

The Pocket

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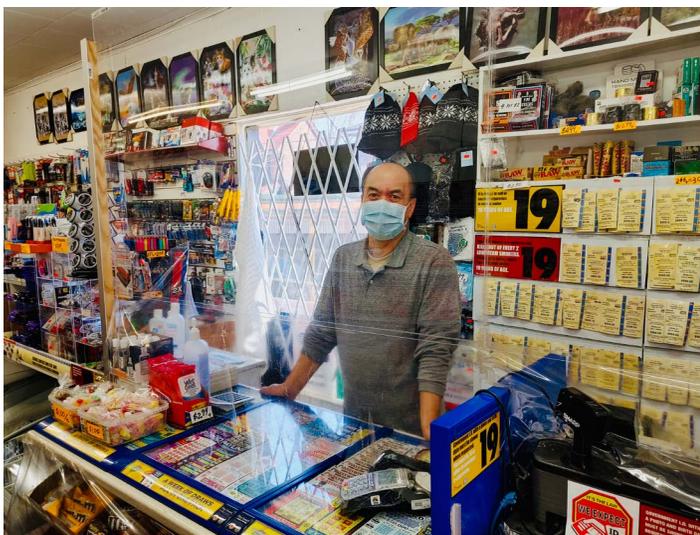
At the front lines of COVID-19

By Marc van Beusekom

Everyone has a unique perspective on how COVID-19 affected them. We asked six Pocket residents in various essential-worker roles to tell us about their experiences and impressions.

Fred Wong

Co-owner (with wife Helena), Jones Variety



How does COVID intersect with your business?

Well, we were afraid when COVID first hit so we shut down for two weeks.

When did you realize that COVID was going to be really big?

March last year. At first, I thought things would be okay here, but that didn't happen.

Most striking COVID-related memory?

When I heard what happened in seniors' homes. I also had a former classmate who lived in Hamilton who died of COVID.

How has COVID changed the way you do your work?

We cut back on the store hours. We put up plastic shielding. Business has gone down about 10 to 20 per cent and hasn't come back yet. We did sell a lot of hand sanitizer and cleaning wipes during the first wave. We couldn't do our usual flower and garden centre because nothing was available to sell. We are looking forward to doing it this year.

How has COVID affected your home life?

I used to go out to visit friends a lot to talk. Now I don't do that. I talk on the phone a lot more.

What do you miss most about "ordinary" life?

No more parties!

Any silver linings?

I have more free time now that the store is open less. I get to relax more.

What's the first thing you'll do when lockdown ends?

Go to a restaurant to have dinner with my family.

Michele Mellow

Grade 4/5 teacher, Bishop Macdonell Catholic School



How does COVID intersect with your job?

Working remotely. Online teaching was a huge adjustment. You can do it. It's not pretty, but you can do it.

When did you realize that COVID was going to be really big?

I saw it first on Facebook as news from Italy. I remember thinking, "Is this fake news?" We had been planning a trip to Disneyland. On March 12 we had to cancel.

It would have been our two daughters' (ages 9 and 11) first trip there. The next day we told the kids. Thankfully, most of their bitterness is gone by this point.

Most striking COVID-related memory?

Being in my office in the basement trying to teach my class online while my daughter was loudly online learning in the same room. I remember trying hard to remain calm and carry on while giving her the evil eye.

How has COVID changed the way you do your work?

A lot more online learning, of course. During the first lockdown the online process was sketchy, but by the second it was a pretty smooth transition. A lot of kids really like online and the learning opportunities are (continued on page 9)

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Stay connected in the Pocket! See last page for details.

Eastview battles food insecurity

By Fiona Devine

Each day in Toronto a neighbour goes without meals in order to pay a phone bill, seniors subsist on pensions that don't cover basic costs of living, and families struggle to put food on the table, no matter how many household members are working. This is the face of food insecurity in our community and just a few of the reasons that Eastview Neighbourhood Community Centre's food bank has supported thousands of people for 45 years.

Daily Bread Food Bank statistics show that even before the outbreak of COVID-19, food insecurity had risen 5 per cent in the GTA from 2019 to 2020. The arrival of COVID pushed food bank visits up significantly; they rose 22 per cent in June and a staggering 51 per cent in August 2020. Eastview's own statistics were worrying, and the length of the queues snaking around Kempton Howard Park before food bank service each week motivated Pocket residents to action.

"Residents from the Pocket have always been staunch supporters of Eastview's food bank. For some, the motivation is knowing that 30 per cent of our food bank's end users are children, and learning that experiences of hunger in childhood increase the risk of developing asthma, depression and suicidal thoughts in adolescence and early adulthood," says Eastview food security worker Bridget Marzin.

"For others, it's the understanding that food security should be a right, yet so many community members are forced to come to us purely because government social support systems aren't working. If you are a person of colour, you are far more likely to come to a food bank. If you rent in low-income housing, same thing. While many food bank users are employed, it is often low-paying, and even clients who receive government assistance are sometimes still living below the deep poverty line."

Eastview Executive Director Kerry Bowser says, "COVID-19 really knocked us about at the start. In March 2020, we locked our doors and cancelled 90 per cent of our programming, but thanks to Bridget and her team, and support from groups like the Pocket, we managed to continue running our food bank.



"We've now completed a full renovation of the centre, including a newly improved area for the food bank to operate out of, and recently adopted the Daily Bread Food Bank's preferred shopping model of multiple food choices and a more dignified experience. We're serving 20 per cent more clients than we used to, and have actually added new programs to serve a greater variety of community members. We can't wait to physically show the changes to local residents when things open up a bit more. It's really impressive."

Pocket residents regularly run food drives, fundraisers and toy collections to help local residents suffering food insecurity, but COVID-19 saw a heightened level of need within the community and once again residents found creative and effective ways to support Eastview.

In addition to donating online and running food drives, Pocket residents also donated egg cartons, to be reused in the portioning of bulk donations, and recycled black plastic takeout containers that allow fresh, nutritious, take-home meals for food bank participants. Newer initiatives include a local group that makes sandwiches for the seniors living in low-income housing on Pape Avenue delivered by Eastview staff, and an Eastview Ambassador Porch Pick Up Program that starts in April.

The Eastview food bank runs 1 to 3 p.m. each Tuesday, and all are welcome. Find out more at www.eastviewcentre.com or call 416-392-1750, ext. 300.

Fiona Devine is Eastview's volunteer and fundraising manager.

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Online: Find colour PDFs of all volumes of *The Pocket* newsletter at thepocket.ca (click on “News” and then “The Pocket Newsletter”).

Editorial: Strength of spirit guides us through the pandemic

By Diana Goliss

When I put up my hand and offered to write an editorial about this COVID year, I was pretty happy. My assignment was to review all of the stories for this newsletter and summarize how our little community is managing through this scary and unprecedented time. Having lived in the Pocket for more than 10 years, I wasn't surprised to learn about the many projects and initiatives that emerged; what really struck me was the sheer number of activities that served to maintain and sustain connections. What I wasn't sure of, though, was what it said about us as a community.

The stories shared in this newsletter are varied. Some explore the personal journeys of essential workers, a term that has rightly been expanded to include many more professions and services than it did pre-pandemic. In other articles, we learn about how some of our artists carefully crafted objects or provided services to inspire and/or help others cope. Happily, the pandemic did not stop all of our usual Pocket activities. Instead, smaller events were carefully organized to promote participation and maintain safety, and you will read about them and future events that are being planned. Some Pocket people even bonded over a number of coyote sightings in the area.

In fact, there were so many activities that this issue was not able to capture everything that occurred – musicians played concerts and sing-alongs, neighbours baked and shared goodies, and people gave away useful household items as they straightened up their houses.

As we know, not all has been rosy. Sadly, food insecurity has become an even bigger problem for those who visit the food bank at Eastview Neighbourhood Community Centre, and there were some strong racist reactions to some anti-racist statements here in our community. In addition, initiatives to combat global warming have taken a bit of a back seat while we focus on getting through the pandemic.



The Lesters in concert

What is inspiring, though, is that Pocket residents took some simple, straightforward steps to help address these complex and sensitive issues.

I suppose not many of us will truly appreciate the impact of COVID-19 until it is over and things go back to “normal” – whatever that means. Whatever lessons we learn, one thing rings true: the importance of community. The need for one another, to help and be helped, to graciously give and receive, and the importance of just connecting, so we don't feel alone. Community is what we make it.

At the start of the pandemic, we were encouraged to care for our neighbours, or at least be aware of them. And, I think so far, the community has done this in spades. Did we get it right? Were there obvious gaps? Only time will tell. In the meantime, let's take this moment and appreciate the efforts made so far and be thankful we live in a community where people make sincere and deliberate efforts to try to connect and show they care.

Pocket 'makers' channel stay-at-home energies into rewarding hobbies and businesses

By Susan Paterson

During the pandemic, people around the world took up the challenge of beating COVID-19 anxiety, boredom and employment difficulties by being creative. Here are some stories from the Pocket.

Allan Titus



Allan learned how to turn wooden bowls after being impressed by the ones at a Cabbagetown arts and crafts sale eight years ago. He mostly uses wood from fallen trees in the Pocket and gives away his bowls to friends and family. Last year, he sold extra bowls in the neighbourhood and gave the proceeds to COVID-related charities. Allan writes that turning bowls has always been just a hobby, an opportunity to focus his attention on a craft, and that it is very satisfying to give the bowls away or support charities. He also enjoys the many stages of creation, from chainsawing to rough turning to drying. Allan often puts bags of wood chips on his sidewalk to give away for reuse.

Diane Smith



Diane is a multimedia artist who works in cloth, watercolour, bookmaking and photography. Last year she joined the homebound trend around the world by making her own sourdough bread. Since yeast was in short supply, she asked for some starter on the Pocket Facebook group. The starter from Dvora Richler (another Pocket breadmaker) has now been shared with many neighbours. It's the gift that keeps on giving. Since Diane's family can't gather for meals, sharing her loaves with them is the next best thing. Diane also gives bread as a thank-you to helpful neighbours.

(continued on next page)

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(continued from page 4)

Steve Massa



When the pandemic started, Steve knew he had to do something to help. He decided to make videos to keep kids engaged and learning French, and that's how his YouTube channel "Monsieur Steve" was born. It's been exactly a year since he started and he can't believe how much it has grown. With more than 7,600 subscribers, he couldn't be happier.

Making the videos helped him tap into a level of creativity he didn't know he had. He is the writer, producer, cinematographer and post-production team, all in one. Steve loves knowing that he's not only helping teachers and parents access quality French resources but making kids laugh and getting them excited to learn French. At the end of the day, if kids are having a blast watching his videos, that's all that really matters.

Steven Pirso



Steven started woodworking on a whim, creating serving boards for family members for Christmas in 2017. He stumbled on a small group of woodworkers who rented him time at their shop and mentored him. He used to work in his backyard but now visits a 350-square-foot workshop where he shares machinery with other woodworkers. Steven started selling at craft shows and to friends and colleagues but now sells exclusively through Facebook and Instagram. His work has evolved to include larger pieces of furniture, but he still sells cutting and serving boards and other small household items. He started making Pikler triangles (climbing structures for children) in March 2020, and now they are bestsellers. Steven loves the joy of transforming raw materials into a finished product.

Jennifer Balogh



Often using pre-loved textiles, Jennifer creates limited-run and one-of-a-kind clothing and accessories such as dusters, kimonos, scarves, shirts and, since last March, masks.

With a passion for vintage that comes from a long-standing family tradition of collecting, she has been running two distinct yet related businesses since she left the corporate world four years ago. In the absence of most in-person markets this year (the exception being the Pocket Porch Pop-up event in December, which she helped organize), she uses several channels to promote and sell her handmade and vintage items, including two Etsy shops (HowFetch and HowFetchVintage), Instagram (@myhowfetch and @howfetchvintage) and booths at the Riverside Arts Market.

Jen is thankful for the tremendous support the Pocket community has shown her, this year especially, and feels that together we can continue to redirect fabric and used items from landfill, all while supporting local, small business.

Dottie Yahoda



For many years, Dottie sewed tiny, ornate smocked dresses for her sister's porcelain doll business. She also made clothes for her children. When the pandemic began, she started sewing masks for her family, and today she sells them. Dottie conducted research to ensure she used the best cottons, the most durable nose bands and softest ear loops. Her pattern adheres to published guidelines, is comfortable to wear and doesn't fog up eyeglasses.

Dottie says that sewing helps her express her creativity and clear her mind. She enjoys seeing the lovely photos that people share and the kind words about how much they enjoy wearing her masks, and meeting customers when they deliver the masks. Dottie also started making Japanese-style pullover aprons at the request of a neighbour and has been busy sourcing fun, vintage fabrics with coordinating pockets. She sells through word-of-mouth and via her Facebook page, Dottie's Masks.

Pocket Community Association

By Lori Zucchiatti O'Neill

The year 2020 began normally. Our Neighbourhood Support Committee hosted the monthly Sip & Chat in January, and after John Koufis and his family created a community rink in Phin Park, dozens came to our February Skating Party. Great weather, hot mulled cider and bite-size treats added to the fun.

On March 3, eight of us at Motorama for the Sip & Chat talked about the “coronavirus over there.” One week later, it was a pandemic, and two weeks later, our city was in a lockdown.

Several concerned residents gathered on March 13 to discuss a neighbourhood response to the crisis. We formed a 10-person COVID-19 Committee, and, with the support of the PCA Executive, we set up a COVID-19 portal on our website, created a flyer with key health/safety information, recruited volunteers and encouraged Pocket residents to contact us for help through an online form or new 24/7 helpline. All in 72 hours – that’s Pocket Spirit!

Our Street Captains and other volunteers quickly delivered our flyers to every address. Dozens of residents registered as COVID-19 volunteers. We increased our digital communications – from offers of help to words of hope and humour.

Every request for help that was sent to the committee, from grocery shopping and delivery to specialized household

cleaning, has been fulfilled within hours. Many residents have asked for and offered assistance on their own through Facebook, text and email. What matters is the sense of community – neighbours helping each other.

The pandemic led us to cancel many events that we organize and fund. There was no park cleanup, Easter egg hunt, door-to-door membership drive, Art in the Park with Jerry Silverberg, film night, neighbourhood party or pumpkin parade last year. There was no Pow Wow at Kapapamahchakwew – Wandering Spirit School for us to support and attend.

Yet we adapted by creating an outdoor Pocket Spring Fling and Pocket Pride celebration, among other events. In September, we had an annual general meeting (AGM) in Phin Park, where we welcomed MP Julie Dabrusin, MPP Peter Tabuns and Councillor Paula Fletcher (Trustee Jennifer Story sent regrets). We elected our hardworking and committed executive members and heard inspiring reports from them and our committee chairs.

Stay tuned for our new website launch, spring membership drive, June AGM and more! Please consider supporting the PCA by signing up or renewing your membership now at thepocket.ca or by volunteering your time.

Lori Zucchiatti O'Neill is chair of the Pocket Community Association.

Pocket chosen by TRCA to develop an environmental action plan

By David Langille

Last summer we were delighted to learn that the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) had chosen the Pocket as one of two communities in Toronto to be offered the chance to develop a Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Plan. Let’s just call it a SNAP!

TRCA wants to pilot its “rapid SNAP planning” approach in collaboration with a community group. SNAP is a proven model for neighbourhood revitalization. There have been eight SNAP projects in the Toronto Region.

A few key strategies are fundamental to its success. They identify the organizations that might assist the community, then help organize a workshop whereby community members can identify inspiring projects and garner support for their implementation. TRCA then brings together the partners who can advance the plan.

In short, the SNAP will build on ideas coming from Pocket residents, from the Pocket Community Association and the Pocket Change project – ideas such as retrofitting our homes to make us the first carbon-neutral community in Canada, having a small community centre, putting a green roof or a solar farm on top of the TTC yards, etc. Implementing the plan will result in measurable environmental benefits, such as reducing our greenhouse gas emissions and improving community health and well-being.

The whole exercise is being coordinated by a project management team that will include representatives from the Conservation Authority, the city’s Environment & Energy Division, Toronto Transit Commission, Toronto

Community Housing, and the Water, Parks and Fire departments – along with representatives from the PCA Executive and the Pocket Change Executive. This group will meet in mid-April, then we’ll have a Community Workshop later in May.

After that workshop, the project management team will reconvene to figure out how to implement the community’s priorities. They will then bring their action plan back to another community workshop in the fall for final ratification before implementation.

Councillor Paula Fletcher is anxious that this be an outstanding project. She even persuaded Toronto City Council to support her motion for “Pocket Change Plus.” It calls on all city agencies to support both the ambitious home retrofit program and innovative environmental retrofits for other public properties in the neighbourhood.

David Langille is the Pocket Change project coordinator.

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Pocket Change is ready to deliver

By David Langille with contributions from Paul Dowsett, Liisa Repo-Martell and other Pocket Change project members

If you have always wanted to save the world from climate change, now you have a chance to do your part. During the last federal election, the Liberals promised 1.5 million energy audits and \$5,000 grants so people could begin retrofitting their homes. Now they are anxious to deliver on that promise before the next election, expected sometime this year.

While Natural Resources Canada is working out the details, the Pocket Change project has reached an agreement with Greensaver, a well-known social enterprise that's been looking after local homeowners since the mid-1980s and is now a leading energy conservation organization.

Greensaver began energy assessments of 10 homes to start with in March, and we hope they will assess the energy efficiency of every home in the Pocket in the coming year. These assessments provide the homeowner with a detailed report on where their energy is lost and a plan for tackling the problem with draft-proofing and insulation.

We will then encourage and assist Pocket homeowners to apply for those \$5,000 grants to get them started on the retrofit road (700,000 grants will be available).

The City of Toronto wants all 420,000 homes in the city to be retrofitted to achieve “net zero” emissions by 2050. And they have asked Pocket Change to pilot a community-based approach to home retrofits.

We've been told by experts familiar with the lack of progress on home retrofits that the major obstacle is not financial or technical but a problem of social or political will – we need to persuade homeowners to invest in improving their energy efficiency so as to lower their greenhouse gas emissions.

But we know that with full retrofits expected to cost as much as \$100,000 per home, governments will have to offer deep subsidies. They can make these grants conditional on the homeowner achieving certain targets, as the German government has done. Another part of our job will be lowering the homeowner's costs by purchasing materials in bulk, improving the process, etc.

At the end of the day, with the world's scientists warning us about what we are facing, we are going to need your help – we will all have to do our part.

Renew Your Pocket Community Association Membership

10 + 10 = 2021 PCA membership! It takes only 10 minutes and \$10 to sign up or renew. Online and paper registration/payment options are available at thepocket.ca. Please support the many activities – from pandemic assistance to fun events and Phin Park/green space improvements – that the PCA funds and organizes.

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Omer Lifshitz

Paramedic, Station 41 (Pape and O'Connor)

How does COVID intersect with your job?

We have senior staff who worked during SARS. So, in the beginning, we treated every call as potentially COVID-related. Every call was high stress and lengthy. Initially, we were using protective equipment left over from Ebola. We were quite busy. People were calling us just to see if they had COVID. Then, all of a sudden, calls dropped off the face of the earth. For one and a half months it was glorious. I actually got my lunch breaks and was able to leave on time. People stopped calling 911 unless they really had to. We had far fewer calls related to some combination of drinking, stupidity and gravity. On the other hand, everyone was waiting longer than necessary, so the calls we had tended to be more serious. Now things feel like normal.



When did you realize that COVID was going to be really big?

When they built the new hospital in Wuhan it looked pretty bad. Then the death numbers started coming in from Italy. But it wasn't until April [2020] that it really hit home that this was not going away any time soon, unlike SARS, which was more lethal but short-lived.

Most striking COVID-related memory?

Going into nursing homes and seeing how under-resourced they were. We would respond to a cardiac arrest and we couldn't do CPR for fear of exposing staff to COVID because they didn't have sufficient PPE [personal protective equipment]. This haunts me still.

How has COVID changed the way you do your work?

Every call is just that much more stressful. We wear PPE – masks, goggles, respirators – and things take longer. At one point we were running out of equipment and felt a bit abandoned by the government. But they stepped up so we didn't have to reuse any PPE – unlike other sectors. They took out the couches from our station to discourage congregating. As a profession, we've been really good in terms of low positivity.

How has COVID affected your home life?

I'm a single dad and have two kids, ages 9 and 12. When I was self-isolating, they had to stay with their mom. Some colleagues actually moved out from family and into a place together for four or five months just to avoid the complications. I considered that but I would miss my kids too much so decided against it.

What do you miss most about "ordinary" life?

I'm a hugger. I miss human contact – hugging my buddies. I'd also like to start dating again.

Karen

Hospital clinician, scientist and assistant professor

How does COVID intersect with your job?

COVID hit hard, fast and didn't let up. As an ER doc, taking care of COVID patients became my primary focus, putting my research work on the back burner and adding complexity to my teaching role.

When did you realize that COVID was going to be really big?

As soon as the news came from China. I have colleagues who were around during SARS and MERS and so had some idea of what this might be like. We started preparing toward the end of January.

Most striking COVID-related memory?

Not a happy one. I remember calling a family member to advise that a loved one had a positive test. I'll never forget the cry they made when I told them. It was the kind of cry I imagine a parent would make who'd lost a child.

How has COVID changed the way you do your work?

Staying safe was and is a huge concern. Especially in the first weeks, fear and uncertainty abounded. All the information overload made it quite difficult. Precautions and recommendations were coming from multiple authorities, sometimes changing by the hour. The system wasn't ready. Our team at work had to come up with our own protocols in order to function. COVID has had a huge impact on how patient care is delivered. Having family unavailable, in particular, makes things difficult. Without



them, it's very hard to deliver quality bedside care. I spend a lot of my day calling family to update them.

How has COVID affected your home life?

I couldn't be home much, so my husband looked after our three small kids (ages 2, 4 and 6). No daycare, no school. He was an absolute rock.

What do you miss most about "ordinary" life?

Seeing my kids playing with their friends. Teaching in a classroom, socializing in a crowded room. Babysitters! We haven't had a babysitter in a year now. Time alone with my husband.

Any silver linings?

COVID exposed the gaps in our health care system and so they are being discussed by the public and in the media. It feels like change is happening. For example, virtual care is now commonplace and improves efficiency. We have been given better computers and software to accommodate that. There is more research funding – mostly COVID-related – but it drives overall innovation. I also see a push to be more community minded. I know it made a huge difference to our family that a neighbour did our grocery shopping for us. That was a really, really big silver lining.

What's the first thing you'll do when lockdown ends?

Hire a babysitter and go enjoy a drink with my husband on a patio!

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Tomas van Beusekom

Grocery store clerk at Jeff's No Frills, first-year student at Niagara College

How does COVID intersect with your job?

It narrowed down job opportunities. When COVID hit, grocery stores were one of the few options. The job itself hasn't been bad.

When did you realize that COVID was going to be really big?

When I had to cut short my gap year in Australia and come back after only two months of a five-month placement. When I self-isolated for 14 days, I couldn't even go into my own kitchen.

Most striking COVID-related memory?

When I was on the bus from the outback town to the airport at 5 a.m. and I realized, looking out the window, that I would likely never come back here.

How has COVID changed the way you do your work?

As a student, everything has changed about school. Everything went online. No in-class, no access to classmates in person. It's harder to share the load – to get that “we're



in it together” feeling. At work it means things are more regulated – people are less willing to interact. Sometimes customers argue over social distancing and managers have to intervene.

How has COVID affected your home life?

Social life is very limited. There is an overall buildup of frustration. You can't just hang out, so it's harder to maintain relationships. Little setbacks boil over more quickly. At times I feel like I'm missing out on what it

means to be 19.

What do you miss most about “ordinary” life?

Hanging out. Enjoying ordinary things – like playing basketball with my brother without being asked by a stranger if we live together.

Any silver linings?

It can only get better from here.

What's the first thing you'll do when lockdown ends?

Go out with friends. Maybe even watch a game together.

Jeff Otto

Firefighter, Fire Station 322 (Cosburn and Donlands)



How does COVID intersect with your job?

I was lucky in that, unlike many others, there was no change in my workplace or number of shifts. When COVID first hit, things were very quiet. There were way fewer car accidents. Things have caught up now. More fires – some devastating ones recently – because

people are at home more, cooking more, doing electrical renovations on older homes.

When did you realize that COVID was going to be really big?

When I heard the news reports from Italy, I thought it looked bad – the suddenness of the lockdown here confirmed that.

Most striking COVID-related memory?

Everyman things – how the city was like a ghost town those first weeks, empty streets and empty shelves. The sense of fear that entered everyday life. How you had to cross the street to avoid people out of consideration.

How has COVID changed the way you do your work?

We wear masks. We clean surfaces. We wear enhanced PPE when dealing with the public, and only one of the crew goes in to a (non-fire) call first, to limit interaction. We also tend to let the paramedics take the lead. We can't just charge in – all the PPE slows us down. It's hard to get a gown over the bulky firefighters' jacket and pants.

How has COVID affected your home life?

I'm glad to have a dog, a good reason to get outside. I've been less active than usual. I hate shopping now. And cooking. So much planning has to go into it.

What do you miss most about “ordinary” life?

Going to movies and restaurants. Visiting my dad, who had to go into a seniors home in November and whom I've been unable to visit since. Socializing with friends and neighbours.

Any silver linings?

I like that we're paying more attention to public spaces – bike lanes on Danforth, Dining TO, etc. Great that those things were done so fast. I'm also impressed with the speed of the science around vaccines. On a personal note, I accomplished some home improvements.

What's the first thing you'll do when lockdown ends?

Visit my dad and take him out to a restaurant!

Michele continued from page 1

amazing. We use a whole host of technologies that are useful to them. The downside is it's easier for kids to be sneaky. One kid kept saying that her screen was white as an excuse for not doing homework. But you could see her search bar had the item “how to find a blank screen” in it.

How has COVID affected your home life?

Our kids are more bored, but the upside is I haven't missed shuffling them around to activities. The girls got really sick of each other. Jon and I never get any time to ourselves.

Any silver linings?

Since we couldn't keep our cleaning lady, the kids have had to learn to clean and do their own laundry. They've also learned to cook. I managed to slow down and find time to meditate.

BLM signs sprout after act of vandalism

By Jennifer Bain

After three youths were spotted tearing down Susan Tiihonen’s homemade “Black Lives Indigenous Lives Matter” sign and yelling racist and anti-Semitic slurs last November, she called the police about the hate crime and then alerted the Pocket Facebook group.

“I am so angry and sad,” she wrote, sharing a photo of how the hand-painted sign on a white bedsheet looked when

it was hanging on a fence in her front yard. David Lightfoot was the first to suggest that Pocketeers support Black, Indigenous and People of Colour, and Susan’s solidarity, by getting their own signs. “Love triumphs over hate,” Susan replied. “To show care isn’t a sign of weakness – it’s strength.”

Within hours, a sign fundraiser was born, and within a month, 110 signs had been created and sold for \$15 each. The proceeds, plus donations, allowed the group to donate \$1,440 to the Sweet Grass Roots Collective, a local non-profit that re-Indigenizes urban spaces through earthwork, art, media and storytelling.

Marnie Consky was part of a team with David and Rochelle Strauss that spearheaded the design and printing of the new sign. They hoped to find a local sign company owned by a BIPOC family and were able to find one in Markham.



“I wanted to get involved to do my small part in taking a stand and saying this is not okay,” says Marnie.

Susan, an artist, remembers painting her “Black Lives Indigenous Lives Matter” sign at home while watching a Toronto protest about anti-Black racism in the wake of the George Floyd murder and other racialized murders and acts of police violence in Canada and the U.S.

A white, Finnish settler from Thunder Bay, Susan enjoyed the fact that racialized youth, families and neighbours stopped to chat about the sign. When asked where she wanted the sign donations to go, she picked Sweet Grass Roots Collective, which is run by Pocket residents Jennifer LaFontaine and Emmanuelle Pantin. Nobody was arrested in the November sign vandalism,

but Susan repaired her sign and put it back up.

“I feel somewhat hopeful that we, collectively as a society, are moving towards more equity,” she says now. “But what does it take for real, significant change to happen? When is there going to be a tipping point? When is there going to be greater justice?”

People are still asking for lawn signs, and if Susan gets to a minimum order of 25, she will place a second order.

Spring is here!

It’s the perfect time to sell especially if you are looking to downsize, re-locate to another neighbourhood or simply want to capitalize on this **red-hot** market.

Let me share some insights that might help you:

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What's been happening

With contributions from Susan McMurray, Lori Zucchiatti O'Neill, Dean Miller, Jeff Otto and Jennifer Bain

Pocket Spring Fling (April 11–12, 2020)

The Pocket's popular Easter Egg Hunt in Phin Park was the first traditional in-person neighbourhood gathering to be officially cancelled after the pandemic came to town. The Pocket Community Association's planning team replaced the mass gathering with a COVID-19 style event. To keep things safe, distanced and household-based, residents decorated the fronts of their homes with spring-inspired themes. Easter eggs were replaced by a scavenger hunt, where kids used printouts to look for signs of spring, from tulips and robins to garden hoses and nests. You can't do a head count for an activity like this, but judging by the number of clicks on the website and copies of the printouts picked up, several dozen families participated in the first COVID-19 Pocket event in 2020.

Blake School Parade (June 25, 2020)

In a touching end-of-year celebration, teachers from Blake Street Junior Public School whizzed through the neighbourhood on decorated bikes and other vehicles, past the homes of the many kids who attend Blake, ringing bells and calling out to their students. It was clear our talented teachers and students have a special bond even though schooling went online after March Break.

Pocket Pride Celebration (June 27, 2020)

With one of the world's biggest Pride events cancelled, Pocket residents wanted to make sure it was still recognized. Our little parade was a surprising success that brought many people out of their houses and onto their lawns to cheer. The small but rainbow-coloured collection of cars, bikes, unicorns, dinos and even a dominatrix marshal were thrilled by the outpouring of affection, even during a sudden downpour. The procession mixed celebration with raising awareness that homophobia still exists, especially for Black, Indigenous and People of Colour. Although social guidelines kept our numbers small, the effect was mighty. More than 130 participation awards were given to homes that decorated for the occasion. The 2021 celebration should be even grander.



September Street Sale (Sept. 12, 2020)

The street sale was more subdued than usual, but we still saw a lot of people enjoying an amble through the neighbourhood to find bargains on a beautiful day.

Kempton Howard Park Playground Reopening (September 2020)

Phin Park is important to Pocket residents, and so is nearby Kempton Howard Park, named after a respected community youth worker who was tragically murdered in 2003 (see *The Pocket* newsletter, Volume 4). The park's playground was revitalized last year through a collaboration by Parks and Recreation staff, Councillor Paula Fletcher and community members. Lots of Pocket residents and their kids are enjoying the fun new playground features.

Halloween (October 2020)

Halloween was surprisingly busy, but most households proved they could dole out treats while keeping kids safe. Many methods were used, including ramps, troughs, tunnels and tongs, which made it all the more entertaining. Costumes and home decorations were great, too!

Pocket Passport to the Holidays: Holiday Pocket Porch Pop-up Shops (Dec. 5, 2020)

Organized by the intrepid Jennifer Balogh, pop-ups offered products for holiday gift shoppers. It was a safe, accessible and local way to shop. Those who got their passport stamped by each vendor had a chance to win a basket of local treats. Keep your eyes open for future offerings by Sweet Pocket, Boozhe, TerraSoapCo, How Fetch, Gammage Printmaking, M is for Maggie, Samieh Walden, La Femme Nikketo, CutCoffeeCreate and ZikZakYum.

Santa's Frozen Festival: Porch Edition (December 2020)

Santa couldn't have the kids on his knee, but he could get 10 friends to help him bring Ho Ho Hope to the people of the Pocket. He thought a night parade would be something special, and it sure was. Led by a wintry princess, the crew included elves, a T-Rex, snowman, walking dreidel, reindeer and a duck. Santa and Mrs. Claus brought up the rear with their candy-cane sleigh. The event brought in donations of toys and food plus more than \$2,200 for the Eastview Neighbourhood Community Centre and the Toronto Humane Society. There was also a scavenger hunt and countless letters to Santa, each one answered with a personal response. Christmas lasted longer than usual in 2020 as many holiday lights remained on to keep the festive nature of the neighbourhood going until well into the new year.



Pocket community announcements

GoFundMe for Greg



A GoFundMe account has been set up to help the Pocket's Greg Barsoski, whom many know from Bolo Soup + Bread as well as his dedication to staging an amazing fireworks display in Phin Park every year. He is being treated for acute myeloid leukemia (AML). He has had brain surgery and will need a bone marrow transplant. His gentler form of chemotherapy isn't yet covered by OHIP, and his family has set up the campaign to help with this cost as well as his lost income: <https://www.gofundme.com/f/help-greg-back-to-recover-from-leukemia>

Book Drive

Vicky Tsorlinis is looking for books to help with her goal to raise \$20,000 for the Blake Boulton Youth Outreach Service, a group that works with high-risk youth and their families in the Blake-Boulton community housing neighbourhood. She's seeking donations of good-quality to new books for adults and children for her Book Sales for a Cause. Email vickytsorlinis@rogers.com or find her on Facebook.

Virtual Marketplace

Local Street (localstreet.ca) is a new company that has created an online marketplace to make it easier for locally minded shoppers to find and shop the Pocket's home-based and small businesses. Its mantra is "Buy Local, By Local." Anyone interested in joining this neighbourhood virtual market can email Desiree de Barros at desiree@localstreet.ca.



Upcoming events in the Pocket

Phin Park Cleanup

We won't be able to have an official city cleanup day this year, but we hope people will work on their own yards and come with tools to spruce up Phin Park and the Dog Park beginning at 10 a.m. on both April 24 and 25. We will set up a table by the shed, make garbage bags available and post a list of suggested chores.

Street Sale

The annual Pocket Street Sale will be 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on June 12 with a rain date of June 13. Set up a table on your

lawn and offer up your treasures. Please respect physical distancing and mask rules and sanitize.

Pride Parade

The Pride Parade will be June 27, likely at 3 p.m. We hope to make this year's event bigger and better, and ideas and offers for floats are welcome, but the scope of the event will be determined by city COVID-19 guidelines and the number of volunteers taking part.



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How to live with coyotes and other wild neighbours

By Jennifer Bain

Ever since the pandemic began, the Pocket Facebook group has been awash in coyote sightings. Coyotes have been spotted night and day in yards and green spaces, sometimes carrying small prey or having standoffs with dogs. They’ve been yipping and howling to the delight of some and consternation of others.

Lesley Sampson, the founding executive director of Coyote Watch Canada, says urban communities need to boost their “nature literacy” and figure out “sustainable and thoughtful” ways to co-exist with wildlife.

The key is to never deliberately or inadvertently leave food sources outside. Don’t leave pet food in your yard or provide nuts for squirrels. Do daily cleanups of any seed that spills from bird feeders, and be mindful of how composting and green bins are secured because anything that attracts rodents and raccoons will in turn draw coyotes.

As Toronto Animal Services’ Mary Lou Leihner stresses, animals and birds don’t need our help: “When we give them an artificial food source, that’s not helpful at all. Stop believing we’re able to help them.”

Sampson suggests “rewilding your property” by adding “natural, indigenous flora and plant trees that provide nuts.”

It’s essential to protect dogs and cats by never allowing them outside unsupervised. That was the message in a city news release in January after two small dogs were killed by coyotes in unusual cases where they were taken from yards along ravines.

Coyote Watch Canada is a not-for-profit that advocates for positive human-wildlife experiences through science, education and co-existence. It helped Toronto create an e-learning module called “Coyotes in the Urban Landscape.”

“The best approach is to ‘teach the coyote’ in your neighbourhood how to behave around people and then live with the ‘educated’ coyote,” the e-learning module advises. (Find it at www.toronto.ca by searching “coyotes.”)

It tackles top myths about intelligent and adaptable coyotes – starting with the fact that coywolf is just a nickname for the Eastern coyote and not a separate hybrid species. A century ago, the Algonquin Park wolf population was severely reduced by hunters, and wolves were forced to mate with coyotes. Now coyotes in Ontario and Eastern Canada have traces of wolf and are slightly larger than Western coyotes, who don’t live here.

Urban coyotes aren’t generally a threat to people, but you should never run from one. Instead, calmly make yourself big, loud and threatening and then back away. Call 311 to report any coyote that looks sick or injured but not what might seem like abandoned pups. Coyotes are devoted and protective parents who leave their offspring in “safe zones” and “rendezvous sites” while hunting.

To tell a coyote from a dog or fox, look at the tail. Coyote tails point straight down and point slightly away from their bodies as they walk or run. The city collects reports of coyote sightings (email animalservices@toronto.ca).

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Stay connected in the Pocket! See last page for details.

In the kitchen

By Jesse Frayne

A year ago March, when we entered our first lockdown, we were startled. Nobody knew what was going on, how long it would last, what we could expect. Isolated, people turned to crafts to amuse themselves, or birdwatching, or bicycling, or Netflix binges. Suddenly everyone had a dog. And suddenly, No Frills was sold out of flour and yeast. Everybody was baking. Take a stroll down memory lane with this sunny bran muffin. Make plenty, then grab one from the freezer each morning for a great start to the day.

Orange Pecan Breakfast Muffins

This recipe makes 18 big muffins. Use paper baking cups in your muffin tins.

Preheat oven to 350°F (160°C).

Stir these together in a bowl:

2 cups flour
1 cup bran
½ cup wheat germ
1½ tsp baking soda
1½ tsp baking powder
½ tsp salt
½ tsp cinnamon
1 cup brown sugar
½ cup chopped dried apricots

In a second bowl, combine the following:

½ cup melted butter or sunflower oil
2 eggs
1½ cups plain yogurt
Grated zest of 1 orange
¾ cup chopped pecans

Mix the two bowls of wet and dry ingredients together lightly – just flip around until evenly combined. Use an ice cream scoop or two soup spoons (scoop up batter with one, slide it off with the other) to transfer the batter to the muffin papers in 18 equal-sized mounds. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes, until golden brown and a toothpick inserted in the muffin top comes out clean.

Stay connected in the Pocket



Ask to join the Pocket Facebook group



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thepocket.ca

In the next issue

By Susan and Gordon Fraser



The Ravina Project (theravinaproject.org) is an engineering science research project located at 75 Ravina Crescent. The flag we fly is the Blue Marble, reminding us to “act locally but think globally.” In 2006, we converted our house into a research platform where we investigate and assess the technologies of green living, including solar power, an energy microgrid, electric vehicle, battery backup, rain barrels, insulation, carbon footprint reduction and household heating/cooling efficiency. In the next issue of *The Pocket* newsletter, we will discuss our conclusions about green living and how our data strongly support the Pocket Change initiative.



The Ravina Project

Susan and Gordon Fraser

Household Engineering Science Research

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