

Retiring from library after 47 years

Having lived through the internet transition, Mai Jay warns about AI

BY LAUREEN SWEENEY

When Westmount Public Library's well-known reference librarian Mai Jay retires at the end of November, it will wind up a career of 47 years.

It was during this time that she worked through two "transformations" as Westmount's library transitioned into the inter-

net age and now into one with artificial intelligence.

"I will miss so many of the people I work with and see every day, and I just want to thank them all for all their generosity and trust," she told the *Independent* last week.

But her decision to leave at this time corresponds generally with what she is experiencing with the move into artificial intelligence, she explains, and a firsthand warning.

She describes AI as "such a very powerful tool characterized by totally false information – inaccuracies that need to be doubly checked out and validated," much of the work of the library's reference desk.

On the positive side, however, she acknowl-

continued on p. 12



Mai Jay at the Westmount Public Library on October 20.

Correction: Inglasco turning 50

The novelty, drinkware, collectibles and hockey puck manufacturer covered on p.1 last week that is celebrating a 50th anniversary is in fact spelled "Inglasco." I apologize for the error. – DP.

'Cold comfort' – City awards \$3M more on snow contracts

BY LAUREEN SWEENEY

The white stuff might come sooner than thought, but with the onset of Halloween comes the realization that winter is on the way and that the city is already preparing for it.

New additional expenses of close to \$3 million were approved at the council meeting October 6 on the heels of those from the August 4 meeting (see story August 18, p. 2).

The new costs included the largest amount of \$1,334,869 for the rental of loader tractors with operators from Ventec construction. This is the same company currently working on the re-construction of Sherbrooke St. and other projects in the city.

Other newly approved costs include \$40,241 for the Info-Neige app by Sidekick Interactive, and \$257,544 to acquire a compact-track tractor with snow plow and abrasive

continued on p. 8

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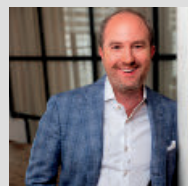
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Public Security arrests five in clothing thefts from Lululemon



Prince Albert and Chesterfield on October 17.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WESTMOUNT PUBLIC SECURITY.

BY LAUREEN SWEENEY

Quick work by a city parking inspector in the Victoria village in the area of Prince Albert led to the arrest of five young men October 17 in connection with the theft of clothing from the Lululemon shop on Sherbrooke, Public Security officials said.

"It was a good effort by all involved," said Public Security director Greg McBain.

While one suspect, the driver of a car, was 21, the others were reportedly aged approximately 14 to 18.

The incident began around 11:30 am when a city parking inspector on Sherbrooke noted a couple of teenagers with hoods covering their faces at the intersection of Prince Albert carrying clothes on hangers.

They disappeared up to Chesterfield where they were seen throwing clothes into a parked black Audi whose driver ap-

peared to be waiting for them.

Another person was seen in the back seat.

As public safety officers were alerted, one patroller parked his car behind the Audi, blocking it in, while a search of the area continued and police were called.

A nearby resident managed to stop one of the suspects reportedly trying to get away while another ran between houses. One was subsequently apprehended near Côte St. Antoine and another was caught near the Victoria parking lot north of Sherbrooke.

More clothing stolen from Lululemon was found in the trunk of the Audi.

All suspects were turned over to police, with one facing charges that included possession of stolen goods.

See p. 12 for coverage of the same incident from the police's point of view.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DID THE OLD WESTMOUNT LEADERSHIP MODEL WORK?

I have read the very reasoned and cogent opinion piece by Councillor Moss (October 20, p. 7) as well as various other letters to the editor expressing concern over the so-called loss of civility and loss of tradition and transparency that some feel is occurring right now.

To all those who do not like what is going on, your concerns are well noted.

But, the reality is that we must adapt or we die. Like it or not, this is the way things are sometimes done today. The world has changed significantly in the past 20 years and is full of examples where entities that wouldn't or couldn't adapt are now defunct or merely shells of their former selves.

Names such as Kodak, Polaroid, Sears, Woolworths, Blackberry, Univac, Blockbuster and Radio Shack come immediately to mind. Councillor Moss very eloquently and correctly states that "Westmount did not become one of Canada's most respected cities by following others. It became a model by leading...."

But I would submit that that was then, but this is now. After all, Kodak was one of the world's most respected companies, a true leader. But where is Kodak now?

And more to the point, I am not fully convinced that all of Westmount's "model of leadership" over the past many years has always served its citizens well. Our roads are in disgraceful, Third World conditions. Buildings owned by the city are crumbling and need millions of dollars of repair, too

many storefronts are vacant and or abandoned*, banks close their ATM machines after hours because of an ongoing problem with vagrants, etc, etc.

As we drive down the length of The Boulevard, we must ask ourselves what benefit did the leadership model, and observance of tradition and transparency, give us?

Did it address the potholes, flat tires, or wheel alignment issues? Did it fix the problems? Simply put, tradition can't always fix what is broken. Action does. But sometimes in order to get action, voices have to be raised.

Yes, there has to be civility, and for sure there has to be respect and certainly there has to be tradition. I couldn't agree more.

However, we also have to get used to the new way of doing things. As the old expression goes, "in order to make an omelet, you first have to break an egg." Maybe some Westmounters don't agree with how the present administration is breaking that egg, but it is the result, the omelet, that is paramount, not how the egg was broken.

All to say, surely those of us on council and elsewhere can work together and find a balance that marries everyone's expectations, achieves both harmony and progress, and obtains positive results and continued success for the city and its citizens.

ALLEN RUBIN, LEXINGTON AVE.

**Editor's note:* At least in Victoria village, this observation does not jibe well with the facts. Retail occupancy is at a record high. See May 12, p. SL-22.

In the same issue, the data show that

the Greene retail area is less rosy, especially if the south side of St. Catherine St. near Atwater is considered part of it, but that block or two has a very specific, building-by-building history that I don't think anyone can blame on the municipal government or council. – DP

GOOD HOMEOWNER, DOG OWNER, DRIVER BEHAVIOUR WOULD BE APPRECIATED

My belief is that good behaviour is an ongoing endeavour as these examples will show.

Westmounters love their lawns, however it would be appreciated if they trimmed their bushes such that pedestrians could walk on the sidewalk without the necessity of needing a machete to make it passable.

Westmounters love their dogs, however it would be appreciated if they did not deposit their dog poo in other people's garbage bins. Save it for your own garbage bins.

Westmounters love their school child-

ren, but it would be appreciated if they did not park in the city bus stop zones when they go to pick them up. You are also not helping by throwing your coffee cups into other people's garden waste bags/bins.

M. MARTIN, THE BOULEVARD

Woman helped at St. Catherine and Wood

An octogenarian fell on St. Catherine at Wood October 21 at 9:26 am, Public Security officials reported. Students had seen her fall. Seated on a bench, she complained of a "throbbing" head and pain in the right knee. Her glasses also had been broken in the fall. The pavement was described as dry and she had been wearing flat shoes. After the woman was transported to the Montreal General Hospital by Urgences Santé, officers picked up a grocery bag she had been carrying. – LS

A harbinger of winter?



Planters lined up on Victoria Ave. south of de Maisonneuve on October 17. They were gone two days later.

PHOTO: INDEPENDENT.

WESTMOUNT INDEPENDENT

We are Westmount.

Editor

David Price: 514.935.4537
david@westmountindependent.com

Chief reporter: Laureen Sweeney

Graphics: Ted Sancton

Advertising sales

Arleen Candiotti: 514.223.3567
advertising@westmountindependent.com

Accounting: 514.223.6138

office@westmountindependent.com

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LETTERS: We welcome your letters but reserve the right to choose and edit them. Please limit them to 300 words and submit before Friday 10 am to be considered for publication the following week. Please check your letter carefully as we may be unable to make subsequently submitted changes. Letter writers should not expect to be published in every issue, or in back-to-back issues, or repeatedly in the same season or on the same topic. Please include your name and street for publication (or borough or municipality if you do not live in Westmount), but not your address (unless you want it published).

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Another harbinger of winter?



Workers were packing up the on-street terrasse of the Spirulina Health Bar on Victoria Ave. below Sherbrooke on October 21.

PHOTO: INDEPENDENT.

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Brian Thompson, President and CEO of the MGHF; Claudia Cytrynbaum and Antonella Argento, Co-Chairs of Soirée en or 2026; and Dr. Lorenzo Ferri, Director of the Division of Thoracic Surgery.

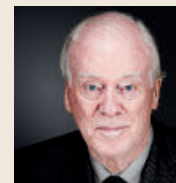
\$2.7M Raised for Cancer Research

On October 17, the Montreal General Hospital Foundation's **Soirée en or** announced an extraordinary **\$2.7M** raised to advance cancer research led by Dr. Lorenzo Ferri and his team in the Division of Thoracic Surgery at the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC).

Their goal is to take the guesswork out of cancer care by tailoring treatment to each patient's cancer, helping ensure patients receive the right treatment, sooner.

We extend our deepest gratitude to the Jarislowsky Foundation for its longstanding support, and honour the memory of **Mr. Stephen A. Jarislowsky (1925–2026)**, whose remarkable generosity will help advance this important work for years to come.

Our heartfelt thanks to *Soirée en or* co-chairs Antonella Argento and Claudia Cytrynbaum, our dedicated committee, sponsors, volunteers and guests. Your generosity is helping transform the future of cancer care.



"With your support, you have built this unit into one of Canada's preeminent thoracic surgical units, and we're most grateful. Thank you." - Dr. David S. Mulder, Thoracic and Trauma Surgeon

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This dragon wants your gold – for the Montreal Children’s Hospital

By JENNIFER BALL

Perfectly timed for Hallowe’en, a dragon’s den at de Maisonneuve and Melville Ave. is home to an amber-and-orange creature at the centre of a fundraising campaign for the Montreal Children’s Hospital.

Affixed to a tree in front of the house is a poster that explains the fundraising campaign. There is a QR code on the poster that, when scanned, takes one to the fundraising campaign page on the Montreal Children’s Hospital website.

To give, see: www.instagram.com/westmountdragon or search for “Westmount Hallowe’en Charity Dragon” on the Montreal Children’s Hospital Foundation website.

The dragon’s owner – homeowner Neil Dickson, who is originally from the UK – told the *Independent* on October 24 that he and his young family were relatively new to Hallowe’en celebrations. People in the UK, he said, are more likely to participate in Guy Fawkes Night on November 5,

which memorializes Fawkes’ plot to blow up the parliament buildings in 1605, than in North America’s scary and sweet tradition. In 2025, Dickson said he and his family wanted to get a “really substantial decoration, and we saw the dragon, and our kids really, really liked the look of the large dragon.”

Dickson said last year so many people walked by taking pictures – including motorists who would stop and roll down their window to photograph the dragon – that they decided this year they would put the dragon back up to raise money for charity. They chose the Montreal Children’s Hospital as the recipient because Dickson’s children have been treated there.

So far, Dickson said they have raised \$850, which prompted him to tell the *Independent* that he is now challenging Westmount to help him raise more. “If [the dragon raises] \$3,000 this Hallowe’en, we’ll have a surprise for everybody. It might not be a big surprise, but it will be, at least, a surprise!” See photo on p. 7.



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The dragon on October 22. A local fundraiser at work. See story on p. 6.

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Some of the Quarter Century Club event attendees were retirees and long-service members of the city Public Security Unit. See story on p. 9.



Director of Public Security Greg McBain, a 30-year Westmount employee, and Mayor Michael Stern at the Quarter Century Club event at Victoria Hall October 21.



This year's Quarter Century Club inductees with the mayor.

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Snow contracts, cont'd from p. 1

spreader as well as \$148,203 for a “multi-function articulated compact sidewalk tractor with snow plow.” Those previously reported included the replacement of Westmount’s salt enclosure

at the Public Works yard for \$79,670 as well as a contract for the next two winter seasons for five 12-wheel trucks and two joint agreements with the city Montreal for the purchase of grit and the supply of de-icing salt without details.

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82nd banquet at Victoria Hall City, retirees celebrate service milestones at annual event

BY LAUREEN SWEENEY

The city's 82nd annual Quarter Century Club banquet recognizing long-serving city employees and retirees was opened October 21 at Victoria Hall by Mayor Michael Stern, citing the contribution they have made and are continuing to make.

"You are the people who carry an organization's memory, who know not only how things are done, but why."

He acknowledged that many do not live in Westmount but added that a community "is not defined by a postal code [but] by the care you put into this city every single day. You plow our streets, keep our lights on, plan our neighbourhoods, run our library and keep our residents safe. That makes you part of the Westmount family."

He cited two who were marking 30 years of service this year: Donna Lach, who retired this year but was unable to attend, and Public Security director Greg McBain, seated among a large contingent of public safety officers, including original members of the unit, which was formed in 1980.

Among those seated at the head table

with the mayor were former mayors Christina Smith and Karin Marks.

This year's celebrants

Inductees celebrating their 25 years and joining the Quarter Century Club were Pierre Chagnon, Martin Émond and Carlo Bruni of Public Works, along with Julie Poulin and Pierre Chartier of Urban Planning.

Other celebrants recognized for milestones were:

20 Years: Robert Badu, Hydro Westmount; Antonella Ferraro, Library and Community Events; and Chris Adamopoulos, Engineering.

15 Years: Annique Dufour, executive assistant, mayor's office; Michel Gagné, of Engineering; Amélie Arel, Paris Papadatos, Stephanie Rodrigues, Public Security; and Evan Drake, Patrick Daraiche, Dylan Drake, Robert Talarico and Patrick Caméus of Public Works.

The mayor also thanked Annique Dufour, his executive assistant, for organizing the event.

See photos on p. 8.

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The SPCA is located at 5215 Jean Talon St. West, Côte des Neiges, Montreal H4P 1X4. Please do not hesitate to join the volunteers to discuss Shoppie with the adoption counsellors, and spend time visiting with her. If you have a carrier, it is best to pack it. If not, you can choose a model that suits you at their in-house boutique, where they also have wide selections of foods, toys and accessories.

You would likely enjoy Shoppie's company so much. Please do not hesitate to consider her as a loving friend.

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LYSANNE FOWLER

Activities and cuddles are things that might fill a day in Miss Moïra's activities book. This stunning silver-shaded doodle-type is presently in a foster home for the Montreal SPCA and her temporary family reports wonderful things about her, including her intelligence and affectionate nature. She is a cuddly companion who is keen on outdoor activities.

Sweet Moïra is a very healthy six-year-old, up to date with her inoculations, spayed and microchipped. You can find out more about her by reaching out through the Montreal SPCA website at www.sPCA.com, then scrolling to her in-

Miss Moïra

formation page through her identification number, 2000498294.

You can then see the "Fill out the form" black rectangle on the right-hand side of the page, where you then click to access the information form that is available for you to fill out to enquire about adoption. Once done, it is forwarded to the adoption coordinators in order for them to follow up with you on your interest.

Moïra is a very sociable dog who will thrive in an only-pet home as, at this stage, she has little experience with children and other animals.

Please do not hesitate to enquire about her. Moïra is a fantastic friend to enjoy the every day with.

Your neighbour,
Lysanne



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City encourages residents, merchants to sign up for alerts

BY JENNIFER BALL

To enhance its ability to rapidly alert citizens exposed to potential emergencies – like an active shooter or an ice storm – the city is urging citizens to register on its citizen portal.

The link is citoyen.westmount.org/en on the city's website.

Mugisha Rutishisha, director of communications for the city, told the *Independent* on October 23 that emergencies, whether weather related, security related or of another nature, are not a question of “if” but “when.”

“Quebec municipalities are also required by provincial regulation to be able to rapidly alert people exposed to a disaster. The Citizen Portal is the city's main means of communication in an emergency, so registering is the best way for residents and merchants to make sure they will be notified quickly.”

Recent major alert ‘unsatisfactory’

Rutishisha explained that the city used the Portal's emergency category for the first time this past summer when a shoot-

ing took place in Côte des Neiges and, at one point, the authorities advised the city that a suspected second shooter (who turned out not to exist) might be in Westmount.

“The alert we sent out using the Citizen Portal proved to be somewhat unsatisfactory, particularly in terms of delivery times. Our supplier informed us that this was most likely due to the very high number of incorrect numbers in the database that had been imported from the city's old system (Code Red). Therefore, the database was fully cleaned up in August” (see “Major technical failures’ plague city's attempt to communicate about police search for possible shooter,” July 7, p. 1).

According to Rutishisha, beyond emergencies, the portal issues alerts about services such as roadwork, collections and snow removal. He said that new features will soon be added to make it even more practical to use.

The *Independent* asked Rutishisha how many citizens are currently registered on the Citizen Portal and he responded that there are 4,200 authenticated users, which represents approximately 20 percent of

Westmount's population. “The campaign launched this October aims to reach about 5,100 users (about 25 percent) by winter 2027, as a first step toward a target of about 30 percent, or roughly 6,000 people. These targets are in line with research showing that municipal alert systems typically reach a plateau at 10 percent to 40 percent of the population.”

Test of system coming in November

Were another emergency – like a potential criminal on the lam in Westmount – to happen again, Rutishisha said the city would send emergency alerts through the Citizen Portal by text message, voice call and email to all contacts in its database. “This includes residents with validated accounts as well as other contacts in the database, so that the alert reaches as many people as possible...”

“To make sure the system performs as expected, we are planning an emergency alert test in November. Residents who want to receive the test are encouraged to register before that date.”

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Police Report

Police arrest five after ‘masked’ heist at Vic village sportswear store

By Martin C. Barry

Police from Station 12 arrested several masked suspects after a seemingly well-organized merchandise theft on October 17 at a sportswear boutique on Sherbrooke St. near the corner of Victoria Ave.

According to Station 12 community relations officer Cst. Emmanuel Provencher, a call came into 911 around 11:40 am reporting that a group of men wearing ski masks had entered the boutique with the clear intention of taking merchandise without paying.

“The store was in operation at the time,” said Provencher, confirming that the suspects tried to pull off the heist in broad daylight.

Arriving first on the scene, officers from Westmount Public Security had already succeeded in detaining a few of the suspects. Soon after, the Montreal police arrived and took over the intervention.

In all, according to Provencher, five arrests were made. Three of the suspects were more than 18 years of age, while two were minors.

Since the police had reason to believe that a getaway car was waiting nearby to pick up the suspects as they were fleeing, an extensive search operation took place in the area over the next few hours.

According to Provencher, the suspects grabbed a few dozen items of clothing and accessories worth an estimated \$2,500. Although some of the stolen merchandise was recovered, there may have been some that was not, he added.

Facing six charges

Case of Temple arson defendant might conclude November 30

By Jennifer Ball

A 38-year-old man will be back at the Montreal courthouse on November 30 to face numerous charges related to attempted arson at Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom.

On June 5, an incendiary object was thrown at Temple, which police investigators said in a June 6 statement was classified as “arson” not a “hate-crime” in an ongoing investigation (see October 6, p. 7 and June 9, p. 1).

Temple and the Centre de la Petite Enfance Narnia, a non-denominational day-care, are located at 4100 Sherbrooke, at the corner of Wood Ave.

Anick Cantin, public relations and stra-

The report filed by the police made no mention of whether the suspects were armed. Provencher said the incident remains under investigation.

See p. 3 for coverage of the same incident from Public Security’s point of view.

Public institution vandalized

Two days later, on October 19, the police responded to the scene of an act of vandalism committed at what the police describe as a “public institution” at the east end of Côte St. Antoine Rd. near Sherbrooke St.

“According to our information, four windows of the building were reportedly smashed by one or more suspects in the days prior to the nineteenth, so we don’t know exactly when it happened,” said Provencher.

All the same, the damage was estimated at more than \$5,000. As of late last week, no arrests had been made, he added. However, he continued, the investigators had some success locating recorded security camera images of the incident.

“There is a possibility we will find good images of some suspects in this, but it’s still too early to give more information,” he said.

(Although the police at Station 12 currently are not identifying specific locations of the incidents and do not provide civic addresses, Cst. Provencher noted that there are two schools in the area described in the report. They are Selwyn House School and École internationale de Montréal.)

tegic communications consultant for the Director of Criminal and Penal Prosecutions (DCPP), provided a statement to the *Independent* on October 22 stating that defendant Steven Luu will be appearing at the Montreal courthouse on November 30.

Cantin said, “The mention in the court file is to the effect that the case returns to the orientation/declaration stage for disposal.”

Lucas Bastien, another spokesperson for the DCPP, told the *Independent* on October 22 that, “the entries in the criminal court register ‘orientation/declaration to dispose’ simply means that it has been announced to the court that the case is on the path to a resolution that could be revealed/concluded at the next court date.”

Making Hallowe’en safer for children

With October 31 being the evening of ghosts and witches, Public Security is increasing its patrols while handing out treats. “The safety of our streets is everyone’s responsibility,” director Greg McBain said.

- Advice for parents included:
- Construction zones can be extra-hazardous in low light, so parents should keep a close eye on kids and avoid shortcuts through these areas,
 - If your children have food allergies, prepare special loot bags for them that they can substitute on arriving home,
 - At your own home, keep a porch light turned on and lighted pumpkins

- away from children’s reach.
- He also issued the following reminders for trick-or-treaters:
- Visit people you know,
 - Never enter a stranger’s home or apartment without an adult,
 - Always use the sidewalk,
 - Do not criss-cross the street and never run between parked cars,
 - Wear reflective tape or bright-coloured clothing so motorists can see you,
 - Carry a flashlight or glow stick,
 - Do not eat your treats until they have been checked over by an adult. – LS

Mai Jay cont’d from p. 1

edged “people are still enjoying print books.”

‘Every day is different’

“I love the job. I feel so challenged,” she added. “Every day is different because you never know what’s coming next and what people are going to ask for. I love helping people.”

Having started work at the library as a high school student, she hasn’t even reached the age of 59 for city managers to be eligible for their pension, she added.

Though she’s gone from shelving and processing books to working at the children’s section and now heading the main reference section, much of her work has evolved from researching information for people to helping them navigate the new technological tools.

“We were in the vanguard of new technologies because our community is so well informed,” she recalls. “We’re always asking if something new is what our users would want.”

The reference desk also provides help in formatting iPads, accessing the growing digitized sources offered by the city’s best-used facility and downloading various applications.

Grown up at the library

Mai, as she is generally known, began working at the library two days a week after grade 9 classes at Westmount High and then through three maternity leaves and raising three sons.

Among the many changes she has seen

is the building of the library’s most recent addition, which opened in 1995.

She moved to the reference section some 20 years ago, becoming its head in 2004, all coinciding with the period of new technologies that were transforming its role.

“There have been so many changes. The internet was just coming in. At first, we were using CD-ROMs. We were one of the first to offer email services. Now we have 15 computer stations so people can do their own research.”

When Mai isn’t working or reading, she likes to garden at her West Island home, something she hopes to spend more time pursuing along with travelling with her husband for his work.

Overheard

Man to woman, October 20 at 1:30 pm, near the Lansdowne/de Maisonneuve entrance to Westmount Park:

“You want to throw it out there to your bro?”

*

Older man to younger man whom he would appear to have just met and who appeared to be from out of town, October 21 at 5 pm, at a business at Sherbrooke and Claremont:

“Montreal is the best city in the world. The work opportunities. The women. Everything.”

The younger man seems to have made some inaudible comment about Florida. The older man replied:

“I hate Florida. It is one big Taschereau Blvd.”

Sicily's 'theatres' show many 'plays' of 'The Good, the Bad and the Ugly'



Travel

VERONICA REDGRAVE

While visiting Sicily a must-visit is the world-renowned Neapolis Archaeological Park in Siracusa.

Go early: There is little shade.

The vast park gives one an idea of the city's might. A Greek theatre is only one of the stunning remains. Look up. Way up. Immense limestone quarries are where slaves cut the blocks of stones that created the city.

My next stop was another UNESCO site: the little town of Noto, a short drive from Siracusa. Much of the old town (Noto Antica) was destroyed in the 1693 earthquake. Rather than re-build on the rubble, a new town was planned five miles away. Noto's High Baroque curvaceous buildings are harmoniously connected by their architecture.

On to another UNESCO site: the world-renowned Valley of the Temples near Agrigento. Outstanding in its field – literally – is the

► The temple of Concordia.





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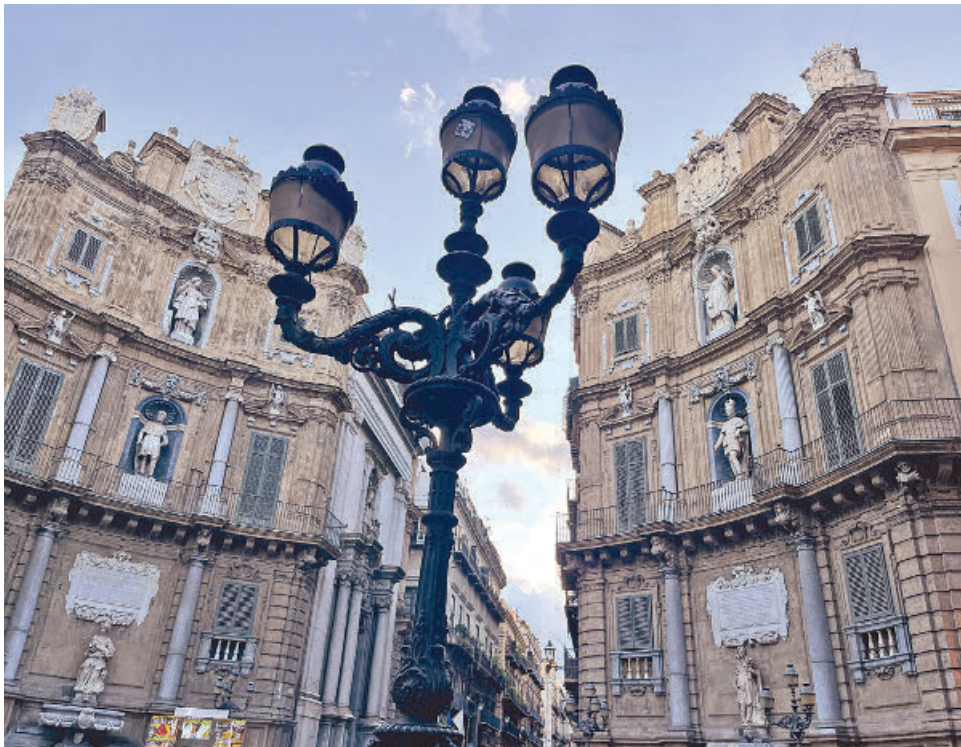
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A street procession featuring local musicians and St. Agatha, patron saint of Palermo.



Street selfies.



Quattro Canti ("Four Corners") contains four Baroque buildings – one on each corner – in Palermo's historic centre.



A market moment.

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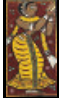
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Travel, cont'd from p. 13

temple of Concordia, 5th century BC, later a Christian basilica, its proportions are perfect.

But it's not Italy without a bit of drama. Between monuments on this massive acreage, the Valley Hop-on Hop-Off bus picked me up.

But then the driver just stopped the bus. He got out with his *panini* (sandwich) and left everyone sitting there while he went for lunch.

Sadly, the site entrance is a tad derelict – hardly reflective of this *über*-important

site.

Next stop Palermo – a shape-shifting city and kaleidoscope of impressions punctuated by stand-out moments. The Good. The Bad, and The Ugly.

Fabulous buildings whose distinctive features reveal the footprints of conquering cultures.

Crime, garbage

And amidst the brio – the bad. Right in front of me a tourist had her necklace ripped off by a scooter-riding thief. Garbage is everywhere: an ugly sight.

But the daily theatre is exciting. Venture

into ragtag alleys. Wet your feet in the Tyrrhenian Sea. Visit the Mercato Ballaro. Listen to a masterclass in salesmanship praising snails, shrimp and squid. Expressive faces seem straight from Leonardo da Vinci's sketch book.

Amidst the frenetic feeling, there's an inimitable passion in this maverick city. *Palermitani* are not trying to please an invisible audience through a screen. The street is their stage. They offer unedited immediacy and theatrical conversations. You just have to listen.

Vago Italian celebrates 25 years

BY MARTIN C. BARRY

After a quarter-century in a Greene Ave. location that has become familiar to several generations of Westmounters, staff and management at the Vago Italian restaurant are in the midst of a celebration of their first 25 years.

While several of the original co-founders have moved on, Shaun Turriff, who started out as a waiter, now co-owns the establishment with two other partners.

According to Turriff, the founders (who were of Greek, Italian and Portuguese background) had dreamed of opening a restaurant and saw Greene Ave. as a prestigious setting. While they chose to focus on Italian cuisine, Vago's menu is also strongly influenced by other Mediterranean culinary customs.

Over the years, according to Turriff, Vago has been favoured by some notable celebrities – including two former Canadian prime ministers.

Justin Trudeau used to drop by, and Brian Mulroney “was a regular” along with his wife.

“To us, they were just Brian and Mila,” said Shaun. “You know, with people like this who just live in the neighbourhood



Vago Italian co-owner Shaun Turriff is seen here at the Greene Ave. restaurant on October 14.

and become our regulars, we kind of forget they're famous.”

City polls seniors, for the first time

BY JENNIFER BALL

A targeted survey by the city – which will be accessible until October 30 – questions seniors about what services they want from the city and local community organizations.

The survey is found at westmount.org/en/leisure-and-community/community-life/survey-on-services-for-seniors on the city's website.

At the October 6 council meeting, Councillor Paul Levine, who is the city's commissioner for seniors, announced Westmount's first seniors' survey, saying “feedback gathered through the survey [will] help inform future recommendations to council and the administration [senior unelected employees] regarding programs, services and initiatives that support elderly residents.”

On October 22, Levine provided the *Independent* with a statement that explained how data yielded from survey responses will be treated, saying, “The analysis will be a collaborative effort. Employees from several city departments will be involved in analyzing the responses, and a report will be compiled for council.”

Levine said that “The perspectives shared by our seniors will definitely play a role

in the city's planning and decision-making. That said, it is still too early to say exactly how this will take shape, especially since the survey is still open and we do not yet have all the information we need. Once the responses have been analyzed, we will have a much clearer picture of our seniors' needs and priorities.”



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