THE LEAF

SERVING WOLSELEY AND WEST BROADWAY

APRIL 2023 NEWS AND VIEWS FROM OUR COMMUNITY | VOL 11 NO 4 | FREE TO WOLSELEY AND WEST BROADWAY RESIDENTS WOLSELEYEAF.CA

Have you bought your tickets yet?

...see p 5-9

From FAME The Musical at the Gas Station Theatre (above) to The Secret of Good Tea at the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre, and much much more.

Check out the details in our special theatre section, pages 5 to 9.

POTHOLE SUPERHEROES

Members of the Transportation and Land Use Coalition include Mel Marginet, Green Action Centre; Ian Walker, Safe Speeds Winnipeg; and Marianne Cerrilli. *Photo Mike Maunder*

Housing and Homelessness experts bringing solutions to Winnipeg

By Mike Maunder

The best thinkers in Canada in the affordable housing field are coming to Winnipeg this month for five days of workshops, tours and networking.

If there are innovative ideas about how to solve housing and homelessness issues, for sure they're going to be presented and discussed April 18-20 at the Convention Centre during the 55th National Congress on Housing and Homelessness.

And, if that's not enough, housing activists and advocates are organizing a second conference on April 20 focusing on what they see as the fundamental solution: getting government to build social housing.

Between the two conferences, and a day of pre-workshop courses, there will be more than 30 workshops and tours bringing real-life programs and expertise from across Canada to Winnipeg. Some highlights include:

...In the face of financialization (affordable rental units increasingly being bought up by financialized landlords –Think Lions Place), what are positive

...Continues pg 4

A sinking feeling; coalition wants major mode shift on city budget

By Mike Maunder

Now that pothole season has officially arrived in Winnipeg, a city coalition is trying to show that potholes are going to be with us forever and are really the inevitable result of the way the city currently does business.

"We agree with Winnipegger's passion for potholes," says coalition chair Mel Marginet. "We're hoping we can channel that passion into a similar passion to redesign city priorities and budgets so we start solving the problems of the 21st century rather than just continue treating them."

She describes potholes as a symbol of how the city is mired in old thinking patterns and needs a major mode shift to move forward. In its website, *Anatomy of a Pothole,* the

...Continues pg 3

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FIRST WORD

Winnipeg Adult Education Centre

By Terese Taylor

"You know the saying it takes a village to raise a child? Well, its taken a village to get students to where they need to be," says Jen, a now full-time social worker at the Winnipeg Adult Education Centre (WAEC). Previously she worked part time assisting students with any barriers they were encountering. "That can be mental health, it can be housing, it can be poverty." But the most important thing about the school, she says, is "it's very much a collaborative team approach."

It's a strategy that school principle Aaron Benarroch has promoted with positive results, and instead of student numbers dropping after the pandemic, as has been the case in many schools, the school population and graduation rates have increased.Unlike many schools, intake of students can happen at anytime through the year, except through the summer months while they are closed. And for many students that will start with an assessment of their educational level and their goals.

"We have really worked hard to be as inclusive as possible.. and if not in this building, then in one of our six other locations," Benarroch explains. "Whether to finish high school, or to upgrade, because you want to be a nurse now and you didn't take chemistry in high school, and apply to university - or you didn't take the right math," he says. "The WAEC's job is to help move people to the next stage."

The WAEC works to upgrade adult students, and often with newcomers to Canada, who are learning language skills as they upgrade their academic credits. But another subset of students that have grown since the pandemic, are 18 years olds who just haven't felt comfortable returning to a regular high school setting. "Its kind of like high school, without the teenage drama."

Benarroch says that sometimes people confuse a GED status with a mature student diploma, and clarifies that the WAEC doesn't offer GED accreditation. But the school can help anyone

improve their english or math; either essential, or applied math, pre-calculus, or physics, and a mature student diploma can be used to qualify for employment or university or college entrance requirements.

The Indigenous student body is one of the largest in the school, and is one of the most important, says Benarroch.

"This is about reconciliation. This is about getting it right," he says. "For many Indigenous students their first school experience wasn't that positive. Unfortunately in our province the general graduation rates of Indigenous high school students are lower than for non-Indigenous students." But the Indigenous graduation rate at the WAEC represents about 35% of the graduating body each year.

Karlyle Epp is one of two full time Indigenous education support workers at the WAEC, who helps to connect students to resources both inside and outside the school. "The door is open," he says. "Come in, hang out, have a coffee, tea, or snacks. If anyone is ever needing to smudge, we have sage they can take home, or take them outside to do smudging as well. Or come and talk with us." he says.

Benarroch says "we may not be able to solve the complex issues of your life, but we can help you navigate them so you can stay in school."

Librarian Phil Cook says that the work he does is very rewarding. This year he helped to move the student lounge onto the main floor of the school, that now serves a daily breakfast, and sometimes a lunch - often prepared by students at the school. They brought down a TV to watch the soccer world cup while it was on. It's a room where the students can be a bit noisier than the library where it use to be housed. In a corner office of the room, a career advisor is available to meet with students to assist with resume writing or applying for jobs. "Whatever your career path is, she is going to help you with that. It's super useful to help students keep on top of deadlines for scholarships and rewards," says Cook.

Over the past week, he has helped a number of students apply for the low-income rent top up from the federal government. "It takes about 5 minutes. But if you don't hear about it, or don't know how to do it, if English isn't your first language, it can be a bit daunting. We need to get that information out. It's nice to know that we just got someone $500 bucks just like that," he says. "Something that is very easy for me to do has a huge impact on the students. We try to do as many things like that as we can," says Cook.

For the first time, the centre will offer Canadian Citizenship Exam preparation classes this spring.

Students at the school run from age 18 and up, and some have been as old as 80. Student Bong Hwang, who will be turning 77 in July, is at the school to learn how to use the computer, and to practice her English. At her home, she hasn't ever had the chance to speak much English. "My attitude is not 77, it is similar to my granddaughter who is 27," she says with a smile. "Before I was very shy. But now that I am older, it's OK."

Benarroch knows the myriad issues that adult students can face: from recovering from the effects of the pandemic, to the cost of living, rent issues, food insecurity, to the lack of a stable situation. He also knows the many successes that students can accomplish. "We can't give you housing but we can direct you where to go. But we are a school first. We are in the business of helping people learn and have great staff who understand.

Karlyle Epp's door is open to Indigenous students who are exploring what they would like to accomplish at the Winnipeg Adult Education Centre. *Photo Terese Taylor*

Bong Hwang is a friendly face in the WAEC library; she is learning to use the computer, and practice her English. *Photo Terese Taylor*

Twins Laura and Dianna, newcomers from El Salvador, who are about to start English classes at the WAEC, stand for a photo with their proud mom *Photo Terese Taylor*

CITY PLANNING

THE LEAF
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CORRECTION: In our A Rocha article in our March Issue, we incorrectly stated that Gilbert Rowe is a featured speaker at the upcoming conference, however it will feature Dr. Norman Wirzba.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR ARE WELCOMED at info @ wolseleyleaf.ca. or by calling 204-771-3882.

The mission of The Leaf is to serve the residence of Winnipeg's Wolseley and West Broadway neighbourhood by providing a free forum for the expression of relevant news and opinion,

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POTHOLES cont'd from

Winnipeg Transportation and Land Use Coalition (TLUC) presents easy-to-understand essays explaining how potholes symbolize what's wrong with city planning. Policies in finance, transit, land use, climate change and active transportation are explained in personal essays by coalition members.

The essays are well worth reading.

But the pothole problem is really just a start to what the TLUC hopes to accomplish.

"The essays were originally written to present policies prior to last October's election," explains Marginet. "We're working now to include new tools, like short videos, and to update the entire site so that it puts forward the TLUC case for improved planning." This is particularly important in the next few months as the city embarks on creating a four-year budget that will prioritize spending from 2023 to 2027.

Coalition co-founder Marianne Cerrilli is focused on that four-year budget – how flawed the process was in 2020 when the city created its first four-year budget, and how there needs to be consultation to give true recognition to the issues that actually matter like climate change and public transportation.

"*Anatomy of A Pothole* was our major project prior to the October election," she explains. "Now a major project is getting the city to improve its public consultation and planning processes so that community voices will be really represented in the upcoming budget process."

She believes Winnipeg's budget consultation is the poorest of any city in the country. She points to cities like Edmonton, whose last budget process began with a three-month on-line survey with easy-to-use tools letting citizens express their priorities, followed by a "budget roadshow" –19 events around the city connecting with over 3,000 citizen at venues from farmers' markets to the fringe festival. All this happened before the actual budget was discussed in three public meetings and then went on to council deliberations.

Instead, in 2020, Winnipeg's budget process happened in 20 days with 600 phone surveys and 786 on-line surveys, she said. As well as improving public consultation, the city needs to create a budget checklist that shows how budget lines agree with public policies already passed, like parks and tree restoration.

The *Anatomy of a Pothole* website includes contributions from coalition members like Green Action Centre, Functional Transit, Bike Winnipeg, and YIMBY – an organization committed to denser land planning and infill. The logo for the Transportation and Land Use Coalition is a stylized map of Winnipeg showing the entire city as it existed in 1972 and its massive sprawl since then. It's that sprawl that has contributes to issues like climate change, ineffective public transit and, ultimately, potholes.

And it is changing that thinking that will ultimately fix these issues, explain coalition members.

Perhaps even potholes.

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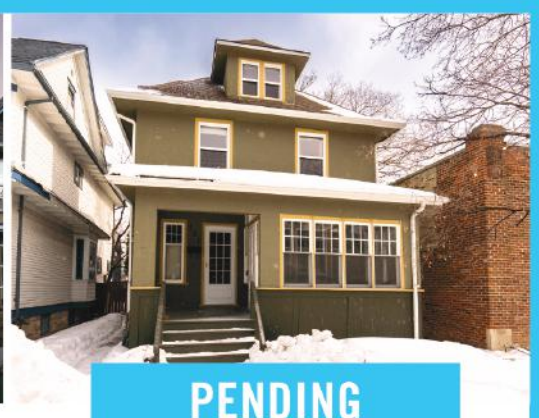
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HOUSING

POTHOLES cont'd from

stories of non-profits who have acquired these units instead?

...What's needed to bring Canada's National Housing Strategy (created in 2017) up-to-date in an era where costs are going up and government commitment is going down?

...One workshop features community finance workers from Quebec and Ontario who are creating new ways to finance construction of affordable housing.

...There will be updates and a tour by the Southern Chiefs Organization on plans for Winnipeg's Hudson's Bay building.

And much more.

The conference's organizer –Canadian Housing and Renewal Association (CHRA)– will be unveiling their strategic plan to develop affordable housing across Canada. CHRA is an umbrella organization created in 1968 to bring together community housing organizations across Canada, such as the Manitoba Non-Profit Housing Association (MNPHA). One of CHRA's main vehicles is the national Congress.

"We're excited that this congress is happening in Winnipeg, because Winnipeg has always been on the cutting edge of innovation in community housing," said Christina Maes Nino, MNPHA's executive director. She points to the pioneering work of Kinew Housing in Indigenous housing in the '70s; the Core Area Initiative beginning in the '80's; the work of community housing activists in the '90s like Harry Lehotsky; and housing organizations active in West Broadway like Westminster Housing Society and the University of Winnipeg.

She is particularly looking forward to a workshop on making affordable housing a major issue in Manitoba's October election. The workshop includes the University of Ottawa's Carolyn Whitzman who has studied success stories of advocates getting affordable housing into government policy.

Among other notable speakers: Leilani Farha, former UN special rapporteur on adequate housing whose documentary *PUSH: The Film* revealed how financialization of housing has helped create an international housing crisis; former Attorney General Jody Wilson-Raybould; and Marie-Josee Houle, Canada's first federal housing advocate, appointed last year.

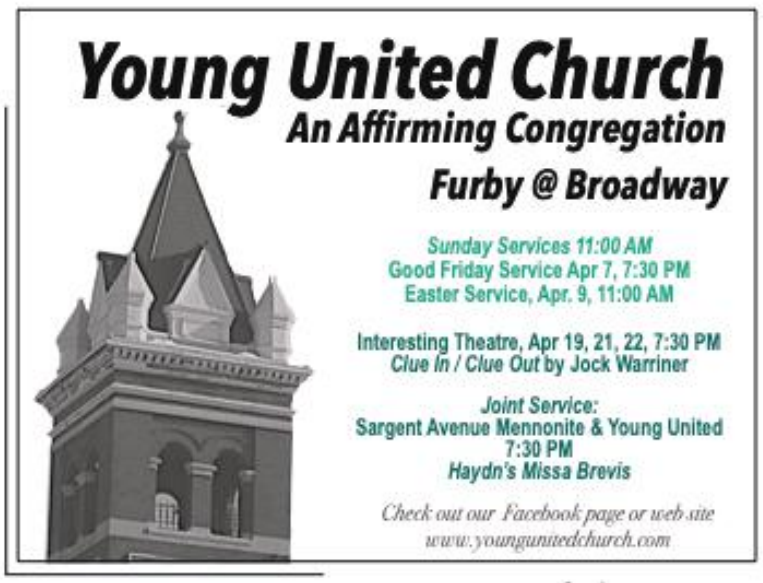
Houle will be attending the second conference, a special gathering of advocates and activists on Friday at the Canadian Museum of Human Rights. The day will start with Houle and front-line advocates trading strategies.

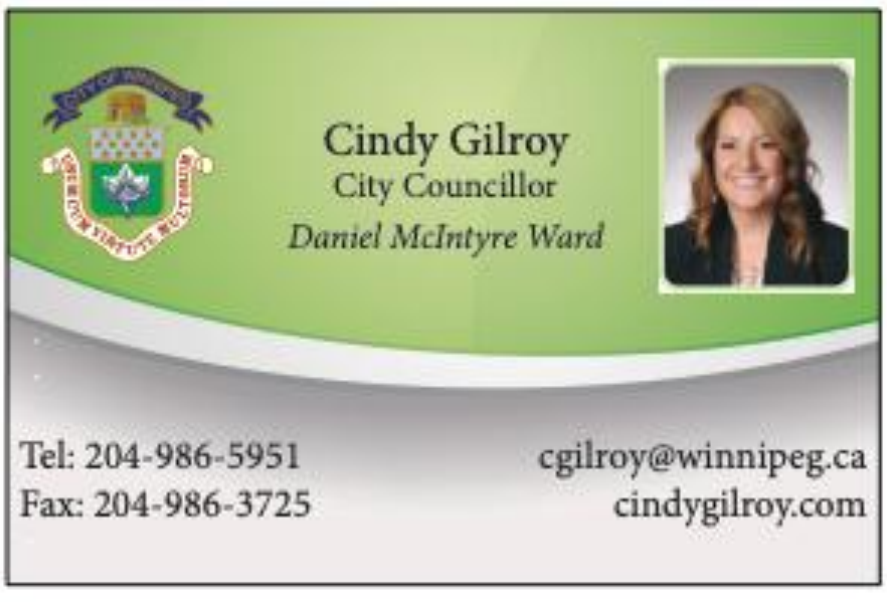
"We're expecting that on Friday a strong group of activists and advocates from across Canada can compare notes and put together what we've learned in the days before," explained Kirsten Bernas, researcher, front-line worker with West Central Women's Resource Centre, and chair of Right-to-Housing's provincial working group. She, and other members of the Manitoba Research Alliance, are organizing the second conference on social housing and human rights.

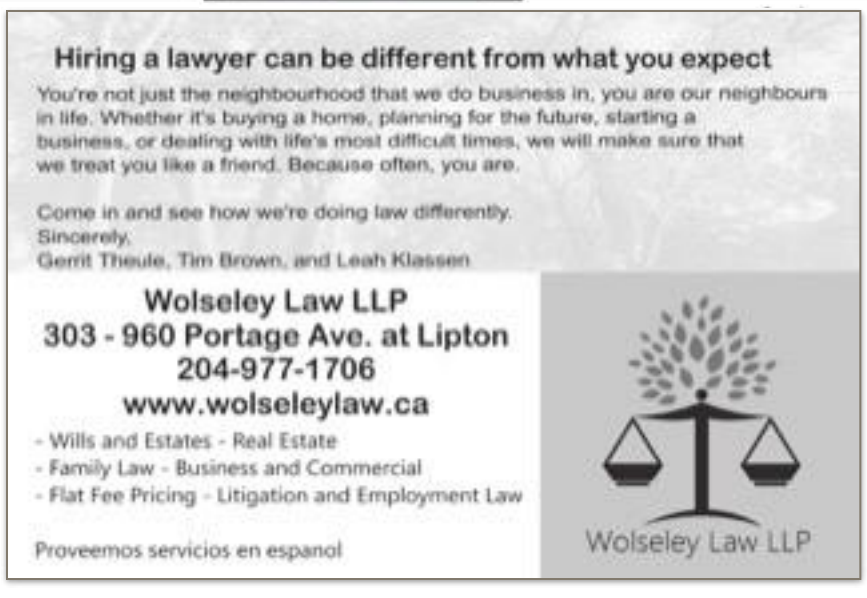
The objective by the end of Friday is to build a concrete action plan to get governments, particularly the federal government, to build social housing. This means building more units and supporting rent-geared-to-income housing, in which government subsidizes tenants.

"It's really a no-brainer," said Bernas."The solution to homelessness is housing."

Kirsten Bernas and Christina Maes Nino, two of the conference organizers, in front of the West End housing project being developed by West Central Women's Resource Centre. *Photo Mike Maunder*







MUSICAL

FAME to reinvigorate theatre for young people after pandemic

By Terese Taylor

Cast of FAME, the Musical (top) that plays at the Gas Station Theatre. Photo provided.

Erin McGrath (left) and Rachael McLaren are using their considerable talents to help youth build their careers, and inspire a love of theatre. *Photo Terese Taylor*

When Erin McGrath approached Rachael McLaren about performing in *FAME, The Musical,* she didn't just talk about the performance of the classic musical theatre piece. The effect of the pandemic on the theatre community and on youth, in particular, were issues that McGrath wanted to get a better understanding of.

McGrath says that this year's Academy Awards demonstrate that Canadians hit high above their marks when it comes to film and theatrical excellence. She says the arts struggle when it comes to funding. But the pandemic punched another hole into a sector that has always made do on very little. Ticket sales for theatre productions are way down since the pandemic, affecting the kinds of experiences young performers need to build budding careers. McGrath wanted to know what steps theatre production could take to overcome the barriers that a traditional rehearsal structure might create; and whether there were new technologies that might assist in that.

The idea was intriguing enough that McLaren wanted to join in on the project; besides her performance experience, she had also mentored and taught dance education and workshops with the Alvin Ailey school of dance. (See McLaren's amazing story on page 9).

McGrath, a transplant from New Brunswick to Wolseley since 2005, with many years experience in a range of theatres across the country, took over as Artistic Director for Winnipeg Studio Theatre during the pandemic, from its founder Kayla Gordon. "We aren't a training facility, but a place where you are getting a professional gig and experience but with a little bit more support to take risks," says McGrath.

There are many elements in *FAME, The Musical,* that are timeless. "Every dancer that I knew in New York knew *Fame*," says McLaren. "The 'racing on the street' scene, they knew Debbie Allan, cause she's like a goddess in the dance world. It's one of those inspiring things… hungry young artists that are willing to do what it takes to push their dreams regardless of what's going on in their family lives or where they are from."

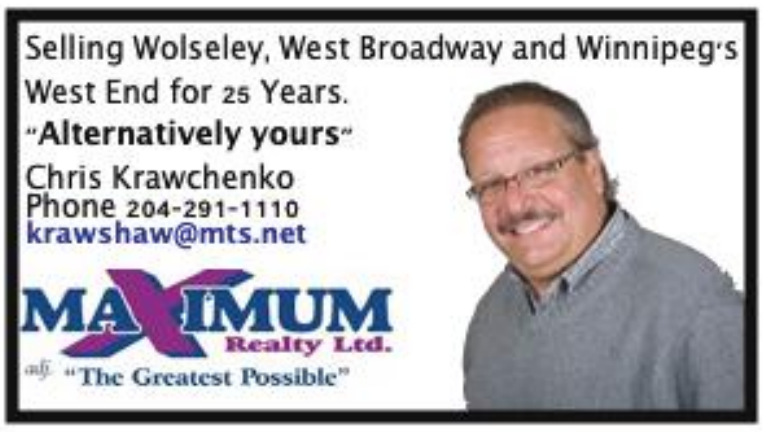
"Its fun to come to this story, and step into Debbie Allan's shoes, so to speak…and work with young artists," says McLaren.

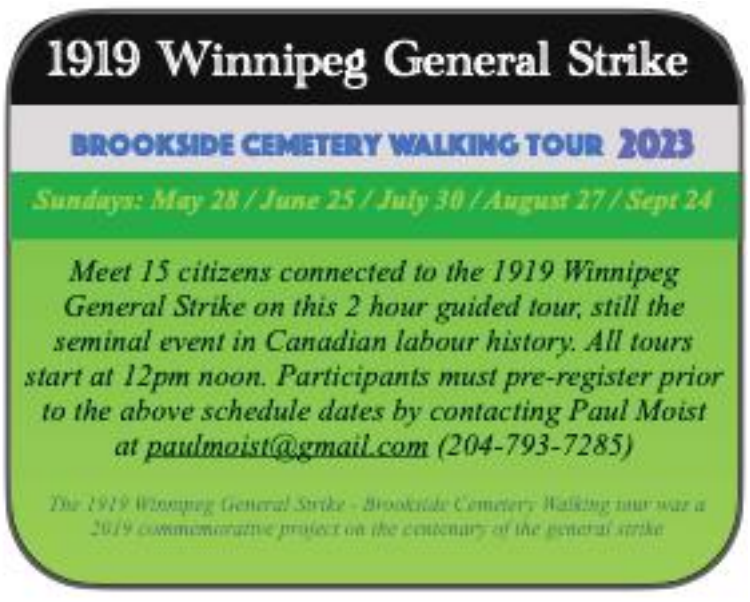
McGrath says one of the few changes that was made to the script with permission is it's 'hetero normativity' - "in our production we are looking to work with the performers we have and create a more authentic representation of what the student body looks like in our performing arts schools," she says. Both McGrath and McLaren say the cultural diversity of the original play in many ways represents the diversity that both are happy to see in Winnipeg - especially with such a large Filipinx community and growing Black community.

McGrath is using an extended rehearsal schedule making it more flexible for moms with young kids like themselves, and youth who might not be able to take off several weeks off of a job to prepare for a performance. It is also endeavouring to create a space where neuro diverse performers are also setup for success and support. MIX MY PART is an app that allows musical parts to be brought together or to be separated out for learning purposes, and has allowed for a more relaxed schedule pre performance and for the artists to work at home at their own pace.

Athough some things have changed since the musical was originally produced, (it was so popular it spun off a TV show and movie adaptation), the many issues that youth explored in its first versions are the same important issues youth are dealing with today - including the many complicated decisions youth face in navigating the public and private spheres of their lives. Winnipeg Studio Theatre hopes the play will reinvigorate a new generation of theatre goers.

The performances take place at the Gas Station Theatre March 31 to April 8. Tickets are available at www.calltimetickets.com





THEATRE

'Tea and Bannock on the stage'

Rosanna has done that for us -- Indigenous womens' voices centre stage

Interview by Terese Taylor and Virginia Maracle

"Often when I read poetry," says author, journalist, broadcaster, poet, and podcaster Rosanna Deerchild, "especially from *Calling Down the Sky,* I would have people come up afterwards and say 'that was my auntie, my uncle, my grandfather, my grandmother. But they don't talk about it.' "

Deerchild can now add playwright to her list of accomplishments.

When people would tell her that their relatives didn't talk about their experiences in residential schools, it was something Deerchild had experienced herself. "I would say 'you should go home and ask a question. Just one question. And then often that will open up that door. Then maybe you can start to heal that wound."

The Secret to Good Tea, onstage at the Manitoba Theatre Centre is the beginning of a conversation that takes place in the kitchen, when neighbours stop by, and in stolen moments. Although it is not autobiographical, some of it is based on the conversations that Deerchild had with her mother.

Like for *Leaf* interviewer Virginia Maracle, who has worked with many Indigenous women writers, there were sometimes important words that were never said in her family because of residential schools, and Deerchild's *The Secret to Good Tea* pulls at the reasons why.

To see part of that story on one of Winnipeg's biggest theatre stages on opening night represents, for Maracle, a powerful shift. "Rosanna has done that for us," she says. "Tea and bannock on that stage.. the mom singing in her own kitchen. Praying. I felt really good because it spoke to Winnipeg waking up and being there to hear the story of First Nation People."

"It feels a bit surreal, to be honest." said Deerchild before the opening night. "This is my first play…and I certainly didn't write it with the thought in mind that it would be one day on stage, much less the MTC main stage, which is mind-blowing."

"Poetry is very singular. When you read it its your voice giving it breath. It's quite different to give your words over to a group of people and trust them to gift it to the world."

But to get it done, as a part of Pimootayowin Creators Circle, Deerchild knew there was going to be some kidding around too.

Deerchild was invited by playwright Ian Ross to create the play, who she says was very patient, and very encouraging.

"I call him Ojibway Wan Kenobi, the Star Wars Jedi knight who teaches us the "force," - "the playwriting force…"

"Of course, when you are in a room full of Indigenous people," says Deerchild, "eventually everybody is going to start laughing and making fun of each other, gently of course. It was a great community to be a part of. There was a great vibe. What he said is you should write the last scene first, so you know how it ends (that's brilliant!, says Deerchild) and it kind of wrote itself backwards."

After doing an initial reading of the play, Deerchild decided to add more humour, and pay closer attention to how communication flowed between her and her mother.

"I don't know what that means" became an important statement throughout the play "that demonstrates the generation gap," said Deerchild.

Throughout the humour that carries the story along, Deerchild builds up to an opening in their relationship that needs to happen, for her mother's healing as well as her own.

"There is an exchange in the play that I actually had with my mom. So I had to write it out. That's often what writing is. You write out the things you wish would happen," Deerchild recalls. "And writing those words and saying them out loud makes me emotional.. it's a truth." says Deerchild.

Maracle likes the emphasis on tea in the play. "It awakens our presence to be listening to another person for a period of time. And Rosanna has done that for us."

To see the play and to have the chance to meet with Deerchild represents a kind of healing for Maracle too. "Its like we are taking our rightful place on Turtle Island…that's the message I get from Rosanna."

'Chock full of comedy, exploration of spirituality' for Westgate Mennonite Collegiate student

By Simon Hathout Willard

I had the pleasure of seeing *The Secret to Good Tea* with Royal MTC's Young Expressions program on opening night. Through the program, I was able to watch and discuss with a group of other high school students.

Rosanna Deerchild, who is originally a journalist and radio host, managed to adapt her skills wonderfully to the stage. The show is chock full of comedy, particularly at the start. These jokes are very effective and tend not to stray into cliches. The playwright also did a great job of creating realistic dialogue, where every character felt as though they had their own personality.

They were not just tools to tell a story, but rather their own people, whose lives we were just seeing a snippet of.

The Secret to Good Tea has a strong thread of spirituality woven though its story.

Maggie Mooswa is a devout Christian, having a lamp shaped like Jesus beside her bed, and praying to God for those living, and those who aren't, before she sleeps. However, in her dreams, she is plagued by nightmares of the past she experienced — brought back to the surface by discussions she has with her daughter, and the character of the crow, an Indigenous spiritual figure. To Maggie, this character is scary to her, as she has learned to suppress all aspects of her culture. As she continues to reconcile with her past, this figure takes a more caring role, showing how she is overcoming her fear of Indigeneity. Deerchild captures the struggles that people can have with their spirituality, and the different techniques they can use to reconcile them. As a student at a Mennonite school, I've had some of these same struggles, albeit at a smaller scale.

Emily Meadows, who talked to my group as a current participant in the Pimootayowin Creators Circle, brought up the idea of "writing for story first, and allowing staging to fall into place later." This was evident in the play, as the story follows the characters much more than it does locations. This is assisted by the wonderful set design, allowing the stage to quickly transition from kitchen, to living room, to bedroom, and back again through a rotating stage. The story evolves over the course of a week, being given time to breathe, and taking a slower pace than if it was forced to fewer locations.

These slower scenes are also helped by the way that the show uses props. Characters are never just sitting at a table talking. Someone is always making bannock, refilling tea, or cleaning up, which helps keep the scenes dynamic, as well as to make the play feel very personal. Although the horrors of residential schools are touched upon by the Manitoba school curriculum, they can feel distant and impersonal. By keeping the scope of the story small, it grounds the viewer and keeps them from being overwhelmed by the scope of the horrors committed.

Tracey Nepinak and Kelsey Kanatan Wavey in The Secret to Good Tea. Set Designer: Lauchlin Johnston. Costume Designer: Yolonda Skelton. Lighting Designer: Hugh Conacher. Photo by Dylan Hewlett. Top photo: Emily Solstice Tait, Kathleen MacLean, Tracey Nepinak, James Dallas Smith, Jeremy Proulx and Kelsey Kanatan Wavey.

Rosanna Deerchild, *photo Terese Taylor*

Good Tea Brewed in Wolseley

By Daniel McIntyre-Ridd
Local Journalism
Initiative Reporter

From Wolseley to Vancouver and back to Winnipeg again, Kelsey Kanatan Wavey has come a long way from announcing their performances to the other kids on their street. Playing the role of Nicki in the world premier of Rosanna Deerchild's first play, *The Secret to Good Tea.*

Wavey attributes much of their love of the stage to the time spent at Laura Secord School.

"I was definitely a very theatrical child, Wavey said. "I was like the one that would always be wanting everyone to dress up in the neighborhood. Some people probably on Walnut Street will be able to attest to that."

"I remember performing at the Laura Secord School community picnic and I just think those little moments and outlets to share joy, song, and performance definitely had a huge impact."

"I could run up and down the street saying 'there's a big show tonight' at whatever time and sure enough, Jim (Derksen) would be on his porch, watching with his daughter," Wavey said. "People would come and sit outside thinking 'what's this kid gonna do now?'"

Kelsey Kanatan Wavey, *photo Terese Taylor*

"It was joyful," Wavey said of their upbringing in this community.

From there they went on to attend Grant Park High School, eventually taking acting classes at Manitoba Theater for Young People for Indigenous youth. It was at this point that they first started to think becoming a performer might be something they could do for a career.

Not only did Wavey find Indigenous artistic mentors in that space, they also learned how important it was to them to tell the stories of their ancestors. "Whenever I see the next generation starting to come up, I'm just so grateful that they're entering into this

Continues page 9...

"Her kindness shows through the play she wrote. She tells the story as it is. Not laying blame. Showing it as it was. The lived experience."

"The set is going to blow people away," says Deerchild. "Every aspect of this journey.. I wrote the words but these people are making it come to life. I'm very blessed," she says.

"I believe that what we are r

esponsible for is bringing reconciliation within our communities and our nations so we can heal. These are our responsibilities. This play I hope will make space for that."

And in her playful Deerchild style, she adds: "Come to my play - it runs until April 16, there are lots of nights to see it, and

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DANCE

From world stage to Wolseley mom

By Terese Taylor

Photo of Rachael McLaren by Andrew Eccles, courtesy of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

Rachael McLaren has performed on the biggest stages across the world.

As a member of the Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre company, she helped to bring some of the most influential dance choreography in United States history to international audiences for six to eight months a year.

"They were big big big theatres," she says, recalling the Theatre de Chatalet, in Paris, and the Kennedy Centre in DC.

McLaren had learned about the Alvin Ailey School of Dance when she was about 14 years old. At the time she was training with the Royal Winnipeg Ballet school. It was the first time that McLaren realized that dance could be something she could dedicate herself to - that she could become a performer of meaningful art, instead of it being something you just practiced after school. "(Ailey) really spoke to me coming from Winnipeg where there were only a handful of Black dancers in the student body none in the RWB company at the time."

Alvin Ailey had created his dance company in 1958 during a time of blatant racism in the United States, to celebrate the vibrancy of African American culture and people and opened the doors to anyone who had the inspiration to dance. Dancers of all cultural and racial back - grounds were part of his company.

The influence of the company was so great that McLaren says that audience members she would meet after international performances told her similar stories many times. "you'd hear about this intergenerational connection with the company, like 'my mother saw them, my grandmother saw them, they were blown away'…people have these really incredible memories, whether seeing different bodies types on the stage…a lot of people remember Judith Jamison…she was this gorgeous tall woman with these long eagle arms that could just eat up the stage and she was a dark-skinned Black woman. I mean, where are you going to see this?"

McLaren skipped her high school graduation to pursue dance opportunities in Toronto (she auditioned and was hired as a cast member for Mamma Mia before she finished high school) and then made the jump to New York, got a scholarship, and achieved her dream of becoming a performer with the Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre company. After many years of living out of a suitcase, and rekindling a relationship (she married her former Winnipeg high school boyfriend, who travelled internationally for many years to meet McLaren on performance tours.) In somewhat fortuitous timing with the pandemic, McLaren and her husband decided to begin their family, and moved to Wolseley.

Since becoming a mother to a young family, Rachael has plugged her dance experience into Winnipeg's growing film industry over the last four years. "A lot of fighting and martial arts are choreography. You watch a director create this beautiful weaving of bodies and story lines, and ideas together. I was able to come into that and feel very comfortable right away and learn a ton of new skills."

Most recently in film theatres over the holidays were her action parts in the comedy *Violent Night, the Christmas movie*. "It was a really fun film last January in awful minus 40 degree cold," she recalls. Her parts included driving a snowmobile, and fight scenes. Hallmark movies haven't missed her touch either, and her kids are at an age that they can watch them. "They like seeing me in the Hallmark movies," she laughs.

WOLSELEY TEA cont'd from page 7...

into this sector of the arts," Wavey said. "Especially at this time where the community is a lot more inclusive and there's a lot more awareness around different stories."

Wavey went to and graduated from Vancouver's Studio 58. Since then, they've been based out of Vancouver but still likes to refer to themself as made in Winnipeg.

The Secret to Good Tea is a story about healing from the past, following a woman's journey with telling her Residential School survival story.

According to Wavey, these stories are exactly what the theater world needs right now. "Something that I think Winnipeg has been working on, really well, in the past few years is developing new Indigenous stories," Wavey said. "There's been such a desperate need. I think it shines a really big light on intergenerational trauma, as well as the trauma of residential schools and how it affects everybody in a family dynamic."

When seeing the play, Wavey advises people to view it with a spirit of generosity. "There are some hard truths that are in this play," Wavey said. "Coming in and being ready to listen is really important for this play."

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SECOND LAST WORD

By Paul Moist

Marching, Marching

Last month's issue of *The Leaf* contained the inspiring story of young activists from the group, Fridays for Future Manitoba, who demonstrate at the Manitoba legislature weekly.

Their efforts through peaceful public protest, marching for the future wellbeing of the planet, join a long list of others throughout the globe, marching in protest on a range of issues.

In Iran, the death of 22-year-old Jina Mahas Amini, after being arrested by that country's morality police, for wearing her head scarf improperly, has sparked six months of bloody protest that have captured the attention of the world.

As of the beginning of this year, Human Rights Watch reported that 516 protestors had died including 70 children, along with the arrest of over 15,000 citizens on charges which include, 'enmity against God' and 'corruption of the earth,' both of which carry the death penalty.

The ongoing protests represent widespread public support for freedom and social justice for all citizens.

We are witnessing widespread strikes in Greece over the February train crash which killed 57 people. The outrage centers around well documented safety concerns with the Greek rail system, concerns largely ignored by successive governments. The neglect of the rail system is attributable to the decade-long Greek debt crisis.

The State of Israel has experienced over three months of protest, which some have called the largest in the country's 75 year history. The issue is an internal one. The country's most right-wing government ever, seeks to make its judiciary less independent, and limit the Supreme Court's ability to rule against the executive branch or to strike down legislation, such as violations of protected minority rights.

In Johannesburg, South Africa, widespread street protests are growing over calls for President Cyril Ramaphosa to resign over corruption allegations. Ramaphosa is the second consecutive South African President to face such charges.

On the labour front, soaring inflation has seen an increase in strike actions throughout the globe. In the United Kingdom, major groups have hit the picket lines including rail workers, postal workers, teachers and nurses employed by the National Health Service.

The global economic uncertainty has driven increased union organizing as workers seek protection for rapidly declining incomes, due to central banks fixated on inflation control, to the point of dampening demand by downward pressure on wage demands through increased unemployment.

Perhaps the most visible protest is that of millions of French workers who in a series of single day general strikes have challenged France's President, Emanuel Macron's plan to raise the legal age of retirement from 62 to 64 years of age.

Polling shows widespread opposition to Macron's plan, as I write this, he is resorting to rarely used constitutional powers to pass the change without a vote.

If you ever wondered about the power or effectiveness of protest marches you need only look to regimes who limit such collective actions. They both know and fear the power of peaceful protest.

In Hong Kong last month, plans to hold a march for gender equality ahead of International Women's Day (March 8th) were shelved, when police warned that 'unauthorized assembly' would result in arrest.

China's adoption in 2020 of a new national security law has effectively outlawed widespread peaceful protest.

Environmental activist, James Ockenden sought permission to hold a demonstration to oppose the actions of an illegal concrete plant. State police warned that if over 30 people showed up, he and other organizers would be arrested.

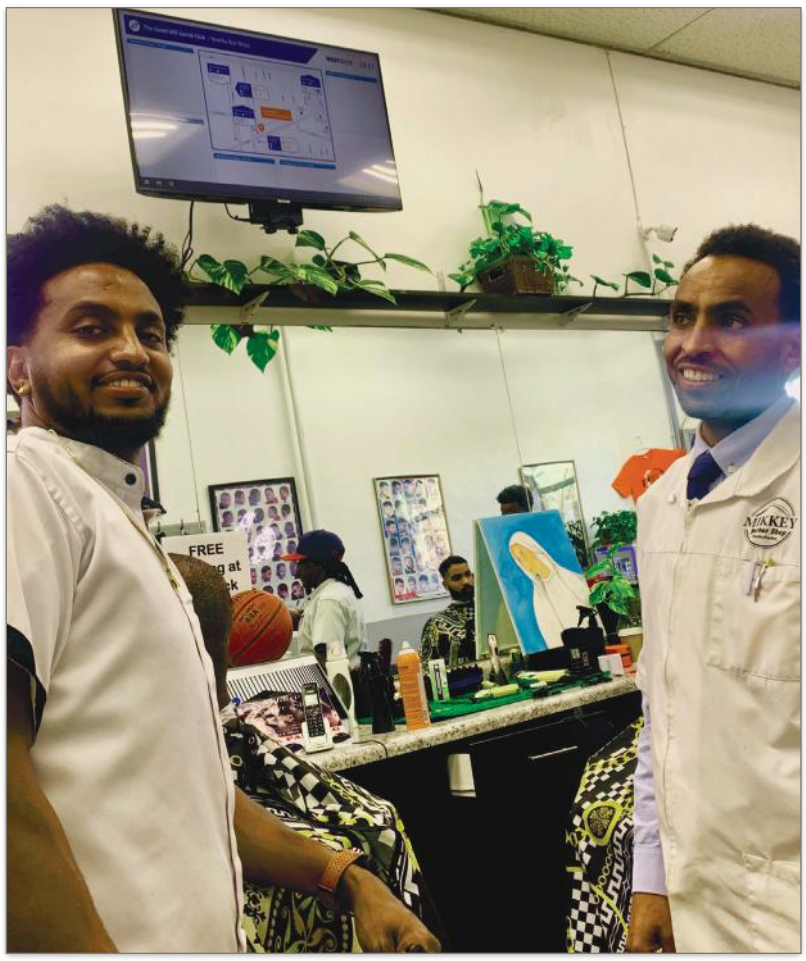
The classic women's protest song, Bread and Roses, begins with the line, 'As we come marching, marching in the beauty of the day.' It is an important message about collective action, both its power, and how necessary it is for all struggles.

Grace Downs, a grade seven student, and a Friday climate striker said it best from the steps of the legislature when she explained her activism by saying, 'Because the environment means everything, and we have to recognize that each voice makes a difference.'

Amen.

Hazel Birt (93) and her daughter, Terry Hollier, were two of the proud artists showing their work at Portage Commons (formerly Lions Place) at the end of March. Artbeat Studio runs art classes every Tuesday. *Photo Mike Maunder*

COMMUNITY



Michael Naizghi (left) and brother Yonatan Gebreegziabhe , owners of Mikkey's Barbershop with bus board installed at their business.

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A Winnipeg first: bus boards will help customers, says BIZ

By Daniel McIntyre-Ridd
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Finding out which buses are coming, and when, just got a whole lot easier with new "bus boards" being installed in local West End businesses.

Mickey's Barbershop owner Yonatan Gebreegziabher, said that it will make it much easier for his customers to make sure they don't miss their connecting bus, but also for people who step into his shop from the bus stop to warm up through the winter months. The boards will contain live bus routes, stops, and schedules.

Joe Kornelsen, Executive Director of the West End Biz stated that the project is currently in its trial phase, and they are hoping to receive funding to fully implement it.

"The objective is to show people who are in the neighborhood, or visiting businesses and organizations in the neighborhood that there is this really great option," Kornelsen said. "We're constrained by space in our neighborhood. We don't have unlimited parking. "

Kornelsen and the Biz thinks the neighborhood is uniquely positioned to use Winnipeg Transit more effectively. "We already have among the highest ridership in the city of Winnipeg in this neighborhood," Kornelsen said. "So the transit is actually going to be good just because there are the customers here to support it, and the riders to support it. And we think we can hop on that to also entice not just more residents to use it, but visit us in the neighborhood as well."

Winnipeg Transit has been instrumental in the development of this project, with the boards being designed and installed free of charge. "Winnipeg Transit knew exactly what they needed to look like," Kornelsen said. "The moment I looked at it as a transit rider myself, I immediately was quite impressed."

The West End Cultural Center, Mikkey's Barbershop, and X-Cues Cafe and Lounge were the first three businesses to have them installed. For businesses looking to potentially get one of these boards in the future, the cost will depend on the funding that becomes available after the trial begins to show results.

Gebreegziabher looks forward to seeing a small influx in customers that didn't previously know they could get to Mikkey's Barbershop on Portage via transit. "I'm really pleased to be one of the first participants in this West End Biz program because it means that more customers can get to my business conveniently," Gebreegziabher said.

Hot cross buns!

A spiced sweet bun from ancient Britain, made for the Spring Equinox. The Christian faith added a cross. Combined with prayer, the buns were thought to provide protection from fire, vermin, accidents and shipwrecks.

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LAST WORD

Writing Humour – a gift or a skill?
But definitely a talent of Winnipeg's Indigenous writers

By Mike Maunder

Space Girl's Brynn Godenir arrives at Portage and Main in her hot air balloon.
Prairie Theatre Exchange photo by Joey Senft

March was a good month for Indigenous humour in Winnipeg, and April is looking to have even more of the unique mix of good laughs and serious insights that many Indigenous writers bring to their experience.

Two plays by Indigenous playwrights opened in March – Rosanna Deerchild's "*The Secret to Good Tea*" at the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre and Frances Koncan's "*Space Girl*" at Prairie Theatre Exchange.

Laughter and tears have often come close together for Indigenous people and humour has always been one of the strongest tools any people can use to survive trauma.

You can see the relationship between humour and tragedy clearly in Rosanna Deerchild's play about a family and their trip to a former residential school. Ben Waldman's five-star review for the *Free Press* summed it up best: "every joke landing with a thunderous clap of laughter, and every bit of dialogue striking at the heart of an ongoing saga that will forever define this land and the people who call it home."

Deerchild's play runs until April 15.

Koncan's play ended April 2, but, as writer-in-residence at the library, she has scheduled two workshops in April that promise an even deeper examination of laughter, and tears, and their place in this land and the people who call it home.

On April 15, she's offering a workshop on decolonizing the creative writing process; and on April 29, a workshop called *Crafting Comedy: Humour as a Tool of Decolonization.* (The humour workshop is April 29th at the Cornish Library.)

"Some say comedy is an innate gift that only a select few possess..." explains the promo for the workshop. "Others say it's a skill that anyone can learn. Maybe it's a little bit of both!"

As an innovative Anishinaabe writer in several mediums, Koncan has earned a reputation as one writer who possesses that gift. Humour and laughs rang throughout *Space Girl:* a story whose heroine is on a mission from the moon to earth – not to save the planet from the approaching asteroid that threatens total destruction, but to find the only cord on the planet that can re-charge her phone. On her journey she meets Ben Affleck, a survivalist farmer outside Winnipeg, who assists her in her plight by arranging a flight on a hot air balloon to the only place she can recharge her phone – and the centre of the planet– the corner of Portage and Main. But when she arrives, she is dumbfounded to find it is an intersection with no crosswalks. The only way to the centre, intones a deep voice, is "Down. Down. Down." And so she descends into the mysteries of the confusing tunnels beneath the intersection.

As well as these two Winnipeg plays, Koncan's play *Women of the Fur Trade* is at Stratford this summer, directed by Indigenous playwright Yvette Nolan, who grew up, and started directing in Wolseley.

Nolan has sometimes described herself as "a halfbreed theatre rat in Winnipeg," and has described how seeing Tomson Highway's *The Rez Sisters* (also a classic of Indigenous humour) changed her life, showing her "how we too could use the theatre to tell our stories our way."

Humour is definitely a part of that way, and Indigenous writers like Rosanna Deerchild and Frances Koncan today, and before them Tompson Highway, Ian Ross, and many others have shared that humour with many Winnipeg audiences over many years

Frances Koncan will share some of the secrets of that gift in her April workshops.