Holiday Gift Guide 2026

See page 10

WESTMOUNT INDEPENDENT

Weekly Vol. 20 No. 11d | *We are Westmount.* | November 24, 2026



Car catches fire on Sunnyside

A Westmount Public Security officer noticed this car on fire on Sunnyside west of Grosvenor Ave. November 15. This photo was taken looking west at Victoria and the apartment building on Bonavista Ave. in Côte des Neiges-NDG. See p. 3 for story. PHOTO COURTESY OF WESTMOUNT PUBLIC SECURITY.

Cabot Square entrance to Metro closes indefinitely

More permanent doors have been put in place to bar entry permanently to the Cabot Square entrance of the Atwater Metro station, as seen November 18. The entrance is located just east of city limits, but it connected the park to Alexis Nihon, most of which is in Westmount. See story on p. 20. PHOTO: JENNIFER BALL.



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Artisans event sets likely attendance record

BY LAUREEN SWEENEY

A turnout of 1,628 attendees at the 42nd annual Artisans Westmount weekend event at Victoria Hall November 14 and 15 was attributed to the interest generated by the handicraft event despite challenges posed by construction work at the front door and intermittent showers on the Saturday.

The 34 participating artisans chosen by a jury for the event from 145 applicants provided a variety of handmade items including Christmas decorations, wood carvings, ceramics, jewellery, handbags, stuffed toys, knitted items, tableware and many other items.

"We had a remarkable *continued on p. 17*

Two issues left before our usual Christmas break

Issues: December 1 & 8

No issues:
December 15, 22 & December 29
and January 5

First issue of 2027: January 12

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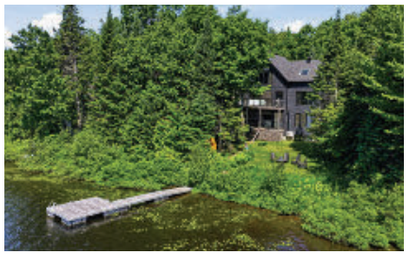

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Public Security kicks off food drive



From left, public safety officers Eric Chukwu and William Harris November 14 at the city's Artisans Westmount event in Victoria Hall, the traditional beginning of Public Security's holiday food drive. Entry was a food item for the basket or $2. A total cash amount of $3,050 and three cars full of non-perishable items were received. "It was a great year, with very generous attendees and some students from St. George's School to help with the collection at the door," said Public Security assistant director Kimberley Colquhoun. PHOTO: LAUREEN SWEENEY.

Parked BMW catches fire

A Public Security patroller on the upper levels of the city noticed a parked car on fire November 15 at 8:24 am on Sunnyside near Victoria and called the fire department.

The car's occupants had also discovered the smoke while on their way to pick up equipment.

Officers blocked Sunnyside at Grosvenor and firefighters were reported to have stated that "no additional" damage had resulted. *See photo on p. 1.*

Sparking Hydro Westmount transformer brings in team

A resident of Argyle Ave. noticed a hydro transformer sparking at the rear of a house November 17 at 5:57 pm, Public Security officials said.

A Hydro Westmount supervisor assessed it as coming from equipment at the rear of property on Anwoth and determined there was no immediate danger. As a result, a team was called in to work on it later. – LS

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Letters, *p. 6*

Gift Guide, *p. 10*

Pet Page, *p. 18*

Social Notes:
Black Watch, *p. 21*

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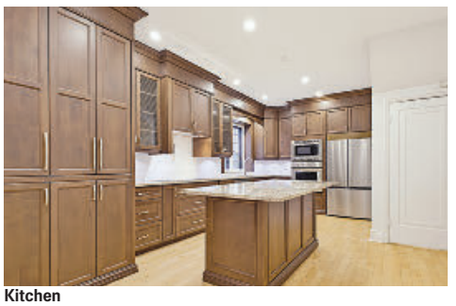

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Activity started November 18

Holton-Mount Pleasant stairs now expected to be completed in spring 2027



The staircase from Holton Ave. to Mount Pleasant Ave. on November 19, after work had technically begun. The snow fence that has been in place since at least February 5 is now gone and a metal fence, complete with contractor logo, had been put up within a day or two.

By Jennifer Ball

Repairs to the Holton-Mount Pleasant staircase – which was closed in April 2025 as a precaution due to deterioration of its supports – commenced November 18 and is now expected to be completed by spring 2027.

At its October 6 meeting, city council approved restoration work to be done for $432,880.80 ($395,277.94 net) by Les Entreprises Ventec.

In a November 18 statement from Mugisha Rutishisha, director of communications at the city, the city said, "The project is currently under way, and the contractual timetable estimates that the works will be completed by the end of 2026.

"However, certain complex aspects of the restoration work may be affected by construction requirements and seasonal conditions. For this reason, and as a precautionary measure, we anticipate that the works will actually be fully completed in spring 2027."

The city's website says the scope of work is:

- re-construction of a structural column supporting the staircase,
- repairs to selected sections of the staircase structure,
- dismantling of certain structural components, transporting them to an off-site workshop for restoration and returning them to the site for re-installation.

The staircase will be completely closed to the public for the duration of the work.

For previous coverage see September 9, 2025, p. 12, February 10, p. 5, February 17, May 12, p. SL-27 and October 20, p. SL-21.



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Letters to the editor

Please investigate Summit Woods' boggy canine health hazard

The Independent *was copied on this email to assistance@westmount.org.*

I am writing to bring to your attention a potentially serious environmental and animal health concern at Summit Woods.

We have been walking our dog at the summit for the past 20 years without incident. However, this year we have noticed a troubling issue involving an area where a small stream runs and muddy sediment accumulates, commonly referred to by dog walkers as "the Bog."

[*Editor's note:* This area is near the eastern/Summit Circle/Summit Rd. entrance to Summit Woods and can be found by taking the right-hand path from the parking lot, walking about 100 meters in, and looking left. The last house on the eastern portion of Summit Circle, just before it turns into Summit Woods' gravel path, is about level with the path at this point. – DP.]

On several occasions, our dog has become ill with vomiting and diarrhea after digging in and ingesting mud from this particular area. We have also spoken with other dog owners who have experienced similar incidents with their dogs.

What makes this especially concerning is that our dog regularly digs in other areas of Summit Woods, occasionally chewing on roots, soil and other natural materials, without experiencing any adverse reactions. The illness appears to occur specifically after exposure to [this] mud.

Given that we have never encountered this problem, I am concerned that something may have changed in the environment. Whether it is bacterial contamination, decomposing animal remains or another potentially harmful substance, I believe the situation warrants investigation.

I respectfully urge the city of Westmount to take the following precautions:

- Arrange for testing of the mud, sediment and water in the affected area to identify any potential contamination or health hazards,
- Temporarily restrict access to this section of the stream until the area has been investigated and determined to be safe,
- Inform dog owners of any identified risks so they can take appropriate precautions.

Summit Woods is a wonderful natural space that many residents and their dogs have enjoyed for decades. I would hate to see a preventable tragedy occur simply because a potentially dangerous condition was not investigated promptly.

I sincerely hope the city will treat this matter with the seriousness it deserves and take proactive steps before a dog becomes critically ill or, worse, dies from exposure to something harmful in this area.

I would appreciate an acknowledgment of this concern and information regarding any investigation or testing the city intends to undertake.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and for helping keep Summit Woods safe for everyone.

Allan Goldberg, Lansdowne Ave.

WESTMOUNT INDEPENDENT

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Thanks, Atwater Library, for tech help

I would like to give kudos to the Atwater Library.

It offers an excellent drop-in centre, on the second Tuesday of each month from 1 pm to 3 pm, and also on the last Thursday of the month from 3 to 5 pm.

A nice young lady, Simone, was very pleasant and helpful to me. I am a very senior citizen, technically challenged, and Simone seemed to understand my frustration with my iPad.

I even told her that I felt like throwing it across the room! Rather than say "tut, tut," she understood. I felt right at home.

I would just like to thank the Atwater Library, which is located in Westmount, for this excellent service. I strongly recommend a visit to other seniors who find this age of the internet overwhelming.

You will be pleasantly surprised. There is help out there for us!

The Atwater Library also gives many courses, from beginner to advanced, on digital devices. Give them a call!

Beverley Hutchison, Kitchener Ave.

Thanks, stranger, for return of tote bag

Many thanks to the #104 bus rider who found my tote bag left behind on November 3, and also hand delivered it to the front desk where I live. I am very grateful.

E. Hogg, Sherbrooke St.

'Thanks' for return of gasoline-powered leaf blowers

It's so nice to see leaf-free, perfectly manicured lawns in Westmount, isn't it? Even if it's at the expense of many residents' physical and mental well-being.

Sarcasm aside, the city's revived tolerance for our daily onslaught by ranks of earsplitting and polluting gasoline-powered leaf blowers desperately needs reconsideration.

Jane Martin, The Boulevard

Serious Somerville Ave. issues have long history

The Independent *was copied on this email to District 5 councillor Shawn Moss*

Dear Mr. Moss,

Thank you so much for taking time out of your schedule to call me back concerning the issues affecting our neighbourhood, and by consequence affecting the safety and quality of life on Somerville Ave. and adjacent streets of the Victoria village. I, and many other residents of District 5, appreciate your commitment and engagement.

As I have done in the past, I thought that a visual example may help to illustrate the situation.

Please find attached images of the traffic issues that we see daily, which have implications ranging from civilian safety to the integrity of road infrastructure and the structural soundness of our homes.



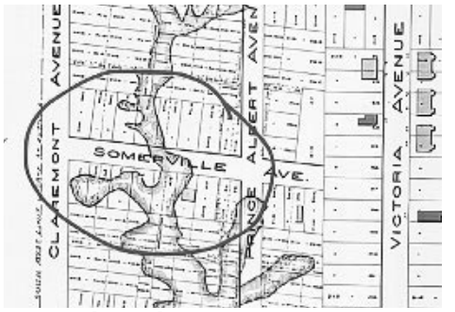
As discussed, one of the many concerns is prohibited delivery-truck traffic continuing to pass from Victoria Ave. to Claremont via Somerville Ave., and to a lesser extent on Burton and Winchester. The bulk of the trucks are going or coming from the Metro Westmount supermarket, despite the (limited) signage indicating they are not permitted on this street.

Photos and documents have been sent previously to the Westmount mayor [former mayor] C. Smith and previous District 5 councillors Ikeman, Smith, Breszki, Bostock and I can also provide these if they will help further document the "*problématique*."

The photos show a variety of trucks passing on Somerville Ave., as they do almost every day, often early in the morning and now well into the evening.

As per the SPVM [Montreal police], following work done with Mayor Smith and the NDG borough, Somerville Ave. is officially designated as a no-truck route by the Ministère des transports du Québec, so the trucks are in violation of this designation.

An additional detail is that Somerville Ave. was built by over back-filled land as it was once a small valley with streams. (Please see the image from Goad's City Atlas of Montreal c. 1890.)



This [street] with many new families, elderly residents and a toddler park is unable to physically sustain such heavy traffic and trucking. Many alternative and more

Letters to the editor

suited routes are available.

This situation is becoming very hard to understand and to accept, as I have been actively trying to address it through many years of consultation, back and forth with Westmount city officials, the Metro [supermarket], the SPVM – all, so far with no improvement whatsoever. I do not know of many city administrations that would sit idle for so long on such an issue.

Having lived in many areas of Montreal and other large cities in my lifetime, I find this situation very hard to comprehend.

I sincerely hope that, after more than a decade actively working to see some improvement, that this will be the administration that will make a difference.

Acting is always better than *reacting* when it comes to safety and infrastructure. We love our area, we want it to thrive, and we hope to live safely and peacefully in it.

Thank you very much for your time and help with this important issue.

Philippe Lord, Somerville Ave.

Keep beloved WAG as it is

At the Westmount municipal council meeting on November 3, the councillor for District 8, Kathleen Kez, argued against any possible installation of a single-use, plastic soccer field at the Westmount Athletic Grounds (WAG) just behind Westmount High.

Kez spoke up, she said, for "what the WAG represents to many in the community," and explained: "Though it is used by many as a playing field, it is treated as a park and used for many purposes, including picnics, frisbee, games, soccer, badminton, softball, baseball, exercise, speed walking" and simply "a place to breathe and relax."

As Kathleen Kez eloquently stated, "Ripping out this beloved greenspace for plastic would be a large loss to the community."

A single-use soccer field, usually with strong overhead lights, is a quasi-industrial installation and inevitably has a heat-island effect, leading to further local warming for lower Westmount, already the hottest part of this municipality.

For those citizens who have used the WAG for decades and for a plurality of purposes — it is indeed "beloved."

Patrick Barnard, Melville Ave.

We welcome your letters

We welcome your letters but reserve the right to choose and edit them. Please limit to 300 words and submit before Friday 10 am.

Email us at:
david@westmountindependent.com

Council should reject MAGA approach

Westmount city council meetings now often appear chaotic, divisive, lacking in civility.

Mayor Stern argues that residents "voted for change." But, according to the mayor, the pace of change is frustratingly slow. He repeatedly lays the blame on residents and city staff for being mired in the "heritage" past, afraid of change.

What nonsense! Residents embrace quality change. They did not vote for descent into a south-of-the-border "MAGA World"-style of conduct or decision-making that rejects civic norms and leads to bad outcomes.

Here are "MAGA" features of the last year.

- *Sidestepping municipal law in making Argyle one-way:* Residents go to court to force corrective action.
- *Opaque decision-making by council:* Insufficient and questionable facts underlie Argyle decision. Demolition plans are now no longer available in advance of consultation meetings. Southeast property reserve by-law changed at last minute for unknown reasons. No information on framework resolution by-law giving council exceptional powers in urban planning. Residents not consulted on auxiliary dwelling unit law and no presentation by city.
- *Disregarding advice from professionals on Planning Advisory Committee (PAC):* Council increasingly overrides PAC recommendations despite a recent by-law providing PAC with far-reaching flexibility in interpreting guidelines.
- *Spurning consensus in climate science:* Garbage pick-up schedule, gasoline-powered leaf blowers, synthetic turf fields.
- *Loss of institutional knowledge:* Several key employees have left Westmount.
- *Disrespectful language from mayor:* Towards residents asking questions at council meetings and towards councillors. Has big trouble with opposing views and criticism.
- *Breach of ethics code:* Mayor pleads guilty on November 14, 2026.
- *Discarding civic norms:* Mayor Stern insists on total control over allowing councillors to answer questions at council meetings. Replaces General Committee meetings with a caucus.

Is this Westmount?

"MAGA World" has failed in the US. Voters repudiated it.

Westmount council needs to re-think its approach to governance. Set aside personal agendas for the common good.

Denis Biro, 5000 de Maisonneuve, NDG

City takes over at Metcalfe Ave.'s 'forever reno'

"Much better right?" wrote District 6 councillor Paul Levine to some neighbours of the 376 Metcalfe Ave. construction site, which is located on the corner with Melbourne Ave. "We pushed to have this done for now," seemingly alluding to the new metal fence and tarps shielding the longtime construction site from the sidewalk. It was put up last week, according to a neighbour.



376 Metcalfe Ave. on November 23. The sidewalk of Melbourne Ave. at its northwest corner with Metcalfe is closed to pedestrians.

The house first caught the *Independent*'s attention during COVID times, when its aggressive exterior wood buttressing seemed to echo the then-in-place health lockdown (see "Locked-down house?" October 27, 2020, p. RE-17). It has been under construction ever since and the amount of exterior destruction has greatly increased, with two sides of exterior bricks now missing.

Levine forwarded his November 19 email to the *Independent* on November 20 and also answered our questions about the nature of the work: "The city has a court order to take over the site, is cleaning it up and working on getting the exterior repaired. They have no defined timeline yet when this will happen, but it is a start...

"All of this work was done by Public Works. And, yes, all costs related to the work are being charged against the property to be recovered from the owner." – WI.

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City plans tree lighting event outside city hall November 30

By Laureen Sweeney

The city's Christmas tree outside city hall is to be lit November 30 in an event scheduled from 5 to 6 pm. It includes a sing-along, performances by the Westmount Community Choir, remarks from city council officials, and a performance from a jazz trio.

The choir, under the direction of Laura Albrecht, comprises participants in the city's singing program offered though the city's Sports and Recreation department.

Refreshments are to include hot chocolate, tisane and cookies, according to the schedule provided by city communications director Mugisha Rutishisha.

It is to be followed by the city council meeting the following day, December 1 at 7 pm at city hall, and a public consultation meeting on an overhaul of the city's urban planning program December 2 at 7 pm at Victoria Hall, all to be followed by the lighting of the Victoria village tree in Prince Albert square (see separate story below).

Vic village tree lighting December 3 planned by city, merchants

By Laureen Sweeney

This year's Victoria village tree lighting in Prince Albert square is being organized to take place December 3 from 4 to 6 pm, according to musician and coordinator Gary White. This follows the city's tree lighting November 30 in front of city hall (see separate story above).

At Prince Albert square, "The Greater Montreal Chorus will be on hand to regale shoppers with Christmas carols," he explained. As well, "hot chocolate, cookies and candy canes will be offered to children of all ages."

The city is once again providing and installing "a fully decorated and illuminated Christmas tree in the center of Prince Albert square, ready to be plugged in for the official lighting ceremony."

The annual event officially opens the shopping season in "the village" where many shops have already been decorated and prepared for the season.

City's Hanukah event set for December 7

The city of Westmount's Hanukah celebration will take place Monday, December 7 at 5 pm at city hall.

"Friends from all backgrounds, faiths, and religions are welcome!" stated its website. "All are invited to join in a celebration of this festival of lights. In collaboration with Congregation Shaar Hashomayim, Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom and Chabad Westmount."

Last year's Westmount event, held December 16 in the wake of 15 murders at a similar event in Sydney, Australia on December 14, attracted a likely record crowd (see January 13, p. 1).

Hanukah runs from the evening of December 4 to December 12 this year. – WI.

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O Christmas Tree

Despite its title, the popular carol "O Christmas Tree" was not originally a Christmas song. According to the University Libraries at The Ohio State University, the modern lyrics to the song referenced the evergreen tree as a symbol of constancy and faithfulness. Also sung and often referred to as "O Tannenbaum" (*"tannenbaum"* is the German word for "fir tree"), "O Christmas Tree" is based on a traditional German folk song that can be traced back several centuries, though the modern lyrics have been credited to German composer Ernst Anschütz, who wrote the now widely recognizable words in 1824.



'O Christmas Tree'

O Christmas Tree O Christmas Tree,
Your branches green delight us.
O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,
Your branches green delight us.
They're green when summer days
are bright;
They're green when winter snow is
white.
O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,
Your branches green delight us!

O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,
You give us so much pleasure!
O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,
You give us so much pleasure!
How oft at Christmas tide the sight,
O green fir tree, gives us delight!
O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,
You give us so much pleasure!

O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,
Your branches green delight us.
O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,
Your branches green delight us.
They're green when summer days
are bright;
They're green when winter snow is
white.
O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,
Your branches green delight us!

Lyrics courtesy of
LyricsforChristmas.com.

– *MCG*

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Tips to pick the perfect Christmas tree



Christmas trees are among the most recognizable symbols of the holiday season, and the popularity of trees is undeniable. Christmas trees are big business in Canada, where Statistics Canada notes cash receipts from Canadian Christmas tree producers totalled nearly $163.5 million in 2022. According to the National Christmas Tree Association, approximately 25 to 30 million real Christmas trees are sold in the United States each year.

Annual spending on Christmas trees underscores how important they are to holiday decor. Christmas trees serve as the centerpiece in millions of holiday home décor schemes, so it's important to pick a tree that can shine in that role. This holiday season, celebrants can consider these tips as they look for the perfect Christmas tree.

- Measure the area where the tree will be placed. A large tree can be awe-inspiring, but also can stick out like a sore thumb if it takes up too much space. There should be enough room around the tree for families and their guests to sit around it. The home interior experts at Better Homes & Gardens recommend leaving a minimum of six inches between the top of the tree and the ceiling. If a tree topper will be added, make sure the top of the tree is at least 12 inches from the ceiling. Measure the area before leaving to buy a tree so it can fit nicely into the room and the surrounding decor.
- Try the shake test. Anyone who has purchased a fresh-cut Christmas tree is undoubtedly familiar with the shake test, which remains an effective way to measure the dryness of the tree. A slight shake will produce some fallen needles. If the fallen needles are brown and few and far between, then the tree likely is not overly dry. A lot of falling green needles indicates the tree is already drying out, which means it could shed quite a bit and lose its looks before Christmas Day.
- Pick a tree with a symmetrical look. Trees are living things, so it's unlikely that buyers will find a perfectly symmetrical tree. However, a tree that's misshapen or already has some sagging branches won't make for an awe-inspiring addition to a home décor scheme.
- Find the trunk (if you can). A trunk that's visible through the branches indicates the tree does not have dense branches, which will be necessary if homeowners want to dress the tree with ornaments. If it's hard to find the trunk because of all the thick branches and green needles, then the tree is likely pretty healthy.
- Test the needles. The home improvement experts at Lowes note that needles should be flexible but still snap when bent sharply. Avoid trees with needles that are already losing their colour and can easily be pulled off.

A Christmas tree garners a lot of attention come the holiday season, which only underscores the significance of finding a tree worthy of being the centerpiece of holiday décor. – *MCG*

Real or artificial? The Christmas tree debate continues

People are passionate about the things they love. Through the years, there have been many debates over a wide range of topics, from which cola brand to back to which book/movie character was more deserving of a lead character's heart.

The holiday season features a classic example of taking sides. The debate surrounding artificial Christmas trees and their natural alternatives will pick back up this holiday season. As with any debate, there are two sides to every story. Those on the fence as to whether to go real or fake this year can consider these pros and cons of each.

Real tree

Pros: One of the biggest advantages of a real tree is its pleasing aroma. The fresh pine smell of a natural tree can trigger memories of Christmases gone by and make a home feel cozy and holiday ready. It takes many years for a Christmas tree to grow large enough to be harvested, and as it grows it provides a habitat for animals and benefits the planet by absorbing carbon and providing oxygen, according to Megan Quinn, coordinator of conservation biology at the Nature Conservancy of Canada. When trees are cut down, two or three may be planted in their place. Buying a real tree from a business nearby also supports the local economy.



Cons: Real trees can be messy and require upkeep like daily watering. Cutting down a tree oneself and bringing it home can help guarantee freshness, but there is really no way to know when trees at Christmas tree lots were cut down. This means that needles can begin falling the moment the tree is placed in the living room. Another thing to note is that live trees can't be placed just anywhere. They shouldn't be next to fireplaces or heat sources, where they can dry out prematurely and pose a fire risk. A real tree also might have unwelcome bugs or animals hiding within its branches. According to Penn State Extension, anything from spotted lanternflies to spiders to aphids to bark beetles or lice may be on a real tree.

Artificial tree

Pros: Artificial trees can be convenient because they are easy to assemble, disassemble and store. Plus, you don't have to venture out each year to get one. Unlike real trees, artificial trees do not require watering or vacuuming to manage fallen needles. Since artificial trees can be re-used for numerous seasons, they may be more cost-effective than real trees. Artificial trees can last anywhere from six to 10 years, but that lifespan depends on the quality of the tree and how well it is maintained. Artificial trees also guarantee a uniform, pleasing look year after year.

Cons: Artificial trees are made from polyvinyl chloride and other plastics, and environmentalists attest that those ingredients make them bad for the environment. According to an assessment study of artificial versus natural trees published in 2009 by Ellipsos, a Montreal-based sustainable development consulting firm, an artificial tree emits 8.1 kilograms of carbon dioxide per year, compared to 3.1 kilograms of carbon dioxide emitted by a real tree in a given year.

In addition, the chemicals used in manufacture may have adverse effects on human health and often are non-recyclable. Artificial trees also take up room in homes year-round since they need to be stored. Plus, they don't emit a pleasing aroma.

The debate over a real or artificial Christmas tree is sure to rage on year after year, so it's up to holiday celebrants to make their pick. – *MCG*



Fun ways to make Christmas Eve even more special for kids

Parents know that nothing quite matches the excitement young children feel on Christmas Eve.

On the day before Christmas, youngsters anxiously anticipate the arrival of Santa Claus down the chimney that evening, and are perhaps even more excited by the prospects of the following morning, when they'll race into the living room and discover all that the jolly old elf left behind.

Christmas Eve seems to have some built-in magical components, but there are a handful of ways parents can make the day even more special for children.

- Track the big guy's movements online. The North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) and its predecessor, the Continental Air Defense Command (CONAD), has tracked Santa's Christmas Eve flight for more than 60 years. Beginning on Christmas Eve, families can track Santa's movements across the globe at Noradsanta.org. Kids can visit the site to see where Santa is at any given moment on Christmas Eve, growing more excited as the big fella gets closer and closer to their own region.
- Create a Christmas Eve craft. Gather children and their cousins and/or friends to create a special Christmas Eve craft or decoration that can be displayed next year. This is a great way to channel youngsters' nervous Christmas Eve energy into something productive, and it can make for a great tradition families can continue even after kids are grown.
- Watch a favourite Christmas movie. Hollywood has never shied away from holiday fare, so there's no shortage of festive films to enjoy with youngsters on Christmas Eve. Enjoy a classic like the 1947 film *Miracle on 34th Street* starring Natalie Wood as the adorable "Susan Walker" and Edmund Gwenn as "Kris Kringle," or go with something more recent, such as *The Grinch*, the 2018 adaptation of the Dr. Seuss book *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*.
- Take a nighttime stroll or drive to see the lights. Lighting displays are another component that makes the holiday season so special. After Christmas Eve dinner, take a stroll through your neighbourhood to see the lighting displays or climb into the car to take in a different neighbourhood's offerings if you're already familiar with those in your own.



Christmas Eve is a magical day for youngsters and their parents. Some simple ideas can make the day even more meaningful for children and their families. – *MCG*

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Shining a light on Hanukah celebrations

Fall and winter provide plenty of opportunities for merriment, including Hanukah, which encourages the Jewish community to gather and celebrate their faith together.

What is Hanukah?

Hanukah (also spelled Hanukkah and Chanukah), is a Jewish festival that lasts eight days. It starts on the twenty-fifth day of Kislev, which usually falls within the month of December, and commemorates the re-dedication of the Jewish temple in 165 BC by the Maccabees. The temple had been previously desecrated by the Syrians.

Why is Hanukah eight days?

After the Maccabees fended off the Syrian-Greeks and re-claimed their temple, they sought to light the temple's menorah. However, they found only a single cruse of olive oil that had escaped contamination, according to Chabad.org. Miraculously, the one-day supply of oil lasted for eight days, until new oil could be prepared under conditions of ritual purity. Sages subsequently instituted the festival of Hanukah to commemorate and publicize this miracle.



Menorah lighting

The menorah is the centerpiece of the Hanukah celebration. It holds nine flames, one of which is called the *"shamash"* (attendant). That candle is used to kindle the other eight lights. By the eighth night of Hanukah, all eight lights are lit and glowing. The menorah is placed in a doorway or window.

Oily foods

Since the Hanukah miracle focuses on oil, it is customary to enjoy foods fried in oil. Potato latkes are commonly enjoyed, as are jelly-filled doughnuts called *"sufganiyah."*

Giving

Hanukah really isn't about exchanging gifts. The tradition actually is to give out Hanukah *gelt*, which is gifts of money to children. Also, individuals reward positive behaviour and devotion to Torah study. The cash gifts enable kids to give to charity.

A minor holiday

Although it is a significant and widely observed festival, Hanukah is a historical rather than biblical holiday. It doesn't carry the same religious weight as other Jewish high holidays like Yom Kippur, for example. Its emphasis may be due in part to Hanukah's proximity to Christmas.

Hanukah celebrations enable faithful Jews to celebrate together and focus on their faith during a festive time of year.
– *MCG*







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Treats & Treasures stirs the Christmas spirit at Centre Greene



From left, Chez Doris coordinator Caroline Gosselin and Maureen Adams, a volunteer with the downtown women's shelter, are seen here with a wide array of mittens made by volunteers.



Potters Jennifer Gavin, left, and Mary Jane Vuchich were among the artisans and vendors offering their wares.

By Martin C. Barry

For those who make do without paying much heed to the calendar, Centre Greene's annual Treats & Treasures bazaar is a pretty good indicator each year that Christmas is just around the corner.

More than 30 artisans and other vendors displayed handiwork, which included everything from handmade candy and baked goods to fine linens, scented candles, handcrafted pottery and watercolour art.

All proceeds from vendor-participation fees, as well as from a raffle, will go towards supporting programs at Centre Greene.

Every year, apart from being a great place to buy Christmas Day stocking stuffers and gifts, Treats & Treasures also serves somewhat as a homecoming event when many past board members and contributors return for a one-day reunion.

Homecoming

Among them this *continued on p. 19*

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Emily Gamble, Artisans Westmount organizer, with artisan from Milette Weaves.



From left, local residents Helen Wiegand, Deanne Habeeb and Lucille Ross.

Artisans, *cont'd from p. 1*

number of people come out – up from last year's record-breaking 1,375," explained Emily Gamble, the city's Library and Community Events logistics agent, "so, it seems that no amount of orange cones and safety fencing could keep the crowds away."

Best weekend ever

She said one artisan told her this had been the best-selling weekend of her entire 40-year career, while another said it was the best number she had experienced on a single Saturday *ever*.

While Gamble had initially been "very anxious about how the construction on Sherbrooke and in our front entrance [of Victoria Hall] would affect attendance, [but] we ended up having the highest turnout since I became coordinator in 2017."

She attributed the turnout to the event having cultivated "quite a strong reputation as a market that features excellent and unique craftsmanship." She also said that over half the participants were first timers. "With such a large pool of applicants, the jury had many new creators to choose from."

This, she added, had made the event feel "fresh and new."

Back again

Attendee Adele Libman of Sherbrooke St. found the handicrafts were "gorgeous." She had returned for her second year to buy several items as gifts for the entire family.

Deanne Habeeb, another resident of Sherbrooke, showed off the handbag she had just purchased, saying happily, "I bought the last one."



Linda Droges of Sherbrooke St. checks out work made by a wood cutter.



The younger generation takes an interest in socks and other knitted items.

Happy Hanukkah
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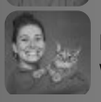
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Lysanne Fowler



So pretty, Griselda has a sweet disposition and enjoys outdoor activities. A sweet natured white-and-tan beagle type, she has the most beautiful smile, soft brown eyes and silky long ears.

Griselda is presently enjoying her stay at a foster home for the Montreal SPCA. She is doing very well and adapts swiftly to the family routine. She is a very healthy nine-year-old, up to date with her inoculations, spayed and microchipped.

I am certain that you are interested in finding out more about Griselda, so do not hesitate to refer to the Montreal SPCA website at www.spca.com, then scroll to her information page from her identification number, 2000512806.

Since she is in foster care, arrangements are made a bit differently than at the shelter kennel. Please note the "Fill out the form" black rectangle on her information page, click it and go through the information page that shows up.

By presenting your contact information and your interest in Griselda, the adoption coordinators who receive your form can then contact you to discuss visits and adoption. Do not hesitate. Griselda is a dear, happy and affectionate – perfect company for the whole family.

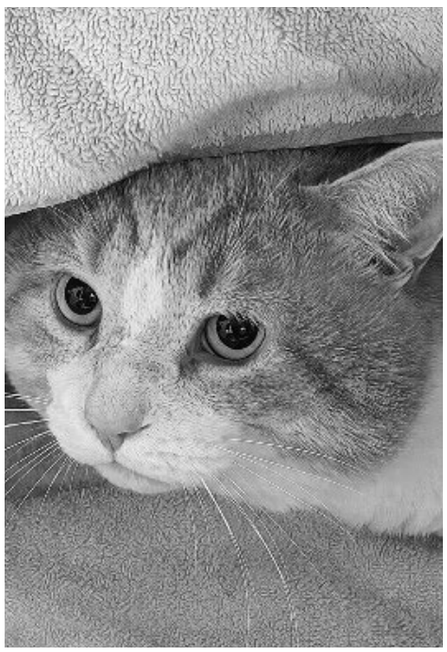
Your neighbour,
Lysanne

Playing with Biggy Cheese



9 Lives

Lysanne Fowler



Such a delightful white-and-caramel tabby, Biggy Cheese is sweet and playful.

He is presently at the Montreal SPCA cattery, where he is waiting for a family to call his own. A handsome fellow with huge green eyes and a kissable pink nose, he is a classic home cat who enjoys the daily routine.

Biggy Cheese is a very healthy five-year old, up to date with his inoculations, neutered and microchipped. For more information on him, please search the Montreal SPCA website at www.spca.com, then scroll to his information page from his identification number, 2000509515. You can then plan your visit to the shelter as it is open every day, Monday to Friday from 3 pm to 8 pm, then Saturday and Sunday from 11 am to 6 pm. It is located at 5215 Jean Talon St. West, Côte des Neiges, Montreal H4P 1X4.

The adoption coordinators are looking forward to presenting adorable Biggy Cheese to you during your visit and discussing your interest in adoption. Please do not hesitate to consider him as a member of your family.

Your neighbour,
Lysanne

Overheard

Man into cell phone, de Maisonneuve between Melville and Metcalfe, November 20 at 9:45 am:

"What are you doing tonight? Actually, first of all, what are you wearing right now?"

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Former Westmounter & past library employee wrote script at Westmount Public Library

Boya's animated short film *Bread Will Walk* a potential Oscar contender

By Martin C. Barry

In its 87-year history, the National Film Board of Canada's film productions have earned a total of 79 Oscar nominations – including 12 Academy Awards.

The NFB has done especially well in the Oscars' animated short film category, with seven awards for Best Animated Short Film, making the NFB the most-awarded international studio in that particular category.

However, we may know by mid-December whether former Westmounter Alex Boya's latest animated film, *Bread Will Walk*, has a chance to extend the NFB's winning streak by making the shortlist of the 2027 Academy Awards nominees.

Boya – who grew up in Westmount and attended École St. Léon and École internationale de Montréal, wrote the script for *Bread Will Walk* at the Westmount Public Library, where he was once part of the staff.

Baruchel voices characters

Produced by the NFB, with former NDGer Jay Baruchel voicing every character in the English version, the film qualified for the Oscars after premiering at the 2025 Cannes' Directors' Fortnight.

Boya tells a story about overconsumption and de-humanization. *Bread Will Walk* follows a devoted sister protecting her transformed little brother from a hungry mob. It is set in a world beset by starvation, where a powerful corporation's miracle bread turns those who eat it into walking loaves.

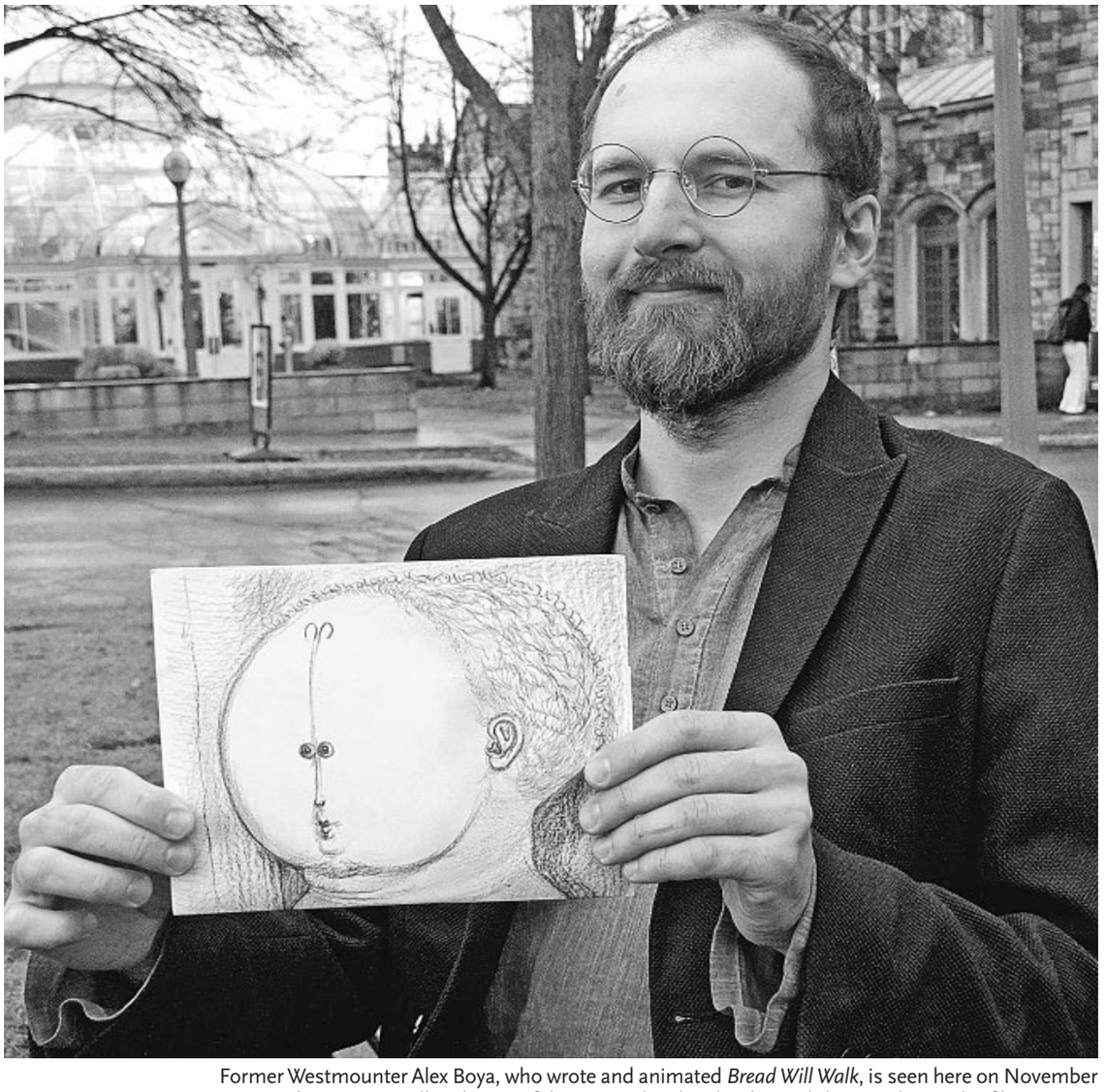
NFB's record

The NFB has a well-earned reputation for nurturing some of the world's most creative animation talent, including Norman McLaren, who was a dominating influence at the NFB for more than 40 years, and Ryan Larkin, who eventually became the subject of an Oscar-winning film.

Boya has been working full-time as an animator for the past 15 years. Before that, he worked as a freelance medical illustrator for clients that included McGill University. His output included highly-detailed illustrations of muscles, brain tissue, as well as heart pacemakers.

After he submitted an application to the NFB, they chose him to participate in the board's Hothouse mentorship program. Boya admits it "changed my life" because it allowed him to use his knowledge of medical illustration to develop a surreal cartoon animation technique he calls "medical expressionism."

Like so many other animators at the NFB, he continues to use traditional hand-drawn animation techniques, while mostly eschewing computer-generated methods.



Former Westmounter Alex Boya, who wrote and animated *Bread Will Walk*, is seen here on November 10 outside Victoria Hall with one of the many sketches he drew while completing the film.

Centre Greene, *cont'd from p. 16*

year was Morag Howlett, an original executive-committee member who is now part of the Ladies of Sandwich team, as well as retired board members Michael Harrison (who served as treasurer for many years), Peter Marcovitz (who just retired after 35 years), former executive-director Beth Symansky and current board president Michele Beacom.

According to Centre Greene executive-director Heather Hodges, past board member Jim Richards helped prepare Treats & Treasures' famous minestrone and butternut squash soup. He is also one of Centre Greene's seniors' luncheon volunteers.

Sally Langan, a Westmount resident and dedicated volunteer at the event, her grandson and family generously donated their time at the bake sale table. "The Ladies of Sandwich took care of the bake sale table with lovingly homemade baked goods they generously donated," said Hodges.

Jane Wightman, a past Centre Greene president, was also present at the table showing her support. Sophie Cram, who worked with Centre Greene for 22 years, was volunteering at the raffle table with her now teen sons.

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Cabot Square entrance to Atwater Metro closed indefinitely

By Jennifer Ball

The Cabot Square entrance to Atwater Metro has had a series of closures and re-openings since early 2024 – which the Montreal Transport Company (STM) said was as a result of efforts to safeguard Metro users and its staff.

A recent statement from the STM indicates that the entrance is now closed indefinitely.

The Metro entrance is found in Cabot Square at the corner of Atwater Ave. and St. Catherine St., and is east of Westmount's border with downtown.

On November 17, Renaud Martel-Théorêt, a corporate advisor in public affairs at the STM, told the *Independent,* "For safety reasons and to ensure the sense of security of customers and employees, the STM made the considered decision in November 2025 to temporarily close the Cabot entrance (2322 St. Catherine St. West) at the Atwater Metro station. Initially, the closure of this structure was to be in effect until April 30, 2026 inclusive.



The Atwater Metro station entrance in Cabot Square on November 18.

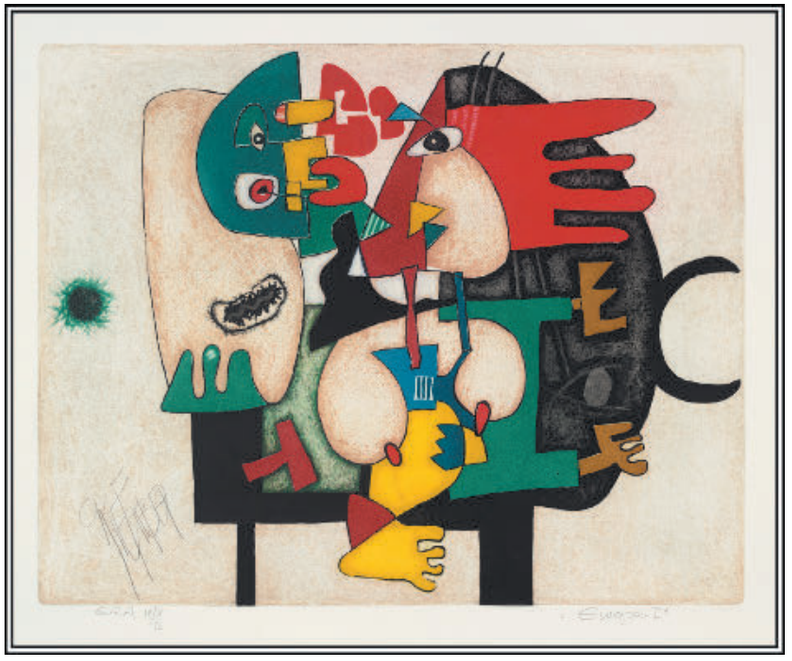
"However, this measure has been extended for an indefinite period. Reducing space has proven to be an effective measure in addressing issues related to cleanliness, overcrowding, incivility and drug use."

Martel-Théorêt added that it should be noted that, "The Atwater station remains easily accessible from the main entrance at 3015 de Maisonneuve Blvd. West."

For previous coverage see April 30, 2024, p. 13 and June 3, 2025, p. 23.

LIQUIDATION

DOMINION GALLERY



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FINAL SALE

Black Watch launches campaign to support foundation, youth program



Social Notes

Veronica Redgrave

The Black Watch Legacy Campaign launch was packed with regimental family and friends.

Campaign honorary chair is **David Johnston**, former Westmounter, McGill principal and governor general of Canada. Campaign chair is **Jonathan Birks**.

For more than 160 years, the Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada has been part of Montreal's story. Its pipers and drummers lead the St. Patrick's Day Parade and its soldiers stand in remembrance every November.

Yet much of what the regiment does remains out of sight.

The Black Watch of Canada Foundation exists to support serving members, cadets, veterans and the wider regimental family while safeguarding the regiment's heritage for generations to come.

This is the mission of the 2025–2029 legacy *continued on p. 22*



LCol David Serapins, Cpl. Samuel Beauchamp; Jonathan Birks, David Johnston, Bruce Bolton and Sterling Downey.



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All proceeds from the event support whole-person cancer care



David Johnston.



Samuel Beauchamp.

Social notes, *cont'd from p. 21*

campaign.

The evening's conversations turned to questions at the heart of the foundation's "Discover Us Initiative."

How does a proud history stay meaningful to today's community? How does a teenager in the cadet program learn leadership, discipline and confidence?

Cpl **Samuel Beauchamp**, a 14-year-old cadet, spoke about taking part in training and activities with the 2497 Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada Royal Canadian Army Cadet Corps, a free Montreal youth program.

Activities, uniforms and training are funded. The corps builds leadership, self-confidence, teamwork, discipline and civic responsibility. It is shaped by regimental and Highland traditions, including a marching band and ceremonial events. Cadets also gain practical outdoor skills, from first aid and map-and-compass navigation to expedition training, marksmanship and fitness.

Noted in the crowded room were **Adam Daifallah**, senior managing director Teneo; **David Laidley**, chairman emeritus Deloitte & Touche LLP (Canada); **Jean-Christophe Bedos**, former CEO Birks Group Inc. and his wife **Arianna; Michael Harris** and **Carolyn O'Neill**, and **Victor Drury**.

Also noted were **Bruce McNiven**, president Drummond Foundation; **Bryan Brulotte**, chairman Sterling Trust; **Felipe Posada**, senior director, defence industry strategy – commercial and private banking National Bank of Canada, Captain (Infantry) Canadian Armed Forces; **Ian Aitken**, vice chair Pembroke Management; **Chantale Ménard**, and Montreal city councillor **Sterling Downey**.

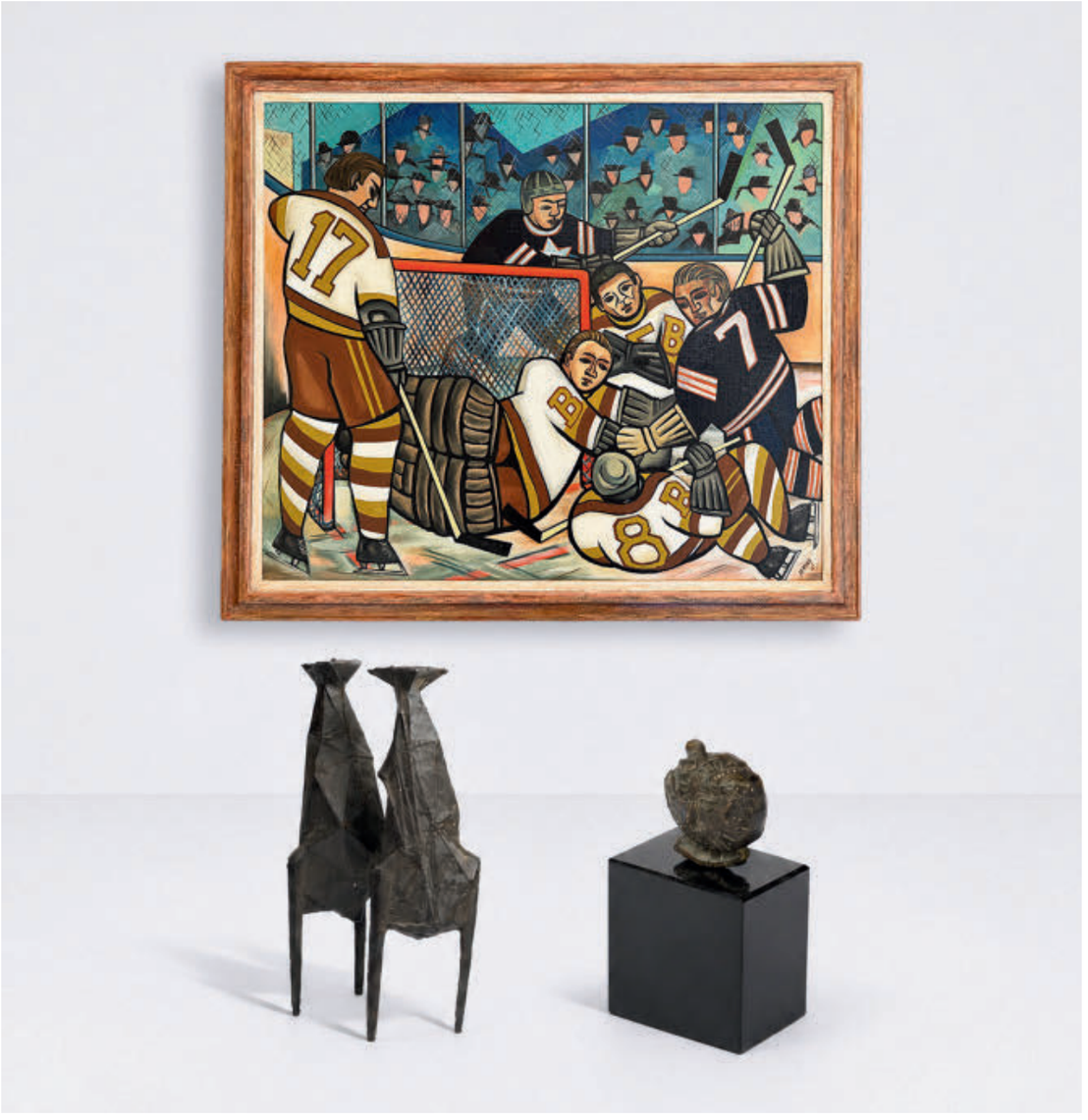
Also noted were the Black Watch of Canada's commanding officer LCol **Dave Serapins**, and former commanders HCol **Bruce Bolton**, member of campaign cabinet; **Kat Coric**, member campaign honorary committee, and LCol **Bruno Plourde**, founder Le Sentier-The Trail.





Galerie Alan Klinkhoff

Important Fine Art



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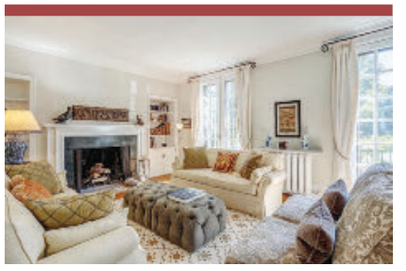

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