

Westmount remembers



Officially, in the sleet



Unofficially, in the snow

For Remembrance Day events, at left, soldiers make their way eastwards on Sherbrooke towards the cenotaph at Argyle Ave. for official city proceedings on November 9. At right, from left, Rabbi Lisa Grushcow, Wilfred de Freitas, Catherine Duff-Caron and Reverend Gwenda Wells at the cenotaph on November 11 itself for an unofficial ceremony. See p. 8, p. 10, p. 24 and p. 25. for coverage.

PHOTOS: RALPH THOMPSON.

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Ruling upholds city's initial election result

Incumbent Aronson wins court finding to represent District 7

BY LAUREEN SWEENEY

Councillor Matt Aronson will once again represent District 7. This follows a Court of Quebec finding that upheld the city's initial declaration of his win despite a legal challenge from his opponent, Gloria Rosado.

The judicial process proceeded "as it should," Aronson had told the *Independent*

November 7 on arriving at city hall from the hearing into the validity of his election results.

The court's judgment certifying the final District 7 results stated that Aronson had received 343 votes compared to 301 for Rosado, thereby confirming Aronson's re-election to a second term.

"I want to acknowledge that the legal pro- *continued on p. 2*



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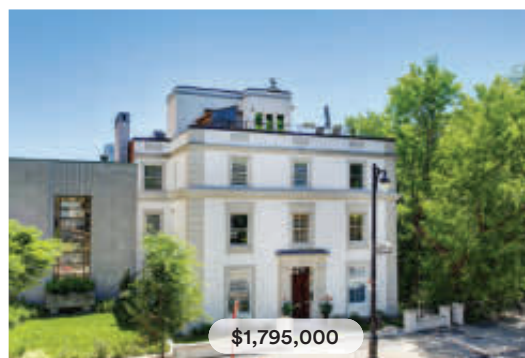
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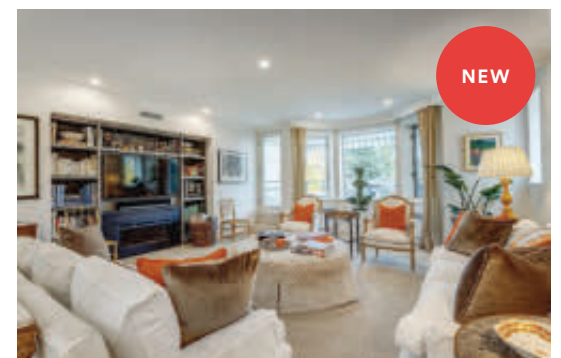
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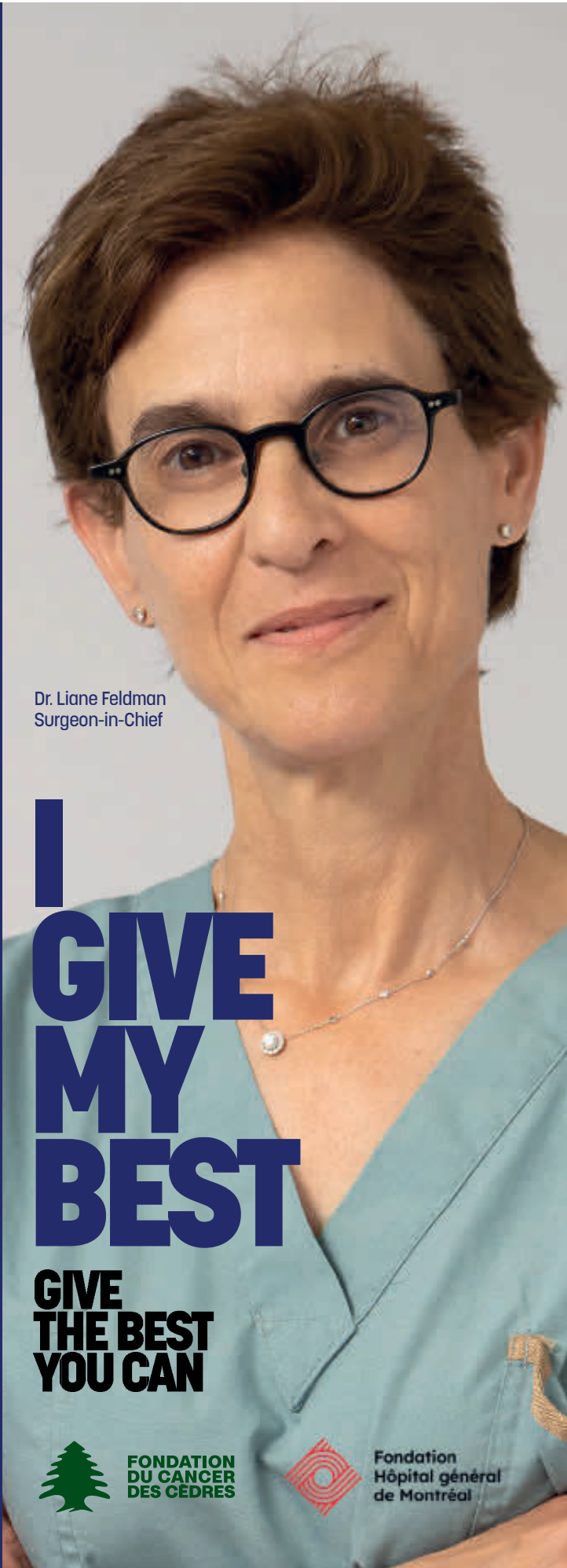
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District 7, cont'd from p.1

cess worked exactly as it should,” Aronson was quoted as saying in a November 10 press release. “When questions arise about election results, we have systems in place to review them thoroughly and transparently. I respect that process, and I’m glad it reached a clear conclusion.”

It is the first time in recent memory, and since demerger in 2006 at least, that a Westmount municipal election had been legally contested in court.

The press release also stated that the “judicial recount was initiated following the November 2 municipal election, which initially showed Aronson with 335 votes to Rosado’s 310. The court reviewed the electoral records and scrutineers’ tallies before certifying the final vote count.”

Aronson acknowledged his opponent’s

campaign efforts: “Gloria Rosado ran a spirited campaign, and I know she cares deeply about Westmount. I wish her well.”

Rosado comments

Rosado told the *Independent* she found it “important to recognize how much our community has grown in engagement compared with those in the last election in 2021.”

That “surge in participation and in support shows that people are ready for renewal, dialogue, and genuine representation,” she said. “Democracy is building the very next day of Elections Day. It’s about trust, and that’s what I’ll keep defending.”

“I wish to extend my appreciation to the municipal staff, to this great newspaper, the WMA [Westmount Municipal Association, which hosted two meet-the-candidates events] and all the ... Facebook groups that allowed me to publish my posts. My commitment to the people of Westmount remains unchanged: I will continue working for environmental protection, social justice, women’s rights and genuine equality in civic participation. To our new mayor, Mr. Stern; the re-elected councillor in District 7, Matt Aronson; to the entire city council – I wish the best.”

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Former Westmount clerk St-Jean becomes new mayor of Beaconsfield

Among the winners in the recent municipal elections in other suburban municipalities was Martin St-Jean as the new mayor of Beaconsfield.

St-Jean had served as Westmount's city clerk/director of legal services for some four years, from 2015 to 2019 (see story

June 11, 2019, p. 1).

He has been described in his Beaconsfield mayoral campaign material as being the only candidate with "a strong background in municipal law, ethics and governance." He had served four years as a Beaconsfield councillor for its District 2.

Tuesday, November 25 Greene merchant group ready to start holiday season

The Quartier Greene Merchants Association is starting the holiday season Tuesday, November 25 at 4 pm with a tree-lighting event in front of the 5 Seasons grocery store that includes "in-store events, carolling, hot cocoa and treats," according to promotional material.

"It's just like Black Friday – but we are earlier: Greene Tuesday!" association general manager Cynthia Lulham told the *Independent* by email. "We will also be hosting and touring a group including newspapers and magazine writers, hotel concierges and influencers – with the goal to familiarize them with our fabulous Quartier Greene and broaden the customer base." – WI.

Correction: Warkentin took fox photos

The fox photos in our November 11 issue (p. 3) were wrongly attributed due to a communication error, for which we apologize. They were in fact taken by Elizabeth Warkentin. – DP.

Canadian insouciance



This man in shorts was spotted on Sherbrooke near Clarke on a snowy November 17 morning.

PHOTO: INDEPENDENT.

Para-snows, a new trend?



This de Maisonneuve near Melville umbrella was one of two used against snow noticed by the *Independent* the morning of November 17.

PHOTO: INDEPENDENT



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Before the swearing-in: 7-year-old Noah Moss, son of new councillor Shawn Moss, centre, meets the mayor. “He was excited!” his father told the *Independent*. Newly elected District 2 councillor Jonathan Chomski is at top left.



Mayor Stern makes it official.

Mayor Stern and new council sworn in

By LAUREEN SWEENEY

At a special city event November 7, Mayor Michael Stern was sworn in as Westmount’s new mayor along with the new council except for incumbent (and now victorious) District 7 Councillor Matt Aronson, who was still awaiting a judicial recount of his election results (see p. 1).

The session was opened by city director general Julie Mandeville, who wished the mayor “every success in your new role,” and stated that the Westmount administration “will be there to assist you.”

Stern provided a brief statement thanking retiring mayor Christina Smith, who has been out of town, and outlining his intentions based mainly on his electoral platform that include customer service and improved infrastructure so that “Westmount should be the envy of all. Thank you all for being here and supporting us.”

The swearing-in was conducted by assistant city clerk Myriam Léger in her role as election clerk.

A lunch reception in the foyer of the council chamber concluded the event.

See more photos on p. 6.



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(Most of) the new council members take their seats

Most of the 2025-2029 council. From left, Antonio D’Amico, Jonathan Chomski, Jeff Shamie, Gurveen Chadha, Michael Stern, Shawn Moss, Paul Levine and Kathleen Kez. Matt Aronson was present but did not take his seat due to his election being contested in court. He did later get confirmation of his victory (see p. 1).

PHOTO: LAUREEN SWEENEY.

Public Security food drive is on!



A total of some \$2,175 was reported to have been collected by Public Security as admission to the Artisans Westmount event at Victoria Hall November 8 and 9 (see p. 9 for coverage) along with six boxes of non-perishable food items. The donations marked the launch of Public Security’s holiday food drive for those in need. Shown here is public safety officer Alexandra Paleologopoulos.

PHOTO: LAUREEN SWEENEY.

New council sworn in (2)



Re-elected District 1 councillor Antonio D’Amico, centre, with his wife Claudia at left, and retiring District 2 councillor Elisabeth Roux, who was invited to the swearing-in as a guest of District 8 councillor Kathleen Kez.

PHOTO: LAUREEN SWEENEY.





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Police Report

Police seek suspect after video cam found at Westmount coffee outlet

BY MARTIN C. BARRY

The Montreal police department's South Regional Investigations Division says it is searching for a suspect in connection with a voyeurism incident that occurred last May at a coffee shop located on

Sherbrooke St. at the corner of Claremont Ave. in Westmount.

Around 1:30 p.m. on May 27, according to the police, the victim and her friends were at the café when they decided to use a restroom and noticed a small object hidden under a sink.

Police Report

Station 12 police report two car thefts and a stolen iPhone

BY MARTIN C. BARRY

Two car thefts and a stolen iPhone were among the criminal incidents reported last week by officers at Station 12.

On the night of November 7 to 8, a 2024 Toyota Land Cruiser SUV was stolen from a parking spot on Côte St. Antoine Rd. near King George (Murray) Park.

According to the incident report, the perpetrator gained access by breaking a window and then driving off.

Lexus stolen

On November 14, the owner of a 2022 Lexus parked near the corner of Roslyn Ave. and de Maisonneuve Blvd. reported it as having been stolen sometime around 6:30 am. The perpetrator made a clean job of it without leaving behind any evidence of forced entry such as broken glass.

The Vancouver-based online vehicle retailer Canada Drives reports on its website that the Lexus is among the top-10 most stolen vehicles in Canada.

The Lexus is "prized by organized crime groups," says Canada Drives, because its upscale design and high global demand make it ideal for export, while its keyless entry system facilitates a quick and quiet theft.

They say the Lexus RX has consistently ranked near the top of stolen vehicles in Ontario and Toronto, from where many end up being shipped out for overseas export through the port of Montreal.

According to the website, Montreal has a "significant" problem with keyless ignition theft, and many of the most stolen cars are newer button-start vehicle models.

Thieves in Montreal have been caught using relay devices to capture signals from key fobs inside owners' homes, according to Canada Drives, allowing suspects to unlock and start vehicles without ever touching the original keys.

iPhone stolen from shopper

Stolen vehicles weren't the only issue the Station 12 police on Stanton were deal-

ing with recently.

During a moment of distraction on November 10 around 7 pm, a customer who was shopping at the Bureau en Gros office supplies store on St. Catherine St. absentmindedly left his iPhone on a countertop.

Within just a few minutes he realized he was missing the phone and returned to retrieve it, but by then it was gone, according to Cst. Mike Yigit, Station 12's community relations officer.

Staff who checked a surveillance camera video recording of the incident confirmed that a suspect grabbed and left with the phone.



The Montreal police have furnished this photo of the Sherbrooke/Claremont coffee shop voyeurism suspect.

Upon inspection, it was determined to be a hidden surveillance camera that was equipped with a removable micro-SD memory card.

Analysis of the card by the police revealed several videos showing people of all ages using the restroom. However, one of the videos also showed the suspect repeatedly installing and moving the camera.

The suspect is described as a dark-skinned man, approximately 30 years old. He has a shaved head or is bald, and has a dark beard.

In the video that recorded his actions, he was wearing a blue cap with a white "LA" logo. He had a tattoo covering his entire left arm and wore a black ring on one of his left-hand fingers.

The Montreal police released four screenshots from the hidden camera footage, which could help identify the suspect. Anyone with information about the suspect is asked to call 9-1-1 or Station 12 on Stanton St.

It is also possible to anonymously contact the police tip line, Info-Crime Montreal, at 514.393.1133 or online. Info-Crime Montreal offers rewards of up to \$3,000 for information leading to the arrest of suspects.

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Left photos, top, from left, Jack Moloughney, Thomas Savoie, Benoit Dion, battery sergeant major Jocelyn Blanchet, Fred Lanoie, Chad Ilias and Henri Oishi of the Westmount Battery at the Westmount Athletic Grounds firing the city cannon heard November 9 at the city's Remembrance Day ceremony at the cenotaph. Right, the city's silent other cannon at the cenotaph at the same time.

LEFT PHOTOS COURTESY OF DOMINIC VARVARO; RIGHT: RALPH THOMPSON.



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Artisans Westmount opens shopping season

Hand-crafted items range from decorations to tableware

By LAUREEN SWEENEY

The traditional holiday shopping season was opened at the Artisans Westmount handicrafts show at Victoria Hall November 8 and 9, where a total of 1,375 shoppers were reported to have attended over the two days, viewing a wide range of hand-crafted items. These included decorations, mitts, handbags, ceramics, jewellery such as golden filigree earrings, and tableware such as wooden bowls and serving dishes.

“We received so many great comments from both the artisans and community about what a wonderful event it was,” said assistant Westmount Public Library director Donna Lach. “A total of 800 shoppers attended on Saturday and 575 on Sunday.”

Adele Libman, one of the shoppers, told the *Independent* she found that “so much imagination” had put into the exhibitors’ work.

At one exhibit, handmade teddy bears were described by the creator as taking three or four days each to sew by hand.

Despite freezing rain on the Sunday, which slowed attendance, a number of attendees said they had returned for the second day.

The event also launched Public Security’s holiday food drive, for which non-perishable food or \$2 collected was collected as the price of admission for a total of \$2,175 (see p. 6).

In the foyer of the concert hall, the Mou-



Anne-Marie Lacombe, left, co-director of the Westmount Public Library and Community Events office, was among the many admiring the Scandinavian Christmas items at the main entrance on the opening day of Artisans Westmount November 8 and 9.

ton Noir café, based in the Westmount recreation centre, provided a sale of doughnuts and other items that could be eaten on the spot.



Claudine Auger with her collection of handmade Kama teddy bears from her workshop in St. Anne des Lacs.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THANK YOU FOR
NOVEMBER 11 HELP

We would like to express our appreciation and thanks to all those who came to the Westmount cenotaph on November 11 to honour those who have served their country, including those who continue to serve today, and to remember those who gave their lives in that service.

A particular thank-you to Rabbi Lisa Grushcow of Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom and the Reverend Gwenda Wells, chaplain at the McGill University Health Centre and honorary assistant of St. Matthias Church, who offered prayers of remembrance; to past and present members of our armed forces who attended and provided the ceremony with a quiet formality and dignity, including the officer of HMCS Donnacona who laid a wreath from his division; to the attendee who played a most poignant “Last Post” on his fife; to the two men who arrived early before the start of the ceremony and cleared snow from a part of the cenotaph and the wreaths laid there; and to Catherine Skinner of the Office of the Director General of the city of Westmount, who arranged to have the flags at the cenotaph lowered to half-mast.

WILFRID DE FREITAS, KITCHENER AVE.
CATHERINE DUFF-CARON,
DE MAISONNEUVE BLVD.

WEEKLY GARBAGE COLLECTION,
AN ADULT CHOICE

When I read Mayor Stern’s post-election statement in the *Independent* (November

4, p. 11) and saw that he is restoring garbage collection to weekly service, I smiled. An adult with common sense and business experience is in charge.

All the best to Mayor Stern.
ALEX SIMONELIS, SHERBROOKE ST.

FOR SUNNY

And so little Red Fox, when you are safely back in the woods, spread the News with your raspy barks that there are people in that Great Outer World with loving compassion and a Spirit for Doing.

PEARL GAMEROFF, MOUNT PLEASANT AVE.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ELIZABETH WARKENTIN.

This photo was taken on October 21 on The Boulevard. On November 1, a fox – dubbed “Sunny” – was captured for mange treatment and re-location (see November 11, p. 1). The *Independent* does not advise anyone to approach wildlife, especially animals that can bite and/or have rabies.

FOR THE SAKE OF MANY
CONSTITUENCIES, PLEASE RESTORE
WEEKLY GARBAGE PICK-UP

A recent letter (November 11, p. 6) opposes our newly elected mayor Mr. Michael Stern’s pledge to restore weekly garbage pick-up, suggesting that households with babies who must “hold onto dirty diapers for two weeks” are a “small percentage of our overall population.”

Consider that keeping dirty diapers and sanitary products is not only a problem for those with young children. Our population also includes many elderly people, some of whom are ailing, disabled or incontinent, as well as young and middle-aged women who menstruate. Take note of the vast amount of pharmacy shelf space devoted to sanitary products for the elderly and women, not just diapers for babies, and you get a better idea of the number of households that are greatly inconvenienced and distressed by the requirement to keep soiled products in our homes for two weeks.

If the solution is to have well-designed drop-off bins for people to use “whenever they need,” who is going to want the Westmount Diaper Bin in their neighbourhood? Are caretakers busy with babies, the sick or the elderly supposed to have extra time to drive or walk to these smelly bins?

Alternatively, since most recycled items

are relatively clean packaging, maybe we could save by collecting recyclables every two weeks and use public bins (for residents who have cars) to drop off their non-smelly recyclables as was formerly done at the Glen yard.

The city should have consulted with residents before imposing the new policy. Mayor Stern’s pledge to bring back weekly garbage collection was probably a major factor in his election.

LAUREL BOSSEN, YORK ST.

Editor’s note: For information purposes only: the large recycling bins that were open to the public at the Public Works yard at the foot of Bethune were discontinued due to space constraints after work on the 720/136 highway resulted in a small (but impactful) expropriation of land from the city of Westmount. – DP.

CAN WESTMOUNT SQUARE
PLEASE ADD A RAMP WHILE
THEY ARE AT IT?

I have been following with interest the major renovations that are being undertaken at the Greene Ave. entrance to Westmount Square. Hopefully, this will include an access ramp for people with mobility issues – a feature that is sadly lacking in the existing entrances to the building.

NEIL WILSON, OLIVIER AVE.

Scouts mark Remembrance Day



Cubs, Scouts and Venturers from Westmount groups attended the city’s Remembrance Day event at the cenotaph November 9, assisting with wreath-laying, handing out programs and distributing poppies, according to a November 12 press release. “Their presence added a meaningful youth element to the city’s commemoration, symbolizing the link between generations and the enduring value of remembrance,” Scout leader Douglas Leahey is quoted as saying. “This ceremony is a powerful reminder of the sacrifices made. We want our youth to understand that the peace we enjoy today came at a great cost – and that remembering those sacrifices is part of our duty as citizens.” – WL.

PHOTO COURTESY OF D. LEAHEY.

WESTMOUNT INDEPENDENT

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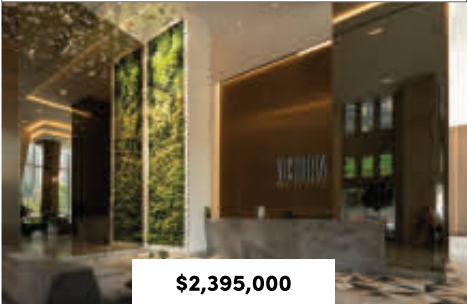
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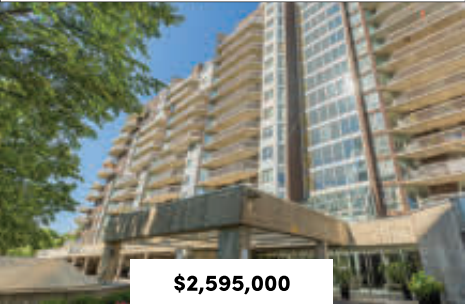


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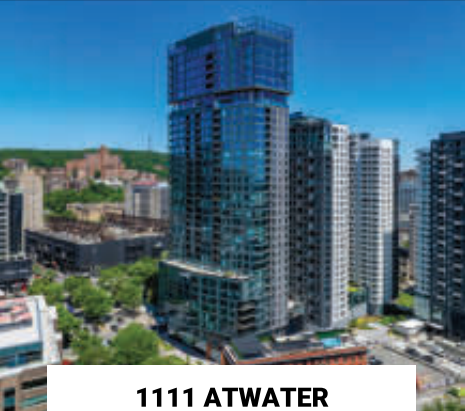


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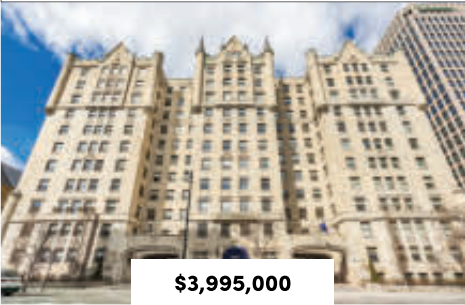
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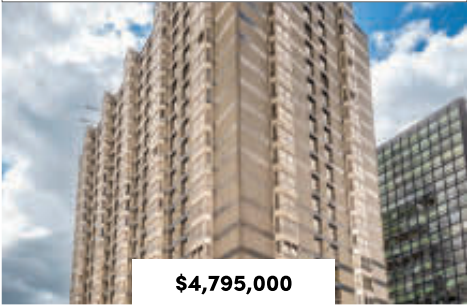


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Holiday Gift Guide 2025

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Gas fireplace safety tips

Few images capture the spirit of a season as well as a family gathered around a fireplace embodies winter. Winter is indeed a time when families spend more time together indoors, and there's no better gathering spot than around a warm fireplace.

Heartwarming scenes around a fireplace are even more enjoyable when safety has been prioritized. While natural fireplaces with roaring flames are notable safety risks, it's important that individuals with gas fireplaces embrace fire safety as well. The following are some gas fireplace safety strategies everyone can embrace.

- Avoid the DIY installation route. Even the most skilled do-it-yourselfers are urged to let the professionals install a new gas fireplace. Gas lines are nothing to mess around with, and professional installation teams have ample experience setting up new gas fireplaces in a home.
- Be sure to install a carbon monoxide/gas detector on the same floor as the fireplace. During the gas fireplace installation, ask that a carbon monoxide detector with battery back-up is installed on the same floor. The detector alarm will alert individuals if something is amiss, like a gas leak. Periodically inspect the detector to ensure it's working properly.
- Periodically inspect your safety screen. Glass panels are standard features on many gas fireplaces. Such panels separate the fire within the fireplace from the people and items outside of it. Glass panels can become extremely hot, which is why most gas fireplaces come with safety screens as well. These mesh safety screens can keep curious kids and pets from touching hot glass panels, and also protect adults. Inspect the safety screens periodically to ensure they're still intact and up to the job, replacing them if necessary.
- Keep objects a safe distance away from the fireplace. Experts advise keeping objects a minimum of three feet away from the fireplace at all times. Fabrics and other materials that contact the glass pose a fire hazard, so keep the area in front of the fireplace clear.
- Make the fireplace off limits to children and pets. Though the aforementioned safety screens are a vital safety feature that can keep kids and pets safe, it's still best that kids and pets are kept away from the fireplace at all times. Turn off the fireplace if kids are playing in the

room, and use safety gates to keep kids and pets away when the fireplace is in use.

- Book annual fireplace inspections. Annual inspections of the fireplace can ensure everything is working properly. Professional inspections may detect potentially harmful gas leaks, and annual check-ups also can help individuals extend the life of their fireplaces.
- Recognize outdoor gas fireplaces have their own safety protocols. Outdoor fireplaces have become wildly popular in recent years. Homeowners with outdoor gas fireplaces must recognize these awe-inspiring features require their own unique safety measures, including turning off the gas supply at the end of the season and protecting the fireplace from the elements when necessary.

Gas fireplace safety strategies can protect residents and also increase the life expectancy of these sought-after features. – MCG

Did you know?

Advent calendars are a common sight in many households each December, and some historians believe this unique tradition can be traced to a creative nineteenth-century German housewife.

Though Britannica notes the precise origins of Advent calendars are still debated, one theory behind the popular tradition suggests a woman in Munich created the Advent calendar as a way for her young and impatient yet excited son to count down the days to December 25.

Though details are fuzzy and difficult if not impossible to confirm, this legends suggests the crafty German mother filled 24 different small boxes with a baked treat, allowing her son to open one each day during Advent, the nearly monthlong period of preparation for Christmas that begins on the fourth Sunday before the holiday and ends by Christmas Eve.

While this origin story connects Advent calendars with Christianity, and many Christians still make it part of their Christmas celebrations, many modern people with no such affiliation also incorporate the calendars into their holiday season routines. – MCG

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Kid-friendly holiday traditions

Tradition is a big part of the holiday season. Families lean into tradition each December, and perhaps no people participate in holiday customs with more enthusiasm than children. Whether it's decorating the family Christmas tree or baking cookies for Santa on Christmas Eve, children look forward to various holiday season traditions once the calendar turns from November to December.

Parents of young children can make this unique time of year even more special by engaging in various kid-

friendly traditions that are sure to produce lots of fun and even more lasting memories.

- **Advent calendars:** The precise origins of Advent calendars are unknown, but historians believe the tradition was started by German Lutherans in the nineteenth century (see p. 13). More than a century later, roughly 50 million Advent calendars are sold across the globe each year, according to Marketplace.org. Advent is a nearly monthlong period of preparation for the celebration of the birth of Jesus

Christ on December 25. Each day during Advent, children open a flap, window or door and find a small gift, poem, candy or another item that adds to the excitement of the season.

- **Matching pajamas:** Though the tradition of wearing matching holiday pajamas may not have the same lengthy history as Advent calendars, it's nonetheless a very fun custom for families. Parents can decide how frequently their families dress up in matching pajamas at bedtime during the holiday season, but doing so on Christmas Eve is a popular way to make a fun day even more special. Another idea is to host weekly holiday movie nights during the season, which presents a perfect opportunity to don matching PJs.
- **Holiday lights tour:** Holiday lighting displays have come a long way in recent decades. Whereas it might once have been popular to string a few strands of lights around the exterior of a house, many holiday celebrants now beckon their inner Clark Griswold and turn their properties into areas with enough illumination to land a small plane. Holiday inflatables for the yard add to the awe of such displays. Kids tend to be especially fond of these types of displays, so parents can make



a point to pick a night each holiday season to go on a tour of their neighborhoods and towns to see this year's offerings.

- **Christmas dance party:** Sweets are another staple of the holiday season, and what better way for kids to burn off some of that extra sugar than to dance it away to a holiday music playlist curated by Mom and Dad? Cue up some holiday classics but let kids dance to a few of their own favourites as well.
- Holiday traditions help to make the season a special time of year. Families can embrace various kid-friendly traditions to ensure children have even more fun this December. – MCG

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Notable Hanukah traditions

Each year on the twenty-fifth day of Kislev, which typically falls during the month of December, adherents of the Jewish faith celebrate the festival of Hanukah. Although Hanukah may not bear the same religious significance as other Jewish holidays, it is a well-known celebration.

Hanukah commemorates the rededication of the temple in Jerusalem by the Maccabees in 165 BC after its desecration. Although there was not enough oil left to light the temple for even one night, lamps remained illuminated for eight straight days and nights. Thus Hanukah is known as the Festival of Lights, which incorporates many unique traditions.

Lighting the menorah

Perhaps the most visible and important Hanukah tradition involves the menorah. While traditional Jewish menorahs have seven branches, the Hanukah menorah, known as the hanukkiah, actually has nine branches. There are eight candles and a ninth, which is called the shamash, is used to light the other eight. The menorah is lit each night after sundown.

Giving of gelt

Hanukah *gelt* is money given as presents during the festival. It is typically offered to children and sometimes to teachers. Other gifts have now largely replaced the coins once offered, and *gelt* is sometimes chocolate.

Playing dreidel

Authorities outlawed Jewish studies at one point, so the Jews spun dreidels to pretend they were only playing games. Really they were engaged with their scripture. The tradition of spinning the dreidel endures as a Hanukah tradition.

Foods fried in oil

The miracle of the burning oil extends to the foods enjoyed during Hanukah. Many of the holiday foods are prepared in oil, including latkes (fried potatoes) and sufganiyot, which are fried, jelly-filled doughnuts. According to *Town & Country* magazine, millions of jelly doughnuts are consumed in Israel throughout Hanukah.

Serving brisket

An authentic Hanukah celebration often includes traditional dishes served in the spirit of celebration and gratitude. Brisket is frequently prepared for



Hanukah dinners. Brisket was adopted because it was affordable and delicious. Jewish brisket is braised, and served with carrots, potatoes and other vegetables. Brisket may be served alongside another Hanukah dish, kugel, which is a casserole made from eggs and noodles.

Making cookies

Although Christmas cookies may be ubiquitous this time of year, cookies often are part of Hanukah traditions

as well. Some cookies are cut to look like dreidels or stars. Those who want to incorporate the miracle of oil into their baking can seek recipes that use oil in place of butter in the cookie batters, something that can make them dairy-free and also vegan.

Hanukah begins on December 14, 2025, and will last through December 22, 2025. It's a festive time to embrace many time-honoured traditions. – MCG

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A brief history of Christmas trees

Towering evergreen trees adorned in lights and other trinkets are a focal point of the holiday season. Christmas trees are placed in prominent locations in homes, typically in front of a large picture window or in the corners of large entryways.

These awe-inspiring trees beckon people to inspect all of the ornaments and often are the first thing people envision when thinking of holiday décor. The tradition of the Christmas tree is believed to have begun in Germany in the sixteenth century.

However, the National Christmas Tree Association says there may be earlier references to Christmas trees in other parts of the world as well. The first written record of a decorated Christmas tree comes from Riga, Latvia, in 1510. Men of a local merchants' guild decorated the tree with roses and then set fire to it. The rose was considered a symbol of the Virgin Mary.

In the sixteenth century in Alsace, France, trees were sold in the marketplace and brought home and set up undecorated. Laws limited the size to "eight shoe lengths" or slightly more than four feet. Early German Christmas trees were adorned with apples, a

holdover from earlier traditions when evergreen boughs hung with apples were used as props in miracle plays. These plays took place in churches on December 24, which was Adam & Eve's Day in the early Christian calendar. Evergreens have long been symbolic of life during the cold months of winter, calling to mind the promise of spring to come.

Various cultures, including early Christians, featured trees during winter solstice celebrations. Some historians believe Martin Luther, a Protestant reformer who might have been inspired by stars in the night, was responsible for adding lighted candles to the Christmas tree.

The Christmas tree was introduced to the North America by German settlers in the 1800s. Soon after those settlers' arrival, trees began to be sold commercially.

President Franklin Pierce is credited with having the first Christmas tree at the White House. Today, Christmas trees are wildly popular, with the American Christmas Tree Association reporting that 94 percent of U.S. consumers plan to display one. – MCG



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Tips to make a home more accommodating for holiday guests

Millions of people host family and friends during the holiday season. According to a recent report from the travel and finance experts at Upgraded Points, 57 percent of adults surveyed planned to host a holiday gathering in 2024, while 70 percent of respondents indicated they planned to attend such celebrations.

Hosting is a significant responsibility, but it's also a fun way to catch up with loved ones in a laid-back environment. Chances to catch up are even stronger when hosting overnight guests, whose comfort should be a priority as hosts ready their homes for holiday celebrations. Hosts preparing to welcome loved ones into their homes this holiday season can take various steps to make their homes as accommodating as possible for overnight guests.

- Offer a secluded spot to sleep. The holiday season can be hectic, and it can be hard to keep things calm and quiet when returning home. That's especially true in homes with young children. Overnight guests who might be a little weary from travelling will undoubtedly appreciate a place away from the hustle and bustle to rest their



heads. Though hosts must make do with the space they have, make a concerted effort to ensure residents remain quiet around guest rooms or other areas where overnight guests will be sleeping. If possible, choose a secluded spot away from areas of the home that tend to be noisy, such as the kitchen and living room/game room.

- Offer some in-room entertainment. Access to the internet and streaming services is nonstop in the modern

world, and it can be a nice gesture to ensure overnight guests can stream their favourite content and stay connected during their stay. Hosts can outfit guest rooms with a smart TV for as little as \$100 and load it up with popular streaming apps so guests can watch an episode or two of their favourite show in private before calling it a night.

- Offer kid-friendly creature comforts. Adults may be accustomed to sleeping

outside their own homes, but younger guests might not be as familiar or comfortable sleeping somewhere other than their own bedrooms. If young children will be staying overnight, hosts can consider putting them up in the same bedrooms as their own children, which can be especially fun when kids are roughly the same age. Additional kid-friendly creature comforts include a stuffed animal or two, an in-room night light and some storybooks on a bedside nightstand.

- Include guests in fun traditions. Tradition is a big part of the appeal of the holiday season, and hosts can make guests feel more welcome by inviting them to participate in their own family traditions. Expand family baking sessions to include overnight guests, encourage willing loved ones to pitch in when preparing family meals and let guests pick their favourite holiday film for a family movie night.

Millions of people will host overnight guests this holiday season. Hosts can employ various strategies to ensure overnight guests feel welcome and comfortable during their stay. – MCG

Pet-friendly holiday decorating

Decorating is one of the great joys of the holiday season. Stores adorn their front-facing windows with amazing displays and homeowners often deck out residences from top to bottom with all measures of holiday wonderment.

Many households will be decorating for the holidays and must figure out ways to keep homes safe for all residents – including those covered in fur.

Consider these tips:

- Choose shatterproof decorations. Select shatterproof ornaments and other decorative items that are durable and non-toxic. Items made from felt, fabric or wood tend to be safer than items that can break.
- Pick pet-friendly plants. Poinsettias and mistletoe may be traditional, but they can be toxic to pets. Additional options like Christmas cactus can be safer. Artificial plants are another alternative to consider.
- Opt out of open flames. It is best to avoid traditional candles when pets are around. Instead, there are plenty of those powered by LED lights that even mimic the flicker of real candles.
- Avoid tinsel and ribbons. Digestive issues or blockages can affect pets who ingest tinsel or ribbons. Select pet-safe

ribbons or garlands, and skip the tinsel entirely.

- Avoid edible décor. Candy canes on trees or popcorn garlands are festive, but they may prove too tempting for pets to resist. Animals can get sick and may knock over the Christmas tree or other items to access the food.
- Secure decorative items. Position the Christmas tree in an area that is not easily accessible. Avoid putting it near furniture that can be used as a jumping-off point. Make sure the tree stand is sturdy enough to prevent tipping, and consider using wire or string to tie the tree to a ceiling or wall anchor for further stability.
- Mind the scents. Some fragrances can be overwhelming or irritating for pets, so use scented diffusers or plug-ins sparingly. A simmering pot of cloves, cinnamon sticks and orange rinds can create a welcoming, all-natural aroma.
- Create a sanctuary. Try not to move too many of the pet's creature comforts, such as favourite toys or bedding. If you must move these items out of the way, gradually introduce the pet to his or her new area, which can be set away from the hustle of the main entertaining area. – MCG

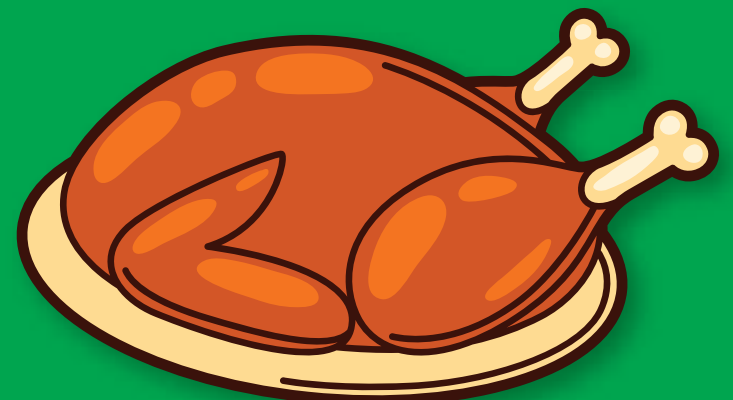
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Unique holiday traditions across the globe

The holiday season is a special time of year. Regardless of which holiday people celebrate in December, billions of people across the globe embrace chances to be a little more festive and spend additional time with family and friends over the final month of the year.

Tradition contributes to the special feeling felt in many communities each December. Holiday celebrants who can't get enough seasonal magic can take note of some of the many unique traditions across the globe that help make the month of December such a special time of year.

The Yule Lads, Iceland

In a tradition that might call to mind the seven dwarves who welcomed Snow White into their home in the classic fairy tale, the Yule Lads of Iceland are said to leave a small gift for children who leave a shoe on their windowsills before going to bed beginning on the night of December 11. The tradition continues through Christmas Day, with each night featuring a visit from a different Yule Lad.

Hiding brooms, Norway

Norwegian folklore suggest- ed evil spirits and witches awoke on Christmas Eve, and this unique tradition is rooted in efforts to keep those unwelcome holiday guests grounded and avoid lost brooms. On the night of *Julaften* (Christmas Eve), Norwegians hide their brooms in closets inside their homes to keep them from being stolen by ill-intentioned witches.

Night of the Radishes, Oaxaca, Mexico

Held annually on December 23, the Night of the Radishes is a local celebration in Oaxaca, Mexico. This unique event celebrates oversized radishes, which certainly merits the celebration's inclusion on any list of unusual holiday season celebrations. The event involves the carving of large radishes into figures, a tradition that began as a way to attract more customers to Oaxaca's Christmas market. A formal radish-carving competition was instituted in the late nineteenth century,



and the Night of the Radishes continues to draw visitors today.

Krampus Parades, Austria (various sites)

The holiday season might be a heartwarming time of year in many locales, but the various Krampus parades throughout Austria turn that notion on its head. Krampus is a horned anthropomorphic figure in central and eastern Alpine folklore. Krampus is something akin to Santa Claus's alter ego who's said to punish bad children rather than reward good ones with gifts. Legend says Krampus and his band of less-than- jovial elves roamed an area of the Alps and delighted in causing mayhem. Austrian Krampus parades take place at night and feature revelers dressed in scary costumes, making this a unique if not exactly lighthearted holiday season tradition.

Tradition figures prominently during the holiday season, and some customs stand out for their uniqueness. – MCG

At the Temple

Justice LaForme draws parallels between Canadian indigeneity, Zionism

By JENNIFER BALL

Justice Harry LaForme – the first native appellate court judge in Canada and the first chair of the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission – explained what he means by standing in solidarity across histories and homelands during a conversation on identity, indigeneity and belonging at Temple Emanu-El-Beth-Sholom.

On November 12, the Temple, which is found at 4100 Sherbrooke, held an evening of discussion that was moderated by Éloge Butera, a Rwandan-born human rights advocate; LaForme and former federal justice minister and former attorney general Irwin Cotler.

LaForme told the packed Temple that he is Anishinaabe, which literally translates as “the good people.” Moreover, he is an Anishinaabe Zionist.

Similar histories

“I have come to appreciate that the story of the Jewish people has many weavings similarities to indigenous people in Canada...

“For those of us that have some understanding of the impacts of history and some intellectual and historical perspective, it is clearly evident that the Jews are the indigenous people of Israel, for thousands of years.”

According to LaForme, the indigenous people of Israel have achieved what the native people in Canada aspire to and continue to work towards: land, territory and the right to govern that territory.

LaForme is a proponent for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). He said, “I think Israel, the indigenous people of Israel, should look at and consider adopting UNDRIP and maybe making it part of the domestic law as Canada did.”

Adopted by the UN General Assembly



Former federal justice minister and attorney general Irwin Cotler, left, at Temple Emanu-El-Beth-Sholom on November 12. Right, Justice Harry LaForme at the same event.



on September 13, 2007, UNDRIP is a comprehensive framework that aims to set minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of indigenous peoples. It recognizes their rights in areas such as self-determination, cultural identity, land and resources: free, prior, and informed consent, equality and non-discrimination.

Past views, current views

Within the context of self-determinism and non-discrimination, LaForme used three chilling, familiar words that encapsulate the suffering of both communities (emphasis by *Independent*); “In 1910, the deputy superintendent general, department of Indian Affairs, Duncan Campbell Scott – responding to the appalling death rate of ‘Indian’ children in ‘Indian’ resi-

dential schools and calls for change – stated, ‘this alone does not justify a change

in the policy of this department which is geared towards the *final solution* of our Indian problem.”

When it was his turn to speak, Cotler said, “I want to commend you, Harry, on your comprehensive understanding and analysis of both the indigeneity of Canada’s indigenous people here on Turtle Island” – a name used by many native peoples to refer to North America – “and the indigeneity of the Jewish people in their indigenous homeland: Israel...”

“It is remarkable: the parallels of the indigenous values and the Jewish Zionist values...and the deep spiritual attachment to the land that characterizes both of our indigenous peoples.”

Rabbi Lisa Grushcow closed the evening by saying, “I want to suggest [that what] you take from tonight is a renewed energy and a renewed conviction that we can’t let ‘Zionist’ be a dirty word...”

“We can’t let the language of indigeneity and colonization and genocide be used against us. We have to be able to hold on in the midst of all the complexity – which is very real – to the clarity that we’ve been given tonight.”

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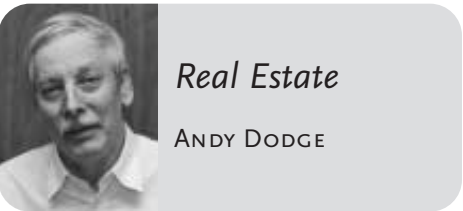
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October sales: ‘Typical’ Westmount house worth close to \$2.9M



Real Estate
ANDY DODGE

Note: The following article relates to offers to purchase Westmount residential dwellings that were reported by local real estate agents as having been accepted in October 2025. Because they are not final registered sales, the addresses cannot be made public, but give a good idea of current trends in local real estate activity. The graph at right offers a picture of these trends over time.

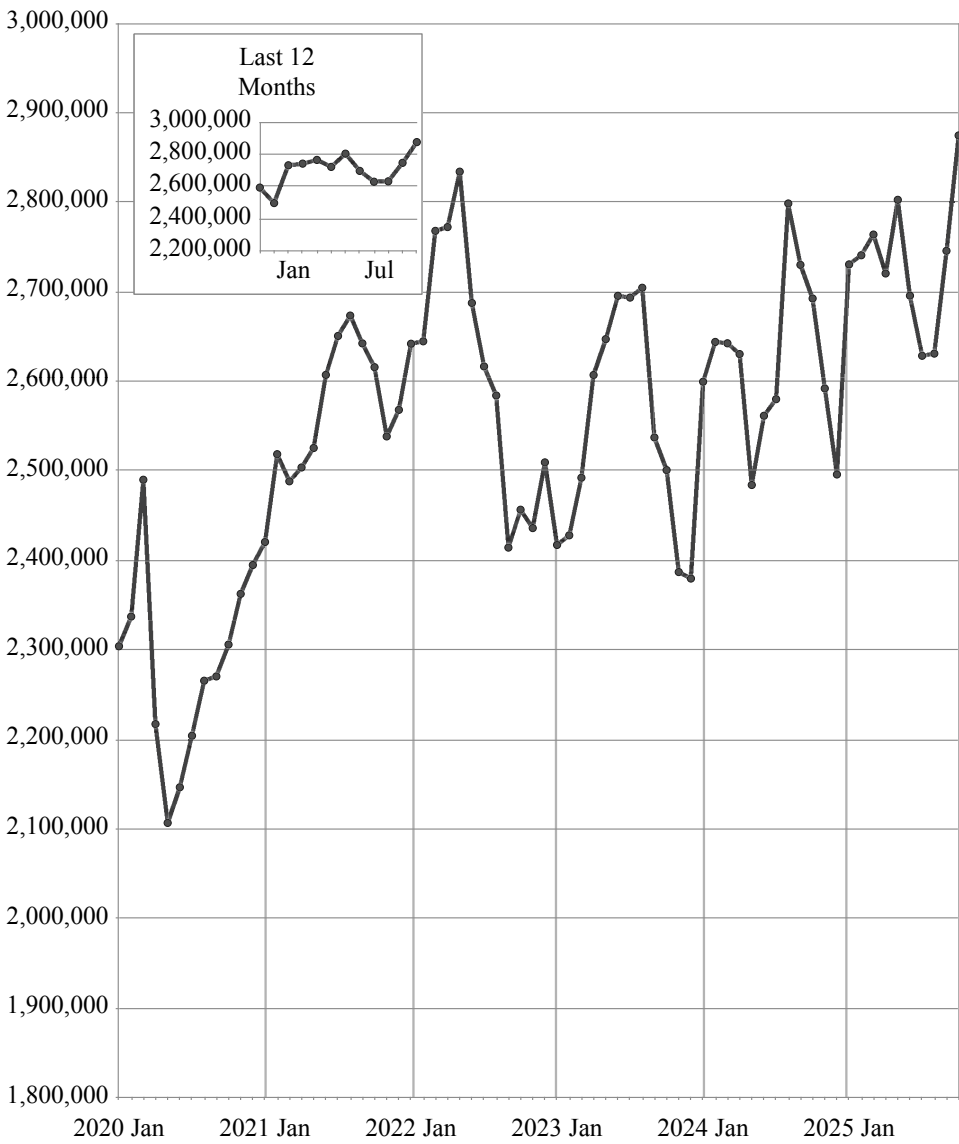
October was tagged with the highest price for a Westmount house (so far this year), as an upper-level mansion brought its owner \$9,000,000, in a month that proved our contention last month that confidence was returning to the local market. In fact, tardy agents added another seven sales to the September list, bringing that month’s tally to 21, tied with 2020’s record high for that month (at least since 1986). September brought an average price of \$2,714,624 and a top price of \$6,800,000, one of three houses selling in September

for more than \$4 million. Then in October, the average price of 11 sales rose to \$3,233,273, led by the \$9-million sale and with another four between \$3 million and \$4 million. The August list of 13 sales brought a price:valuation ratio of -0.1 percent, which moved to +9.7 percent in September and +15.9 percent in October. In August, there were eight sales at less than their city tax value; in September, of 21 sales, six were less than their valuation, and in October, of 11 sales, only three went for less. Even after removing the highest and lowest prices and price:valuation ratios, the “typical” Westmount house is now closing in on a value of \$2,900,000.

Condos, adj. quiet

Perhaps because there is so much interest in Westmount houses these days, the local condominium market included only two sales in October, both at Château Westmount Square, 4175 St. Catherine St. Activity was down for adjacent-Westmount properties as well, with two houses on Circle Rd. and a duplex on Northcliffe Ave. as the only transactions of complete properties. No houses east of Westmount or in the Square Mile were reported by agents in October. Moving into the holiday season, the number of listings still available in Westmount has dropped from 144 in mid-October to 124 in mid-November, though last year at the same time there were only 117 houses available. One more Westmount house was rented in October, bringing this year’s total to 35, compared to 42 at the same time last year. Available house rentals are asking in a range from \$4,500 to \$13,000 per month, but two contracts this year included rates of \$25,000 per month, and one more rented in April for \$3,500.

Average adjusted price for ‘typical’ Westmount house, by month, January 2020 to October 2025, based on accepted offer dates



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A precious grey-and-black tabby, Miss Chanelle is exquisite and sweet. Most affectionate, she is presently at the Montreal SPCA cattery. She is patiently waiting for your visit, and the adoption counsellors would be pleased to meet with you.

Lovely Chanelle is two years old, up to date with her inoculations, spayed and microchipped. To find out more about her, you can refer to the Montreal SPCA website at www.sPCA.com, then scroll to her information page from her identification number, 2000248274, for more information and photographs. You can then plan your trip to drop by the shelter, as they are conveniently open every day, Monday to Friday with hours from 3 pm to 8 pm, and Saturday and Sunday with hours from 11 am to 6 pm.

The shelter is located at



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Westmount A-dog-tions

LYSANNE FOWLER

A tiny teacup Chihuahua inspiring nurturance and joy, Chico is affectionate and friendly with everyone.

He is presently in a foster family for Gerdy's Rescues & Adoption, charming everyone he meets.

He is a very active and healthy nine-year-old, weighing in at a mighty four pounds. He is neutered, his inoculations will be renewed and he will be microchipped.

You can find out more about Chico at the Gerdy's Rescues & Adoption website www.gerdysrescue.org, then going to his information page where you will find the link to the gerdysrescue.org/adoption-form/. You will then be able to fill in your contact information and explain your interest in order for the volunteers to get back to you and discuss adoption.

Chico is a happy little fellow, enjoying adult companionship and being playful with cat and dog friends. As he is quite

small, he is best with children over 14 years of age. He enjoys his little walks and car rides, while also being pee-pad trained if it is better for him to be indoors in inclement weather. He is quite calm and enjoys resting in his crate. He can be left on his own a bit and is not a barker.

Please do not hesitate to fill out the application form for Chico or contact the rescue by email at info@gerdysrescue.org for more details and sweet photographs.

Your neighbour,
Lysanne



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Garneau’s ‘State of Being’ short story published in *I’m Here*

By JENNIFER BALL

Westmounter Simone Garneau – who was longlisted for the 2023 CBC Short Story Prize (see April 11, 2023, p. 20) for her entry “State of Being” – has now had that work published in the anthology *I’m Here*, which is edited by Beverley Brenna and was published by Red Deer Press in November.

On November 11, she provided a statement in which she said “State of Being” is “divided into six segments, each relating to the phase changes of water: deposition, melting, evaporation, condensation, freezing and sublimation...”

“I used this structure and the relationship between the main character and their father to explore the theme of identity. No matter what physical state the water is in, it’s still water.

One’s essence matters

“And that’s what I meant when I was asked to describe the story in five words [for the *Independent’s* 2023 article] and I chose: ‘One’s essence is what matters.’ At the end of the story, the main character, though they grapple with issues of identity, is still at their core the same person inside.”



Simone Garneau in Westmount Park near Lansdowne Ave. on November 12.

The anthology *I’m Here* is described by marketeers as young adult stories of identity, but Garneau said that writing for a young adult audience was not intentional

when she first faced a blank page.

“It’s a story that can be enjoyed by adult readers as well because we’ve all been young people once, and we know how difficult it can be for teenagers trying to figure out who they are, and who they want to be, as they move into adulthood.”

Write what you don’t know

How did Garneau put herself in the mindset and find the voice of teens today? “As a writer, I don’t just want to write about what I know. I write to try and better understand what I don’t know...”

“I try to put myself in new situations on the page and explore where it takes me. By putting myself in the shoes of others and thinking of how these situations make them feel, I also learn something about myself.”

Exploring space, writing

Garneau studied geological engineering at Queen’s University, then did a master’s in space studies at the International Space University before working at the Canadian Space Agency in space exploration.

Having left space exploration behind, she is currently working on a novel. She said that each one of her endeavours that

resides between book covers has meant a lot to her.

“Being a writer is [pretty solitary], and you spend ages writing and editing your work. When it finally goes out into the world, it’s very rewarding.”

Previous coverage of Simone Garneau:

“Launched into new film career – Simone Garneau explores weaponization of space,” December 19, 2007, p. 19,
“Sunmetrix named co-winner in US solar energy competition,” February 24, 2015, p. 18.

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A smaller crowd than usual attended the ceremony, possibly because of the chilly conditions and sleet fall.

City marks Remembrance Day for 99th time

BY RALPH THOMPSON

On a bleak, blustery, cold November 9 at 2 pm, Westmount held its official 99th Remembrance Day ceremony accompanied by the Royal Montreal Regiment (RMR) and the 34th Signal Regiment. The grey skies and occasional sleet added a sombre atmosphere to the event.

Most of the newly minted municipal council, including Mayor Michael Stern and council members Antonio D’Amico, Jonathan Chomski, Jeff Shamie, Gurveen Chadha, Shawn Moss, Paul Levine and Kathleen Kez, were escorted to the cenotaph in Vimy Park by Greg McBain, director of Public Safety. (A minor car accident prevented the attendance of Councillor Matt Aronson. He made it to the unofficial ceremony on November 11. See p. 25.)

Dignitaries also included Anna Gainey, MP for NDG-Westmount; Jennifer Maccarone, provincial legislator for Westmount-St. Louis; Senator Tony Loffreda and Eliaz Luf, the new consul general of Israel.

Padre Captain Rici Be, Diocese Montréal, welcomed everyone and presided over the event. He opened with a recogni-

tion of the native peoples including the Kanien ‘kehá:ka, whose “unceded” land is the site of the gathering. As the Canadian flag was raised to half mast, everyone sang the national anthem, followed by the Lord’s Prayer read by the Reverend Patrick Wheeler, followed by a reading in French.

Master Corporal Peltier and Suzanne Guerin, president RMR Quebec Association Branch 14, read Laurence Binyon’s “We will remember them” in English and French.

Private Hernandez, trumpeter with Fusiliers Mont-Royal Band, played the “Last Post,” followed by two minutes of silence. He then played the “Reveille.” During the silence, a distant cannon boom was heard, fired by one of Westmount’s two refurbished British 1810 cannon. It was located at the Westmount Athletic Grounds and was fired two other times during the ceremony (see p. 8).

Pipe Major Adam Wilson from the Montreal Highlanders marched past the cenotaph playing “Flowers of the Forest.”

Wreaths from 15 organizations were laid around the cenotaph by their respective representatives. This was followed a

singing of “God Save the King.”

The cenotaph, a magnificent monument in Westmount’s Vimy Park, was constructed in 1922 to commemorate soldiers who died in World War I and it was placed on a marble platform in 1948. Names of Westmounters who fell during World War I and World War II are inscribed on the marble walls.

► Emily Reid was born in 1938. Her father, uncle and aunt all served in World War I, at Passchendaele, at Vimy and as a nurse.



The Royal Montreal Regiment and the 34th Signal Regiment lined up along Côte St. Antoine Rd.



The Reverend Patrick Wheeler of St. Matthias led the Lord’s Prayer in English.



Dignitaries standing before the cenotaph during the national anthem included, visible in front row from left: Gregory McBain, Westmount director of Public Safety; Israeli consul general Eliaz Luf; Mayor Michael Stern; Jennifer Maccarone, provincial legislator for Westmount-St. Louis; Senator Tony Loffreda; and Anna Gainey, MP for NDG-Westmount. In the second row, visible from left, are councillors Antonio D’Amico, Jonathan Chomski and Paul Levine.

Remembrance Day, on the day, meant snow this year

BY RALPH THOMPSON

Just before 11 am on the eleventh day of the eleventh month, known today as Remembrance Day or Poppy Day, a small group gathered at the cenotaph in Vimy Park to remember and honour those members of the armed forces who lost their lives in the line of duty during and after World War I.

The service was organized by Wilfred de Freitas and Catherine Duff-Caron, and included Rabbi Lisa Grushcow and the Reverend Gwenda Wells, chaplain, McGill University Health Centre and honorary assistant, St. Matthias. Others in the crowd were recently re-elected city councillor Matt Aronson; Greg McBain, director of Public Safety; other Westmount Public Safety officers, Station 12 police and Westmount Public Works employees.

The service took place under a substantial snowfall. Steve Gregory, former honorary colonel, 2nd Field Regiment, Royal Canadian Artillery, arrived early to shake the snow off the wreaths left from the city's official Remembrance Day event two days before.

Duff-Caron welcomed everyone, presented the guests and introduced de Freitas, who read excerpts from a poem by Mark



The short service lasted around 20 minutes and was supported by Public Safety, Station 12 police and Public Works.

Britten. At 11 am, all were asked to remain silent for two minutes, followed by Lewis Hancock playing a B flat band fife.

Gwenda Wells read the words of Lawrence Binyon, followed by Brigadier-General Guy Chapdelaine's prayers in French. Rabbi Grushcow then read the words in

English.

de Freitas then recited John McCrae's poem "In Flanders Fields." An officer from HMCS Donnacona, a Royal Canadian Navy reserve unit based in St. Henri, placed a wreath at the cenotaph and everyone was invited to attach their poppies to one

of the wreaths around the cenotaph.

The date and time are the same as the official time the Allies and Germany agreed at the end of World War I to cease hostilities at Compiègne, France in 1918. A treaty was concluded in Versailles the following year.



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Social Notes

VERONICA REDGRAVE

The Montreal chapter of the Israel Cancer Research Fund (ICRF) recently held its annual Taste for Life Market to support cutting-edge research in Montreal and Israel. Presented by The Dan and Wendie Bensoussan Foundation and Le Windsor Ballrooms, the evening showcased the city’s vibrant culinary community – and delicious talent! – while raising critical funds to advance scientific discoveries that improve cancer treatment and patient outcomes.

“Taste for Life is more than a celebration of food – it’s a celebration of community and hope,” said **Brigitte Fortin**, CEO of ICRF Montreal.

Event co-chairs were **Zak Bensoussan**, **Michaela Elhadad** and **Melanie Pollack**, who led a helpful committee of volunteers. Among the evening’s highlights was the participation of renowned culinary destinations, including Westmount’s Petros, Prime Bar à Bœuf, La Toxica, Brera, G



Alana Wexler Schwartz and Abraham Wexler.

‘Taste for Life Market’ raises \$70k for ICRF



Jeffrey Bernstein and Robert Bard.



Melanie Pollack, Zak Bensoussan and Michaela Elhadad.

Pizza, Baba Hummus – to name but a few.

The *soirée* also featured a raffle with prizes donated by local partners. Event sponsors included Delmar International Inc. and the Felicia and Arnold Aaron Foundation.

Noted in the sold-out crowd were ICRF Montreal co-presidents **Jeffrey Bernstein**, there with his wife **Maxyne Foldiak**; and **Robert Bard**, with his son **Matthew**; and ICRF fellows **Dr. Gabriel Levin** (gynecologic oncologist at JGH), there with his wife **Einav Levin-Binyamin**; and **Amatzia Gantz** (liver cancer research at the MUHC), with husband **Shuli Talmor**.

In attendance also were **Sheryl Ramroop**, director special events and adminis-



Dr. Gabriel Levin, his wife Einav Levin-Binyamin, and Amatzia Gantz.

tration ICRF Montreal; ICRF Montreal board member **Alana Wexler Schwartz** with her father **Abraham Wexler**; **Sharyn** and **Bernard Sepinwall**; **Angela Tietolman**

and **Arlene Silver**. The event raised over \$70,000 for cancer research. Since its founding, ICRF Montreal has raised more than US\$100 million globally and funded nearly 3,000 cancer research grants in Israel. ICRF is the largest non-governmental source of cancer research funding in Israel. The Montreal chapter uniquely funds Israeli post-doctoral fellows conducting research in Montreal hospitals, strengthening scientific collaboration between Canada and Israel.



Sheryl Ramroop and Brigitte Fortin.

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