ca/projects/site-remediation-at-victoria-island

357-363 Preston Community Meeting

On February 7, a meeting was held on Zoom to provide information about a new residential and commercial building proposed for the corner of Preston and Aberdeen.

The meeting was a first in several aspects. It was the first public meeting this year to discuss an application to the city for a major new development in Dalhousie.

It was the first public meeting in Dalhousie hosted by the new Somerset Ward councillor. And, above all, it was the first development proposal in recent memory for which, in the words of the planners, "no relief is required from the zoning by-law."

The result? An attractive building that should "fit" on Preston Street and with the surrounding community. An excellent example of "gentle density," as Councillor Troster put it. And a favourable public response to the proposed development.

This was a short meeting. Developers take note! Let's get building!

Get involved

The DCA will hold its next regular meeting on Wednesday, March 1, 2023. Join us!

You can contact president@ottawadalhousie.ca, and check out our website: ottawadalhousie.ca

Birds in the bushes, bunnies in the tall grass

continued from page 8

Through gardening, I found that there is an even more complicated web of life centred around pollination. Within this web, some insects are too busy and pay little attention to one another. Some are predators of certain others; all may be victims to other insects or birds. I saw a large beetle get rapidly devoured by a gang of ants. Bees can jostle with one another to see who gets into which flower. Many insects are very selective in terms of which plants they pollinate. Bees are generalists and pollinate almost any flower.

As I observed more closely, it became obvious that timing is everything within the pollination cycle. The plants let the insects know when they are ready for pollination, attracting certain ones with colour or shape of flowers and through releasing scents to either attract some and repulse others. Different insects appear at different times through the season, each having some kind of significance to the operation of the whole natural system.

I watch the tracks of the animals during the winter. I have seen footsteps for mice, squirrels, cats, and even rabbit tracks. Then one evening, I saw a jack rabbit sitting in the driveway. It ran away rapidly on hearing me. I have spotted hares too,

especially in places around churches or other large buildings where there is grass to nibble and low brambly bushes for hiding. When my backyard was mostly meadow-like, a mother rabbit and bunny used to come to feed. They stopped when we put in the flower and vegetable garden.

There are so many fascinating things to be learned about nature, the variety of species of plants and animals, the patterns of their lives, their interactions, and how we can adapt our behaviour so that we can live along side them together. This knowledge we can pass on to our children and grandchildren. It is never boring.

Birds in the bushes, bunnies in the tall grass



Cardinals are now less rare in Centretown. STEPHEN THIRLWALL/THE BUZZ
Stephen Thirlwall

As cities evolved, humans removed themselves ever farther away from nature. In our daily lives, most of us ignore it. However, within the city pockets of nature exist that have survived and learned to adapt to urban life.

I am speaking about urban wildlife: from insects and worms to mice, chipmunks, squirrels, raccoons, groundhogs, skunks, and foxes, to birds and fish. Occasional bears, deer, and moose walk into the city from the surrounding forest. Some beavers remain in our waterways.

We often see wildlife as pests to get rid of, but they are the original inhabitants of the land. They deserve more of a place here, and have more purpose than we think to affect our lives. When we take time to observe the remaining nature around us, we see a whole world of interrelated creatures and plants. We can learn from them to better understand both ourselves and them.

Bees, wasps, butterflies, and other insects are important pollinators of plants. Without them, we would not have complete agricultural systems. Worms mix and aerate the earth. Insects rapidly convert waste to usable natural compost. Birds and squirrels help spread seeds. Some squirrels innately know how far from an oak tree to plant its acorns so that new trees can best grow and survive.

We do face certain wildlife infestations that we need to control – moths and caterpillars that destroy trees, coyotes

in the Greenbelt, and rats brought to the surface from major construction sites. Still, from these challenges, we can learn much more about how our ecosystems work.

The lockdown brought an increased wildlife presence

With the coming of the COVID-19 lockdown, a huge amount of human activity in the city ceased. That continues even now with our gradual comeback. Wildlife started making more of a presence because we had less of one. In particular, the bird presence in Centretown has intensified over this three-year period. The changing global climate also contributes to this by lengthening the annual warm period for this region, changing migration timing of some birds and perhaps allowing some species to winter over.

I've noticed increased numbers of most birds. Cardinals are less rare. This past summer, bluejays didn't just pass through but hung around for about a week.

Birds congregate in "singing bushes"

Wherever I walk I find "singing bushes" – small trees and bushes with net-like patterns of twigs that made safe places for small birds to gather and converse together. There could be 30 or more in a group, all tweeting at once. You can hear them a block away. If they notice anyone close by, they quieten down and move deeper into the bush or fly off in a cloud. I realize that birds have a more social conversational language than I had thought. I now know all their favourite gathering and feeding locations in the neighbourhood. A few people placed interesting roosting structures near feeders.

Experiences like this have made me take time to learn more about birds: for example, how they survive in the winter. On the sunny days, they sit in the sun to take in heat. They need to find food sources that gives them energy and warmth. They puff up their feathers which increases insulation around their bodies. They are not actually as fat as they appear. Their feet are most vulnerable, but their circulation system allows their feet to stay moderately cool for long periods. It's like turning down the furnace for a while to conserve energy. Their bodies also do this when they sleep.

Birds find places to keep themselves tucked away from the cold, whether padded nests or shelter areas. Following one big snowstorm, I saw birds feeding from a seed ball someone had hung up. Then they flew through a small space between a large snow bank and a car, entering into the wheel



Rabbits are regular visitors. STEPHEN THIRLWALL/THE BUZZ
well and under the car. This gave them a temporarily secure and warm space.

In warmer times, the birds sit on telephone wires, gaily play in bird baths and rain puddles, scour the garden for seeds or worms, and sing sweetly and uniquely or caw from high atop large trees.

There is a strong relationship between most birds and trees. Trees are their homes and habitat when they are not flying. They gather in groups on branches; they signal to one another between trees. Trees are their source of food (seeds, nuts, buds, berries, bigger fruits, bugs) and location of nests (homes and breeding grounds).

The chain of life is more visible

There is a chain of life. Some birds are predators of smaller birds, eggs, or small animals such as mice and insects that often also live in the trees. In urban environments, birds can fall victims to cats, who are amazing bird catchers. There can also be payback. I saw a cat carrying away a robin chick. All of a sudden, adult robins came from everywhere and chased and dive-bombed the terrorized cat all the way home.

continued on page 7, Birds in the bushes

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