

5th consecutive sitting videotaped, plus two audio taped

No plan yet for return to in-person city council meetings

BY LAUREN SWEENEY

As the city council met remotely by Zoom again on June 15, the abnormal format appeared to be on the way to becoming a norm.

While the Quebec government that day had announced gatherings of up to 50 would be allowed in some venues as of June 22, "there are no plans yet regarding council meetings," and their return to the council chamber, according to Mayor Christina Smith.

The June 15 meeting was the fifth session to be videotaped and livestreamed,

a practice that started April 20. The first two remote sessions on March 16 and April 6 had been audio recorded rather than videotaped (see story April 14, p. 7).

While the virtual sessions are livestreamed to be viewed at the time on the city's website or its YouTube page, the meetings can also be tuned into and watched at a later date.

From the start of the remote sessions, citizens have been invited to submit questions online for question period but these have dwindled from 10 to the one asked last week on the call for Lansdowne bollards (see separate story p. 11).



The city council session June 15 as it appeared on a computer monitor. Shown in action are the mayor, eight councillors, city director general Benoit Hurtubise, top left, and city clerk Andrew Brownstein, third from left.

**No issue next week
(June 30)
Next issue: July 7**

Simplified schedule announced

Pool opens June 22 to 'very different' season

BY LAUREN SWEENEY

Opening day was June 22 for Westmount pool users. Specific schedules were announced last week based on the pool's reduced capacity to 75 people to enable social distancing and regulations for general swim.

With the exception of lap swim in the early morning, followed by senior swim (general swimming and/or aquafit), the rest of the day the pool is open for 90-min-

ute general swim slots with use of the diving boards.

The pool closes at 9 pm on weekdays and at 9:30 pm on weekends. It is to close for the season September 7.

"It's going to be very different and something we're going to be learning through," said Sports and Recreation director Dave Lapointe.

Registration to reserve time slots for general swim is to be "an open first-come, first-served process," he said. This can be

made from any computer using a link on the city's website or Westmount.org/reservation. Users enter the facility card number and register seven days in advance. Breaks between the times are required for disinfecting work.

If the government should allow lessons to take place, it's not necessarily something the pool will offer, Lapointe said. This is because it would lead to re-arranging the system and pool numbers, and affecting general *continued on p. 14*

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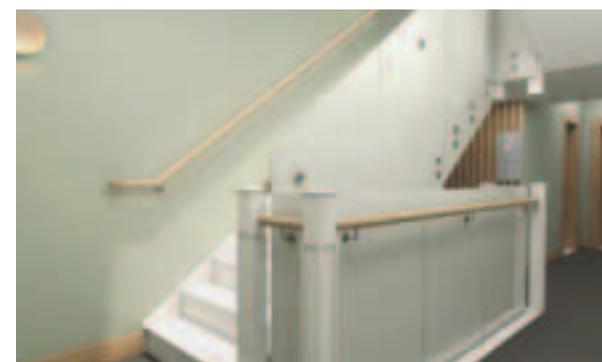
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Residents asked to read 'landmark' report

Cllr. Peart speaks out on behalf of 'racialized groups'

BY LAUREEN SWEENEY

Westmount's city council encouraged residents June 15 to read at least a summary report and 38 recommendations on systemic racism and discrimination in Montreal. It was released the same day as the council meeting following extensive public consultations in Montreal.

"As the lone person of colour on this council," Conrad Peart said, "it would be remiss of me not to mention the release of the landmark report." It reveals he said, "what should be obvious to many in that the lived experience for racialized groups and indigenous persons is indeed subject to systemic racism and discrimination."

Acknowledgment of the problem was the first "and most important" recommendation, he said. "Only once all of our residents are able to find full and equal participation in our daily lives, will we be able claim equality in our cities."

Speaking personally, he said, "When my parents arrived in Montreal from Jamaica 60 years ago to attend university, their lived experience was vastly different from my

years growing up in Ottawa and Montreal.

"Now, as the first elected person of colour in Westmount, I hope that my young daughter can look back to these times and know that we stood up and participated in change."

"These are very powerful words to follow," said Councillor Marina Brzeski, who echoed the need for people to read the report.

Shamie leads off

Councillor Jeff Shamie, who had led off the discussion, said he knows that the council along with all Westmount employees "are united in the common belief of respect for human rights, dignity and honourable treatment of all people."

He noted how Westmount had voiced its opposition to Quebec legislation preventing certain public service employees from wearing religious symbols and clothing in the workplace. "As the father of four daughters, every day I try to teach my children to do more to be inclusive and to build bridges with our neighbours."

These comments followed an impas-

sioned statement delivered June 1 by Mayor Christina Smith after the fatal treatment by police in Minneapolis of George Floyd and the subsequent protests across North America, including in Westmount.

"I stand in solidarity with the protesters, seeking a more just world without discrimination, inequality, systematic racism and injustice," she said.

As a mother of three young children, she explained, "I struggled with how to teach my children about why this is hap-

pening. I am raising my kids to believe that all are equal regardless of skin colour, religion or who you love, but that is clearly not enough.

"I know I need to do more, listen more and learn more to teach my children about discrimination and the role it plays in society. It is not enough to just not be racist," she said.

"We must continually push for and demand of others a society where equality and justice for all is a reality."

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From election day 2017: Conrad Peart, second from left, was elected to council on his first attempt. He is flanked by his wife, Claudia Perrotte, and his brothers Byron and Kevin.



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Council seeks increase to summer day camp fees

BY LAUREEN SWEENEY

For the second time during the pandemic crisis, city council June 15 proposed a change in the tariffs by-law. The first change had been to reduce fees related to café-terrasses. This time it's to increase the fee for youth summer camps.

This fee will go from \$130 a week for a full day to \$150 a week "in order to meet residents' needs during the COVID," the resolution states.

Councillor Mary Gallery, whose com-

missionership includes sports and recreation, said that "we had to raise the rate to help cover the costs." These relate to the reduced number of "campers" the city is able to enroll in each two-week session as well as increased number of councillors required by the Quebec government.

Because there were still spots available, she said, the city would be opening up sessions to allow for participants to register for more than one two-week session. A total of 68 can be accommodated during each of the four two-week sessions.

People urged to pick up own garbage from parks, not congregate

BY LAUREEN SWEENEY

With the onset of summer and re-opening from the pandemic, there are four times as many people congregating in Westmount Park and King George (Murray) Park (KGP), littering and leaving the parks strewn with garbage, Mayor Christina Smith said last week.

"They're leaving garbage all over the place. We've added weekend (Public Works) crews, waste bins and parks patrols. But it's taking them four hours to clean up the parks. People have to take responsibility for picking up their garbage. It's a disgusting display of thoughtlessness."

By 9 pm, she said, "KGP is full. Our parks are incredible and now they have become people's lifeline." But she appealed

to people to pick up their own garbage.

Public Security director Greg McBain said that he has never seen the parks so busy since starting as a parks patroller himself in 1991.

He said the patrollers are reminding people of the provincial government's social distancing requirement.

Mayor Smith said that when groups spot the patrollers, they separate, but as soon as the patrollers leave, they get back together again.



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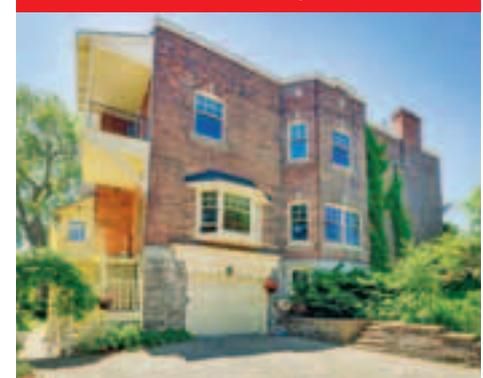
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This post-party detritus was almost put in a garbage can at in Murray (King George) Park, as seen on June 6. PHOTO: RALPH THOMPSON.

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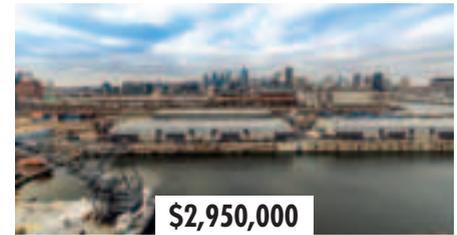
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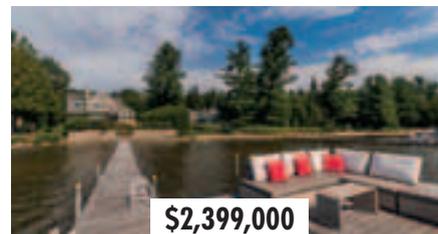
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Mayor's Column

CHRISTINA SMITH

Good news: some open facilities – but please remember to follow health guidelines

- The pool is open to Westmounters with Sports and Recreation cards by appointment only. Reservations can be made online or by phone. We are planning to soon offer some programming, so please check the website for details over the coming weeks.
- There are still a few spots available for Westmount day camps, which begin on June 29. In light of the pandemic, camp operations will be different than previous years, but we are confident they will bring much needed fun and enjoyment to kids. I am also sure that parents will appreciate the break.
- The library is now offering curbside pick-up. I encourage you to go to the library website to request your books.

As Westmounters emerge from their homes, we are spending more and more time in our parks. We are indeed fortunate to have so many public green spaces in our city. Families are enjoying picnics, and we are delighted that our young people are gathering at King George Park in particular. I am pleased to report that, for the most part, everyone is respecting physical distancing. To help us manage the popularity of our parks, we have hired more staff at Public Works to work weekends and nights and additional Public Security officers for park patrols.

The challenge we are facing is that too many people are not picking up their garbage. Please show respect for your neighbours and help preserve the beauty of our parks by cleaning up after your get-togethers.

Our summer infrastructure projects, particularly roadwork, have been launched. We appreciate that this is inconvenient for residents living on streets where work is under way, but it is critical that we move ahead with these initiatives.

The pandemic has hurt store and restaurant owners across Westmount. Let's all shop local this summer. I urge you to visit Greene Ave., where, working with the local merchants, we have introduced a number of initiatives to enhance your shopping experience. We have added more furniture and space for pedestrians without sacrificing any parking spots.

As we all continue to adapt to the impacts of COVID-19 and the de-confinement process, please remember to wear a mask when you cannot keep a two-meter distance. The city is distributing re-usable masks, so please check our website to find out how to get them.

Despite the challenging times, I urge you and your family to enjoy all that the city has to offer this summer.

Above all, stay well.

The good news is that we seem to have flattened the curve, and the number of new cases of COVID-19 in Westmount has declined sharply. While we must continue to physically distance, wear masks and wash our hands regularly, we are at the same time gradually re-opening our municipal facilities and operations. In so doing, we are following the policies and recommendations of Public Health and the Quebec government as we strive to find the right balance between ensuring the well-being of our community and the opening up of society.

At the outset, I wish to emphasize that the situation is evolving on a daily basis. We expect that over the course of the summer we will be frequently adjusting our operations and programs. The best way to access that information is on our website – westmount.org – and the city's social media platforms. I urge you to bookmark our site.

Our facilities are at the heart of our community. They are the gathering points for Westmounters. The following is a status report on our tennis courts, library and summer camps.

- Tennis courts are open for both singles and doubles as well as lessons. Residents can also now invite a guest who does not have a Westmount Sports and Recreation card to play.

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hours and help preserve the beauty of our parks by cleaning up after your get-togethers.

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St. Stephen's development plan still in PAC process

BY LAUREN SWEENEY

A residential development plan for the former St. Stephen's church at Atwater and Dorchester is still under consideration by the city's Planning Advisory Committee (PAC), Mayor Christina Smith said last week.

"We want residential," she emphasized, confirming what she had told a group of residents concerned about the impact of the vacant property on the neighbourhood. This happened at a small community meeting regarding squatters and homeless people held June 10.

"A couple of people said it's the city's fault it hasn't been built, but we've gone back and forth with the developer and it's in the PAC process to develop the church building and vestry into residential.

"Residents are all very eager to have the project proceed," District 8 councillor Kathleen Kez added. "The development will complete the residential feel of the neighbourhood."

Development challenge

Developing a property such as this one is a challenge, according to the city's Urban Planning director Tom Flies. "It's trying to strike a balance between developing a Category I heritage property and something that respects the city's zoning.

"It's not something that works quickly," he added. "We want to move the file further, but need proposals. The ball is in



The St. Stephen's vestry, as viewed from Weredale Park on June 19.

PHOTO: MARTIN C. BARRY

the developer's court."

In this case, Flies said, the current situation is amplified by "shelter requirements" concerning homeless people around Cabot Square.

Mayor Smith said, "We have been receiving a deluge of emails and calls at all times of day and night concerning disturbances from people needing a shelter. We keep asking the neighbours to call 911, so the data can build up, and the patrols have increased."

The real solution, she said reiterating previous statements, is for a permanent shelter near Cabot Square. A temporary day shelter has been operating at Dawson College (see story April 28, p. 13).

The *Independent* was unable to reach the developer for updated information by press time Monday.

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Speedy is a very attractive aquatic red-eared turtle, named for the red spot behind each eye, as a contrast to the beautiful green, olive brown, yellow and black markings on the top and underside of her shell.

Speedy is social and curious, enjoying her aquarium swimming, and stretching her legs to explore the house. She requires an aquarium 10 times larger than her size, water in her aquarium at a temperature of 26°C that is changed regularly, integrating accessories such as a water access platform, as well as a UVB basking light and a heating lamp to keep her body temperature at an optimal level while she keeps

Council told construction cones a danger to cyclists

BY LAUREEN SWEENEY

The city will be installing flexible bollards along the Lansdowne bike path between Westmount Ave. and Sherbrooke, Mayor Christina Smith said last week after the request had come at the June 15 council meeting from the Association of Pedestrians and Cyclists of Westmount.

The decision was made by the city's Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) that met June 16, she said.

Without the bollards, "the safety of many Westmount cyclists, in particular, is compromised," the group's president, Dan Lambert, told the council meeting in his submitted question.

"Construction cones were added to define (its dual use as) the pedestrian corridor but they are constantly being moved towards or onto the sidewalk by contractors and delivery trucks," he explained. This forces cyclists to swing out into the driving lane to pass the displaced cones while riding down a hill – "a risky manoeuvre." The white line painting had worn off.

Mayor Christina Smith agreed, saying she had driven down Lansdowne recently

and "so many cones had been moved. They have taken away the bike lane. Certainly construction cones should not be in the bike lanes."

Following the TAC meeting, she told the *Independent* the numbers and distances required for the bollards were being measured but it was not known when they would be installed.



Looking north up Lansdowne Ave. from Sherbrooke St. on June 19. PHOTO: INDEPENDENT.

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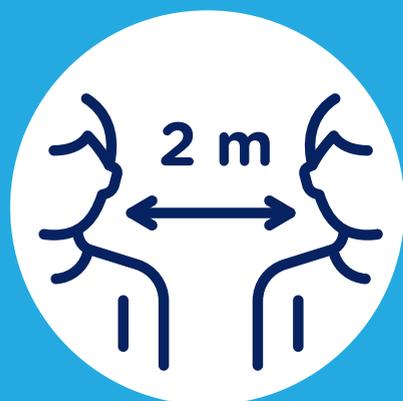
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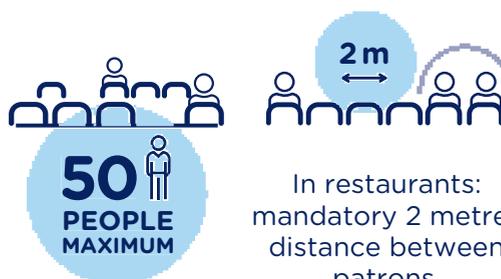


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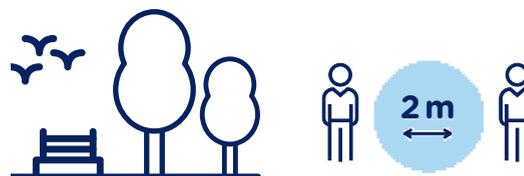
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WAG field re-opens

The field at the Westmount Athletic Grounds (WAG) behind Westmount High is open again, Mayor Christina Smith con-

firmed to the *Independent* June 18 by email. It was fenced off on May 29.

“The original plan was for a minimum of two weeks and a maximum of three weeks [of down time]. The fences came

down at 2.5 weeks because the landscaper felt it was ready.

“The process seems to have worked and we will have a much better field for the rest of the summer.”



The WAG field on June 16. The grass was green and appeared to be very healthy. PHOTO: INDEPENDENT.

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Pool, cont'd. from p.1

swim.
“It’s all about how many people we can allow in.”

On weekdays, lap swim takes place every day from 7 am to 8 am with a half hour for disinfecting and then from 8:30 to 9:30 am. The pool will then be reserved for seniors’ swim from 10 to 11 am (Monday and Friday for their general swimming and Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday for aquafit).

General swim then takes place from 11:30 am to 9 pm.

On weekends, lap swim is at 9 am and

10:30 followed by general swim 12 noon to 9:30 pm.

The pool access will be via the Lansdowne entrance to the WRC and there will be no changing facilities available, so bathers must arrive wearing their bathing suits.

Since government requirements and restrictions seem to change almost daily, pool users are requested to keep checking the city’s website for updates and not depend on getting their information through Facebook, Mayor Christina Smith pointed out last week.



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Brzeski votes against: seeks tree plan

Council approves \$242,442 to remove trees and stumps

BY LAUREEN SWEENEY

The state of Westmount's dead or dying trees came up again at the city council meeting June 15. That's when a contract was awarded for \$242,442 to remove 176 city trees and their stumps. Of those, 58 are in parks and 118 mostly along streets in front of people's homes.

The vote, however, was not unanimous. Councillor Marina Brzeski, as commissioner of sustainability and accessibility, voted against the motion, saying she needed more information on replacement measures. Citing the role of trees in reducing carbon emissions, she suggested there might be "a deficit" in the number being planted. Mayor Christina Smith later said these

types of questions need to be asked and that she urges council members to "vote with their conscience." The environmental portfolio is a difficult one since it affects all city departments and other commissionerships, she explained.

Councillor Cynthia Lulham, who moved the resolution, also told the *Independent* that 175 new trees ones had already been planted (125 this spring after 50 in the fall) and another 125 are to be added this fall (see story May 26, p. 5).

Making headway on catchup

"We have catch-up to do, but we're making headway," she said.

Fifty percent of those to be removed under the new contract – some 89 – have been killed by the emerald ash borer while 87 have suffered from "die-back," having only a few branches, or none, remaining, she explained.

"The \$242,442 will come from this year's operating budget and not our special tree fund, which is \$300,000 rather than \$500,000 as had been previously mentioned." The contract went to Service d'Entretien d'Arbres Viau, the lowest conforming bidder.



Four dead trees on Sherbrooke St. in front of Victoria Hall, the library and Westmount Park on June 19.

PHOTO: INDEPENDENT.

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WESTMOUNT

To alternate weekly Greene/Prince Albert square First Sunday market July 5 features food, animation

BY LAUREEN SWEENEY

The first of Westmount's Sunday farmers' markets will take place July 5 in the Greene Ave. parking lot, Councillor Cynthia Lulham announced last week.

This is to be followed the next Sunday, July 12, by one in Prince Albert square as well as down the street. They will be open 10 am to 4 pm.

Both markets are to alternate weekly between the two venues throughout the summer in collaboration between the city and the two area merchant associations, for Greene and Victoria village.

"We think this will be very good for our merchants and for residents," Lulham said. "It's win-win."

Participants will be expected to provide their own tables, tents and umbrellas, she said, and will follow a COVID-19 market design.

There is also expected to be "fun" entertainment such as magicians, jugglers and music, "not loud but something that animates the event."

A coordinator is being hired for the summer though the associations and paid for by the city using some of the \$200,000 recently appropriated by the council for economic development.

Featuring food

Fashioned along the lines of local markets, such as those in Knowlton, that emphasize food and flowers, Lulham said that by last week, the Greene market had already lined up participants that include Boucherie Du Coin, the butcher shop on St. Catherine at Kensington, and Arlington Gardens, which delivers produce baskets. Its co-owner, Claire Lanctôt, is a former resident of Arlington Ave.

"While this year there is no participation fee, our goal if the markets are successful, is for the associations to have a fee structure," said Lulham, whose commissioner-ship includes economic development.

► Looking north up Greene Ave. on June 18.

PHOTO: INDEPENDENT.



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**Bonne fête du Canada
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Westmount Park's dawn redwood now protected



BY HEATHER BLACK

The tree and its panel on June 6.

PHOTOS: RALPH THOMPSON.

A deciduous conifer with green foliage – which turns to cinnamon in the autumn – stands near the children's playground in Westmount Park.

A dawn redwood (*metasequoia glyptostroboides*), the tree is now found only in scattered stands in central China and is classified as an endangered species.

Prized for its beauty and history, a new protective panel relays an interesting past.

Fossil evidence of the tree was found in 1941 and, later that year, a living dawn red-

wood was discovered near Hubei by forest ranger T. Kan. With a history dating back 150 million years, this “dinosaur tree” sparked scientific interest worldwide. In 1947, an expedition sponsored by Harvard University's Arnold Arboretum found a large stand and collected seeds. These were then dispersed to public gardens and universities across North America, including in Montreal.

According to writer Bronwyn Chester, the first dawn redwood was planted at the

Montreal Botanical Gardens in 1948 by landscape designer and curator Henry Teuscher. A former dendrologist (wooded plant expert) at the New York Botanical Garden, he was mentored by plant-explorer Ernest Henry Wilson, also known in his era as Chinese Wilson, keeper of the Arnold Arboretum from 1927 until his death in a car accident in 1930.

Teuscher planted a second dawn redwood in 1949 at Wilson's gravesite in Mount Royal Cemetery in tribute to his many Asian expeditions.

Although the tree grows to a height of 10 rather than 45 metres in Montreal, its survival here – and throughout the world – is a success story for conservationists.

Westmount Park's dawn redwood with its distinctive cone-shape is a particularly fine specimen. Councillor Cynthia Lulham, commissioner of urban planning, economic development and parks, said: “The Parks department has done a wonderful job. This new panel not only protects the tree but also provides information on this rare species.”



Andrew Katz launches 'I Just Want to be Super'

Book depicts young boy's exuberance, kindness

BY LAUREEN SWEENEY

When a young boy called Nino gets especially energetic, his creator – author Andrew Katz – finds a solution in his new picture book *I Just want to be Super!*

It's a small orange mask carried home by Nino's cat, Jaguar, which Nino puts on and gives him the power to do everything in super-mode, from clearing away his dishes to saving his cat from a tree monster.

"Woo-hoo, look what I can do!" he exclaims. He rushes around doing great

things with new enthusiasm, all depicted in vivid colour and "swooping" action illustrations.

During Nino's nap, he makes himself invisible under the covers and when he opens his eyes, his super powers are re-charged. As a result, he is able to rescue Jaguar from a monster. Are his new adventures in a dream or in his imagination? That's left to the reader.

Author Katz, who has been teaching English literature and creative writing at Dawson College since 2006, takes his latest inspiration from an exuberant nephew.

"Nino learns there are many ways to be super such as showing empathy, helping others, making new friends and being gentle. I was trying to address kids who have a lot of energy," he said.

Coming to the library

The book was launched virtually June 16 along with its French translation, *Je suis Super Nino!* Both are expected to be available soon at Westmount Public Library, according to children's department head Wendy Wayling.

The library has already featured the

author's first book *How to Catch a Bear who Loves to Read* in a reading and on its Story-Walk panels in Westmount Park (see story October 16, 2018, p. 15.)

This is the first children's book for illustrator Tony Luzano who, Katz said, "being Filipino-Canadian provided a great opportunity to represent a family with brown skin and straight hair" as Nino, his sister and parents are depicted.

The book is published by Crackboom! Books, as was the previous one. Katz is now working on a sequel to "the bear who loved to read."



Andrew Katz June 19 with his new book *I Just want to be Super!* on Victoria Ave. June 19.

PHOTO: INDEPENDENT.

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Social Notes

VERONICA REDGRAVE

Cause: Under the Tuscan Sun/Long Live the Queen

Fundraiser profile: Elaine Lalonde

It was planned to be held on what date?
 May 28, 2020 at Maison Principal.

Have you planned a new date?
 The event was held on May 28. But via a fabulous online moment.

How are you sheltering in place?
 Personally, I welcome the time at home to re-organize closets! I am also cooking more. There is less running around to go to meetings. That's a real plus.

But my work as a fundraiser doesn't stop. I am connecting weekly with other non-profits whose revenues depend largely on fundraising events, just like the QEHC Foundation. I get to attend very interesting webinars and am discovering new tools that before this moment I never had the time to explore.

It's amazing to see the solidarity in time of crisis. This is why we are going to appeal directly to our donors to ask for their help.

Have you developed a daily routine?
 My daily routine consists of calling/FaceTiming my parents and watching the Trudeau 11 am press conference and especially the Quebec government's one at 1 pm. I try to monitor my news intake. Es-

pecially news coming from the United States – it's too discouraging. Apart from that, whatever is on the schedule for work.

Instead of cocktail attire, what are you wearing?

Running shoes are now worn daily! And it feels great. More jeans, but no jogging pants! Early in the week, or if I have a Zoom meetings, I dress up and put on make-up. It's important not to let yourself get lazy – but I must admit I did during the first couple of weeks. Wearing work clothes puts me in a work mindset and I get more things done that way – or so it seems LOL.

How are you staying in touch?

I stay in touch by calling people on the phone or FaceTime. I want to *talk* to people, not text them. The foundation board members meet on Zoom. It's so great to see their faces and feel the team spirit.

I personally stay in touch with lots of family members and friends. I FaceTime friends who live abroad a lot more often now. We are all in this together. The amazing thing about confinement is that you



know your friends are not out and about so it's easier to reach them. I especially think of my friends who live alone and friends of my parents who are confined in senior resi- *continued on p. 21*

As Social Notes depends on social events, which depend on gatherings, times have changed. But we'll meet again.

Until then, we profile the disappointed but determined supporters of great causes to see how they are faring in our smaller world and learn their event's new plans.

Elaine Lalonde is a professional fundraiser who volunteers at the Queen Elizabeth Health Complex.

What was your event? Cause?

For the past 17 years, Under the Tuscan Sun, our signature event, raised funds for the Queen Elizabeth Health Complex [on Marlowe Ave. in NDG]. This year was particularly exciting, as we had not only moved to a new venue, but had rebranded the evening as "Long Live the Queen." Dress code was still business attire – but no tiaras were required! As the venue is spectacular, we had no real decorating costs, but rather we had planned huge amounts of fresh flowers, and of course our famous food stations.



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9 Lives

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His SPCA identification number is 44867499.

Please refer to its website at www.sPCA.com and complete its simple online application for precious Salar's adoption as soon as possible. You will be contacted within 24 hours for a telephone interview, followed by a visit by appointment at the SPCA.

Your neighbour, Lysanne



Westmount A-dog-tions

LYSANNE FOWLER

Young Angel princess

place for her amongst the neighbourhood pooches.

Angel is only a year old, growing still and learning through play and a training routine.

She is very healthy, up to date with her inoculations and treatments, is spayed and microchipped.

Angel's SPCA identification number is 43821656. Please refer to its website at www.sPCA.com and complete its simple online application for Angel's adoption. You will be contacted within 24 hours for a telephone interview, followed by a visit by appointment at the SPCA.

Your neighbour, Lysanne



He is breathtaking. There is no other word for handsome Salar's presence.

As you can see, he was hiding in his carrier when he arrived at the Montreal SPCA



Social notes, cont'd. from p. 20

dences and cannot even go outside for a walk. My heart goes out to them.

Link for supporters?

Our supporters are welcomed to contact us by email at mtonofrio@qehc.org or can make a donation online by going to: www.qehcfoundation.org

What do you miss the most given our smaller world?

I miss having friends over to my house and going out to restaurants. I also miss going into stores. But what I miss more is the carefree attitude we used to have. I find people are more on edge these days. Anxiety levels are increasing and that's worrisome. The community must stick to-

gether. And people need to be patient with one another.

A smile doesn't cost anything and can make a real difference in the life of a stranger. Especially when you are standing in line in [bad] weather to go grocery shopping.

Kindness and patience are key these days.

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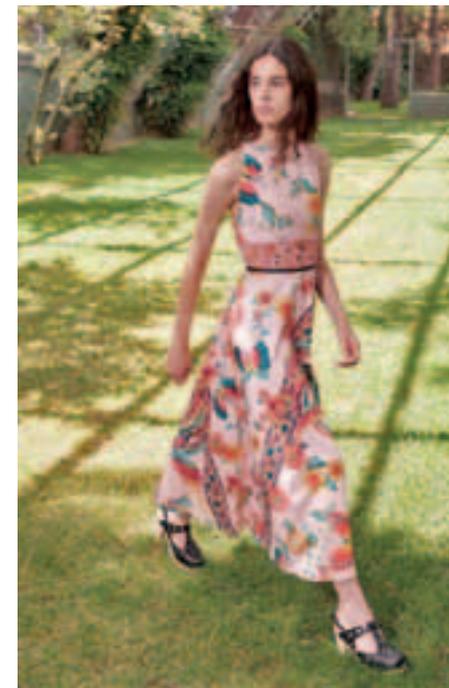
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ECOWatch

HEATHER BLACK

Bird-watching is therapy, environmental engagement

Songbird factor

According to researcher Eleanor Ratcliffe, bird songs remove listeners from day-to-day concerns, restore a sense of calm and evoke pleasant memories.

This daydream state improves attention as well as creative associations for problem solving. The sound of songbirds also restores circadian rhythms to improve mood and sleep patterns – important for those with ADHD.

Observing bird behaviour – whether our pest-control woodpeckers or predator merlins – also leads to “soft fascination.”

The question “What’s going on?” stimulates species knowledge and “biomimicry” design solutions. Researcher Daniel T. Cox found that individuals who could identify more bird species, also felt more connected to nature. This trait “connectedness to nature,” in turn, predicts psychological well-being and pro-environmental behaviour.

According to The Wildlife Society, birders are also four times more likely to

engage in conservation efforts. And when children witness an “awe moment” – such as ducklings learning to swim – empathy and an emotional bond with nature develops. Researcher Claudio Rosa found that greater contact with nature during childhood is positively associated with connectedness to nature and adult ecological action.

Nature mindfulness

Birding also helps young children learn about neighbourhood nature and – when you sit and wait – to develop patience. To avoid disturbing birds, educators at Le Nichoir sanctuary recommend observing from five or six meters.

Recording and photographing bird behaviour also alerts youth to specific ecological roles, habitat loss and migratory patterns. Our mallards, for instance, distribute duckweed, which detoxifies ponds, which are vulnerable to climate change.

And youth do care! This spring a young artist drew attention to the plight of West-



A cardinal.

mount Park’s ducks, see bottom photo.

A common concern at the first Westmount Park consultancy, the resulting recommendations – at engage.westmount.org – include more duck protection and a naturalized pond free of frost-fragile pipes.

At future events, support these and other bird-friendly features such as native shrubs for food and shelter.

But caring for birds also means that all citizens – young and old – respect city by-laws. These prohibit feeding wildlife in parks – bread and birdseed cause deformed “angel wings” and neurological damage in ducklings as well as interfere with adult migration.

And as harassment – throwing sticks and stones or stalking and chasing wildlife – is both cruel and illegal, please report all violations to Westmount Public Security at 514.989.5222.

Engage as a birder

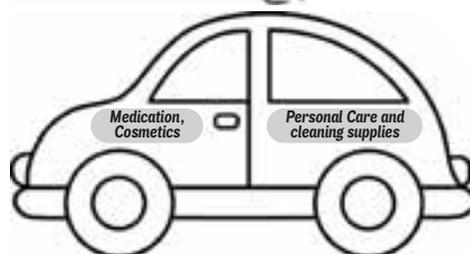
Birding is fun and, from time to time, astonishing. I once witnessed a battle for the Westmount armoury when the resident crow – ousted by two merlins – returned with five others to reclaim his perch.

So, try birding and connect with nature. It’s a win-win for you, your family and – when you recycle, compost and advocate for wildlife protection – the community.



A poster on a lamp post in Westmount Park by an unidentified artist.

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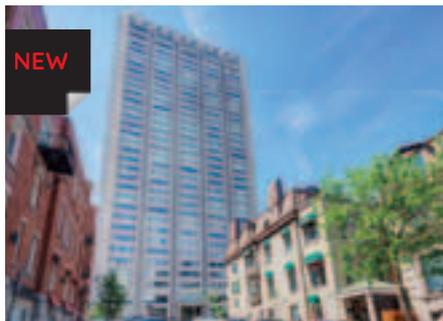
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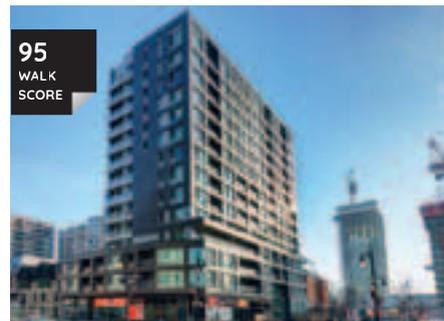
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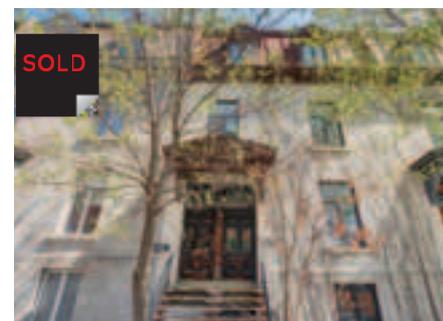
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