

Resident Beitel marks 20 years of de-merger



On January 3, Westmount resident Sam Beitel took it upon himself to mark the 20th anniversary “of the city once more being the city of Westmount.” The provincial government of Quebec, which controls all aspects of municipal law, merged Westmount and all island municipalities with Montreal as of January 1, 2002. After much controversy, and changes of governments at the Montreal and provincial levels, it was demerged January 1, 2006 along with 14 others. “I have had these placards in the basement for the last 22 years,” explained Beitel. They date back to the efforts to stop the merger in the first place and vote for de-merger.

PHOTO COURTESY OF S. BEITEL

Record-breaking attendance at city's Hanukkah event follows murders in Australia



The council chamber at city hall was filled to capacity December 16 at the city's menorah-lighting event. Two days before, 15 people had been murdered at a similar event in Sydney, Australia. See p. 2 for story.

PHOTO: RALPH THOMPSON

Mayor seeks report on state of infrastructure

Stern opens December council meeting with apology

BY LAUREEN SWEENEY

Mayor Michael Stern opened the December 8 city council meeting apologizing for an off-colour comment he had made during the question period November 17 that was caught by an open mic.

The comment, as reported by the *Independent* November 25 (p. 19), was followed by an apology from Stern at the following, December 8 meeting during the *Indepen-*

dent's four-week publication holiday.

“It was inappropriate,” he explained at the meeting. “I expect better of myself and residents have the right to expect better from their mayor. I apologize for that comment.”

Launching immediately into an opening statement on the year ahead, he said that “we have important work ahead and I want us to stay focused on improving services, continued on p. 3

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City’s menorah lighting strikes sombre, determined, hopeful notes

By RALPH THOMPSON

The city of Westmount’s annual Hanukkah celebration, held at city hall on a cold December 16, the second day of the holiday, was coordinated by Donna Lach, assistant director of the library and Community Events.

Contrary to tradition, most of the 45-minute-long event was held indoors because of the cold.

A record-breaking crowd of over 200 squeezed into the foyer and council chamber, as informally gauged by veteran atten-

dees from sight. Councillors, adults of all ages, noisy children plus a small cockapoo cradled in the arms of its owner crushed into the small space.

Lach introduced Councillor Jonathan Chomski, who welcomed everyone.

Australian victims commemorated

Rabbi Lisa Grushcow of Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom talked about the horrors of two days before at Bondi Beach in Sydney, Australia. She slowly read the names of the 15 victims who had been shot and killed. She also mentioned the hero – Ahmed al-Ahmed – who surely saved many lives by tackling one of the gunmen.

“We have more light than darkness,” said Grushcow, adding that people around the world of all faiths would be coming together to show the light.

Rabbi Benjamin Luks-Morgan, also of Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom, presented Psalm 121 with Cantor Gideon Zelermyer of the Shaar Hashomayim.

Rabbi Yehoshua Ellis of the Shaar and Grushcow talked about Hanukkah, followed by cantors Rona Nadler, the music director of the Temple, and Zelermyer, who led *brachot* (blessings).

Chomski made a gallant attempt to light a tiny menorah but did not succeed, only



After the speeches and singing inside, much of the audience gathered outside to witness the lighting of the second “lamp” on the outdoor menorah.

to be rescued by Councillor Jeff Shamie. A small boy in the audience was invited to light the second candle.

All joined in several traditional Hanukkah songs: “Hanukkah Blessings,” “Maoz Tzur,” “O Chanukah,” “Svivon” and “I Have a Little Dreidel,” with words, translations and music handed out by Community Events.

This was followed by hot chocolate, traditional deep-fried *sufganiyot* (doughnuts) and delicious latkes served up in the foyer.

Finally, everyone braved the cold to officially turn on the second bulb on the

large menorah in front of city hall. A new high-tech switch system allowed Rabbi Grushcow to magically switch on the second bulb without any assistance from a tall individual to screw in the bulb (the previous years’ low-tech approach).

City councillors Antonio D’Amico, Gurveen Chadha, Shawn Moss, Matt Aronson and Kathleen Kez were also in attendance. Anna Gainey, member of parliament for NDG-Westmount, was in the audience.

See also photo on p. 1.



From left, Councillors Shawn Moss, Matt Aronson, Gurveen Chadha, Jonathan Chomski, Kathleen Kez, Antonio D’Amico and Jeff Shamie with Rabbi Lisa Grushcow.

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Quiet end to holiday season reflected by some of Public Security’s incidents

A call to Public Security at 11:15 pm December 26 involved a suspicious person seen on properties. He was also described as walking down the middle of the street on Mount Pleasant, and was checked out and identified by police, Public Security officials said.

No other details, or the outcome of the incident, were reported.

Woman falls on sidewalk

A woman was found by patrollers to have fallen on the sidewalk at 317 Claremont December 31 at 9:54 pm, Public Security officials said. She appeared to have hurt an ankle, was unable to stand and was helped to the back of a patrol vehicle to await Urgences Santé.

Public Security unjams resident’s door – Likely culprit: lock

Public Security was dispatched to a residence on Victoria Ave. January 6 when a resident was unable to open the front door. Officials managed to open it and said the lock appeared to have jammed.

Council, cont'd from p. 1

strengthening operations and moving Westmount forward.”

The focus “is simple,” he explained: “better services for residents, stronger operations and a more responsive city hall.”

The biggest challenge for 2026 would be “infrastructure restoration: repair and replacement as promised,” he explained. “I have asked for a complete assessment of the status of our infrastructure – roads, sidewalks, water systems, Hydro and buildings.” This report is targeted to be finalized April 30, he added.

Indie goes to the movies



David Robitaille, the director of *Unmatched*, reached out to the *Independent* for permission to include a copy of the paper in his 11-minute film. “Of course, I said ‘yes,’” said editor David Price. “I was happy to help and it is fun to see our paper in a movie.” Female lead Jeanne Potvin can be seen holding the October 27, 2025 edition at a café clearly identifiable as Avenue G on Greene Ave., as well as on the film’s poster and IMDb tile. “John, the owner, is always kind enough to let me shoot there!” said Robitaille. The film’s trailer began streaming on YouTube December 12. “It’ll be shown at festivals this year (mostly in California) if selected/nominated,” concluded Robitaille.

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Manoir Westmount’s bazaar raises \$3,240 for local groups

By LAUREEN SWEENEY

The annual bazaar held November 21 by Manoir Westmount residents from the sale of handmade and donated items generated a total of \$3,240, according to Ilona Vovk, leisure department supervisor.

The proceeds were distributed among six recipient service groups of \$540 each: the Old Brewery Mission, the Depot Community Food Centre, the Rotary Club of Westmount, Share the Warmth, Chez Doris and Dans la Rue.

The Manoir residents’ handicrafts group that contributed many of the items meets weekly throughout the year to prepare for the residence’s biggest volunteer initiative. The group works throughout the year on handmade creations that include knitted/crocheted items and seasonal crafts. The sale included a raffle as well as tables offering baked goods, plants, rummage and jewellery. The event is an activity coordinated every Friday by Karen Pencer and Marie-Claude Gendron.

Vovk extended thanks to the Westmount community for the bazaar contributions from residents, friends, family members, staff “and some of our sponsors”: Metro Westmount, El Shaimaa Saliem Pharmaprix at Alexis Nihon Plaza and Westmount Florist.



Among items sold at the Manoir Westmount bazaar were knitted items made by residents during the handicrafts activity coordinated by volunteer Margrit Stutz, who has been volunteering with the seniors’ residence for some 30 years. Helping at the sale are residents Ann Ascoli, left, and Josephine Lefebvre.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MANOIR WESTMOUNT.

46 deliveries made to recipients – Balance goes to Resilience

Public Security holiday program generates \$3,300 plus

By LAUREEN SWEENEY

Westmount Public Security’s holiday distribution program totalled “just over \$3,300 and \$700 in grocery gift cards,” according to assistant director Kimberley Colquhoun, who coordinated the program.

This included amounts from collections at IGA (\$545) Metro Best (\$675), Les 5 Saisons (\$641), the Westmount Lawn Bowling

and Croquet Club (\$601), McManus Hockey (\$400) plus “a few anonymous \$100 donations and a large bag of coins.”


Centre Greene “contacted us in December to offer additional items they had collected,” Colquhoun said. “As a result, we were able to help four additional families for a total of 46 deliveries to families and individuals on our territory in need. Remaining items go to the Resilience

Centre.”

Also provided by Westmount Scouting was a fresh Christmas tree for a family to decorate in the common room of the housing complex for seniors at 80 Hillside, she said.

See photos of goods and deliveries on p. 5

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Public Security delivers the (Christmas) goods



Parking inspector Stephanie Rodrigues, left, delivering baby supplies and knitted clothing to Elizabeth House, a rehabilitation centre in NDG that offers help to families with children up to five years old. The items were assembled as part of the Public Security department's holiday food drive. Public safety officer Michael Ramsay, right, loading a city vehicle with food baskets.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WESTMOUNT PUBLIC SECURITY.

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Lawn bowlers contribute to Public Security food drive

► The annual holiday food drive organized by the Westmount Lawn Bowling and Croquet Club collected some 200 pounds and over \$1,000 for the annual food drive of Westmount Public Security. From left in the photo are Naomi Sharpe, former city director general Bruce St. Louis and Izak Rubin. PHOTO COURTESY OF B. ST. LOUIS



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EDITORIAL

Mix markets into Medicare for healthier outcomes

A reason why capitalism works:
“When the going gets weird, the
weird turn pro.” – Hunter S. Thompson

A reason why central planning doesn’t:
“The state pretends to pay us and we
pretend to work.” – Soviet-era aphorism

We are witnessing the slow but steady implosion of the Quebec/Canada health-care system – with millions of seriously ill Baby Boomers still to arrive at its doors in the years to come. I have always thought of our healthcare system as a wet paper towel, and the Boomers as a cannon ball. Well, the edge of the cannon ball is meeting the edge of the paper towel, right now. Get ready for some mess.

The CAQ’s Bill 2, as originally drafted, aimed to set prices and terms and force health professionals to accept them, and force them to stay in the profession. Their plan – which is under constant evolution as the courts, public and interest groups dig into it – was likely illegal and unconstitutional. It was certainly unworkable and likely remains so, even if parts have been improved, or will be. What happens to a King Canute when he orders the tide to turn and it doesn’t? We are going to find out in the years to come and it is going to get ugly.

If you don’t like, or know, King Canute, history is full of other examples showing why this basic concept won’t work. Readers with a taste for ancient history might want to compare these measures to those of the Roman emperor Diocletian, which were disastrous. As it exited the medieval period and reacted to the Black Death, England introduced and the Statute of Labourers to set prices, which led to the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381. In modern times, price controls were tried all over the democratic world in the 1970s, and they didn’t work. Any state-controlled economy, or sector of it, provides more examples: Maoist China, Castro’s Cuba, the USSR, the UK and France in the 1970s. The list goes on.

The reason in a nutshell: People won’t do work for \$50,000 when the market price is \$100,000. They will go where they can get the \$100,000, or do other work, or retire altogether. It is about the money, and it is about their dignity, and in some cases it is about not continuing an activity if you are losing money at the prescribed price. Unfortunately, Microeconomics is an indifferent and pitiless god. If costs aren’t covered, an activity won’t happen. If being a GP doctor were such a great proposition, do you think we would have a shortage in the province?

It’s not just about money

Market lovers often err in only focusing on money. In addition to dollars and cents, it is also about the people and processes around economic decisions. Dedicated professionals won’t put up with parts of their jobs falling apart, e.g. doctors don’t like working without the proper support from the proper number of nurses and other technicians, and the proper equipment and so on. You see them saying so on TV all the time. Can you blame them?

Money is a great motivator, but it is not the only one, or the only thing in life. Economic freedom also means being able NOT to work. In a freer system, we might see all sorts of doctors working later in life, part time, because they can set their own rates and schedules, and their own parameters, and because it is rewarding. In an unfree, undignified system, the minute that they can retire, or leave, they do.

I pick on the CAQ because they are in power, but it could just as easily be some other party. If you are looking for a real alternative here in Quebec (or Canada), don’t turn to Quebec’s (or Canada’s) other established political parties. They are all caught in the same statist vortex.

To take one example, remember Dr. Gaétan Barrette, a provincial Liberal and the provincial health minister from 2014 to 2018. From the get-go, I thought he had a pronounced *dirigiste* air about him as he expounded on *how things would be*. Sure enough, late in his term he said something like: “We have new jobs available for nurses at such-and-such a place, and they aren’t applying,” implying that it was the fault of would-be applicants, not the offer, that the system was short of nurses.

I would guess that Dr. Barrette is a good radiologist, but he would fail miserably in Microeconomics 101.

How we got here

How did we get here? In the 1960s and 1970s, we put a major part of our economy under the management of federal and provincial politicians and bureaucrats, groups not known for efficiency and flexibility, or managerial *savoir faire*. How could it have ended any other way?

But it is deeper than that. What we will learn, eventually, is that government is not good at *managing* things. I mean “managing” in a very specific sense. Managing means hiring and firing, and setting prices, and purchasing (short-term and long-term) items (and not others), and changing processes and systems – repeat-

edly, sometimes on a daily basis, for years and decades.

Governments can’t do this well, period. It is not about choosing a CAQ or Liberal or a PQ decision-maker. It is about getting rid of *the* decision-maker and replacing him, her or a small group of them with the market, with us. To paraphrase Khaleesi Daenerys from *Game of Thrones*, we should not try to stop the revolving wheel of political parties on this one or that one, we should *break the wheel*.

The reason why government decision-makers don’t work are legion but they include the short-term focus of politicians (“Do well in the polls! Win the next election!”) and the (understandably) self-interested focus of government employees, from the lowest-paid worker to the top bureaucrat. (At work, you maximize your return. Let’s not be surprised if they do so too, including not downsizing themselves or their departments.)

There is also just a natural rigidity to government. When it comes to policing and tax policy and certain other areas, this might be a good thing. We don’t want these parts of life to change all the time. We want constancy, and policies that are adhered to. When it comes to *managing* an entity that deals with constantly changing costs and prices and technology and people, rigidity is disastrous.

It is not the fault of individual politicians or bureaucrats. They might be well intentioned. They might be able. The issue is that no one can know how many GPs (or specialists) there should be in Montreal, or the Laurentians, or the Charlevoix, or what they should be paid, or what kind of support teams they should have, or what those people should be paid. And it won’t be one answer anyway!

Local story confirms expectations about government

You can see this phenomenon at play in these pages. Read “Provincial government’s simplistic math leaves many without a family doctor” (November 22, 2022, p. 6). It was written by the director of the Queen Elizabeth Family Medicine Group and the director of primary care at the McGill University Health Centre, Dr. Mark Roper. It shows how well-intentioned bureaucrats can’t anticipate, or understand, how free individuals will live their lives or use services. Short version: they can’t seem to understand that people from off-island use doctors who are on-island.

Guessing how unfree individuals will behave is not easier. The Soviet Union was

full of intelligent, educated people, but it couldn’t figure out how many cotton balls were needed in Minsk and in Murmansk – because no person or small group of people can come up with that number, even when they control most of an unfree population’s choices.

The market, on the other hand, puts hundreds, or thousands, or millions of decision-makers together to get these things right, or right-ish, or right for now. And errors are paid for by private actors.

In a market system, when cotton balls are wanted, the price goes up, and – without any discussion or policy statements – entrepreneurs start to acquire, or make, cotton balls and get them where they are wanted. They also won’t send them where they aren’t wanted, because they won’t be purchased there. Mistakes are quickly corrected because people are playing with their own money, or the money of someone who notices.

One major result of this government inability to manage is that wages, and head counts, only go in one direction: up! (Add in unions, and wage and headcount increases can really get going.) Businesses, on the other hand, often stay profitable and in existence because they sometimes say “no.” Yes, businesses do get things wrong sometimes, for a time, but many realize the need to change and actually do so without drama. Other businesses do it *with drama* – i.e. in bankruptcy protection. Still others fail utterly and disappear.

Governments, on the other hand, don’t adjust much or at all. The political costs of downsizing, to take one prominent corporate survival tactic, are too high and the benefits for the decision-maker/politician are too remote. Also, unlike companies, governments don’t tend to disappear. They just keep growing.

The net result is that a large part of our economy – the medical field – is inefficient and badly run. We all know it from personal experience, and we shouldn’t be surprised. We had learned by the 1980s that centrally planned economic systems do not work. They are not innovative, or efficient, or customer friendly, or fun to work in.

Canada, Canada – Medicare, Medicare

But for weird Canadian reasons, we decided – even in the 1980s – to keep one large portion of the economy – medical care – as government run, like a kind of mini-Soviet Union, preserved for the ages.

I write “weird Canadian reasons” because we have in many ways defined this country by its Medicare system, to show

EDITORIAL

that WE ARE NOT AMERICANS. It is an article of faith that Medicare is great, and it is Canadian, and when Medicare fails, the answer is ... MORE MEDICARE! It is great, and it is Canadian. We must need more of it. It is Canadian “logic” at work.

It reminds me of medieval peasants praying that the plague miss their town. If the plague did not come, the praying had obviously not been done hard enough or properly. But the answer was always more praying.

How do we move forward?

If we take back this part of the economy from the modern commissars, it does not mean we have to adopt the “dreaded” US system. (Although how dreaded is it, if many Canadians jump the border – or dip into Canada’s private sector – for a given procedure?)

The US system is not a perfect free market either and it has many flaws, including often tying insurance coverage to employment. Lost your job? You’ve just lost your health coverage too. Let’s not go there.

So where do we go?

Firstly, while government can’t *manage* things well, it can often do a pretty good job of *regulating* things. Look at how well we do on murder. Or asbestos. Or speeding. Or illegal parking. Things aren’t perfect, but life in these regards is quite livable, literally in the case of murder.

As they exit centrally planned health care, the federal and provincial governments could set up a regulatory system to encourage competition and free enterprise, and individual and corporate achievement and innovation. Soon, we could quite easily have as many options in health care as we do in other consumer products and services. Economically, there is no difference between fixing a car and fixing a human body – but our cars get faster and better care. When has your car ever had to wait in line for “surgery”?

The difference between service for your car and service for your body is that the government runs one of the systems.

So how do we get a freer market system?

Well, let’s start by thinking about the objectives of the current system. People in the 1970s (and before) were rightly afraid of unexpected and massive health care costs. At that time (and definitely for the century before) financial and insurance markets were not as developed as they are now and people naturally turned to government, in some cases in the naïve hope for a free lunch.

But as Margaret Thatcher taught us in the 1980s: “the trouble with socialism is

that you eventually run out of other people’s money” and a large program that targets *everyone* in a population will soon overwhelm the government running it. If you look at the Quebec government, it is basically a healthcare provider that also does some other stuff: about 40 percent of its expenditures are on health care.

But maybe the *dirigistes* of the 1970s had an insight. Healthy, young people will not save enough and will not insure themselves sufficiently health-wise, especially for the high-cost final years. Why buy insurance for when you are 70 or 80, or save for those medical expenses, if you can go to Daytona Beach now? So – the 1970s answer was – the government should come in and force everyone to pay for health care through non-voluntary taxes, not voluntary private insurance premiums.

It was this kind of thinking that put government into its will-fail management role.

Why not combine the insight of the 1970s with that of the 1980s? Make saving for, and insuring against, health setbacks a legal requirement, but leave the money and *specific decision-making* in the hands of the individual patients. And leave management of the services in the hands of private doctors and health companies.

Bring on the MSP

Think of it like a forced medical RRSP – an MSP, if you will – that can only be spent on health expenses (many of which will be far in the future, like retirement spending), but some of which must be spent every year on a GP visit and on government-approved, but private, health insurance against major diagnoses.

A lot of actuarial and regulatory work would have to be done to set the amounts and rules, but it is doable. A lot of computer “back-end” would also be needed to track all the money, but we have tons of capacity there too (another change versus the 1970s, not to mention the 1870s).

To pluck numbers out of mid-air: If someone were earning \$50,000 at age 21, they might be forced to put aside \$5,000 per year, of which, say, \$1,000 would be forced to pay for private insurance against major diagnoses and \$500 for a yearly program with a GP (which might include a check-up plus one or two quick visits during the year). The remaining amount would be saved and grow each year until those large medical bills eventually came in one’s 70s or 80s.

The key is that the government would not be providing the medical services, which it has shown that it can’t do well, or the insurance, which it can’t do well either. These tasks would be done by private

entities, who would compete and – within workplace and accreditation laws such as those that we all already work under – provide services as they saw fit.

The important point is that the customer and provider would be free to enter and exit the market, set prices and set the terms of service. For a higher price, you might get a GP from a top-tier school working downtown in a fancy office with a cappuccino machine. For much less, you might get a younger doctor from a lesser-known school working in an ugly suburban strip mall. And you would have all sorts of economically ambitious people (doctors, nurses, test technicians) working evenings and weekends for a chance to earn your – *your* – dollar.

(I once spoke to an entrepreneur in the medical space whose firm exceeded government efficiency standards. He looked at me sagely through tired eyes and sighed: “Our secret? We work on weekends.”)

Except for the regulators, no government employees or payees would be doing anything.

(By the way, don’t overempower the insurers and, in effect, turn them into something like a government, another US problem. They should be required to pay out on justified expenses, but be unable to say where the money will be spent exactly, again reinforcing the central role of the patient and making the market work.)

Conclusion

I suspect that I won’t be listened to, that I will be a modern Cassander. Politicians will keep making glib promises that can’t be kept. (Go back and look at the CAQ’s!) But the great god Microeconomic does not care about me, or you, or the voters. If something does not cover its costs, it won’t exist, period. We will be confronting that reality more and more in the years to come.

The Middle Ages and its prayer “system” lasted a long time, and this crazy system of ours, which also does not work, may as well.

But at least we can start pointing out that it doesn’t work, and will never work, and why. The politicians have spent so long convincing us that we are poor, telling voters that they are helping them, and bribing us with our own money, that we have forgotten that *we* are already paying for our own health care. There is no external-to-us, third-party government out there funding it. We have just chosen – contrary to the rest of our economy – to put a lot of inefficient, expensive federal and provincial politicians and bureaucrats – and rules and processes – between our money and our providers.

Why not get rid of them?

What about the poor?

Obviously, you can’t force people with no or little income to save. The system proposed here will not help people out on the street.

Here is where a humane society steps in – not to have government manage a whole sector of the economy – but to give something to the poor. The forced “health RRSPs” of the working poor could be topped up by the government, giving them the tool (dollars) to participate in the medical market.

In the case of people literally on the street, hiring a small, dedicated team of health professionals would probably be necessary. But its size would be *tiny* compared to the government healthcare behemoth that we have today. It could also target the specific health issues of that population.

What about waste, fraud and abuse?

Any system is subject to abuse, including the current one and the one proposed here. Under this one here, for instance, the government would have to carefully regulate what could be considered a “medical expense,” otherwise trips to Daytona Beach would soon be offered under that name. (“When the going gets weird, the weird turn pro.”) Abuse will never stop, but I would rather have health care offered using all the best tools of a modern economy (plus some abuse) than the failing 1970s model that we have today (plus some abuse).

Would there need to be a transition period to a new system?

Yes. Breaking from certain addictions is dangerous and needs to be done carefully. Government spending (on anything) can be an addiction. There would have to be a carefully planned transition period. But we can start by thinking about where we want to go. A possible first step? Get the GPs out of Medicare, so we have some again (see p. 8 for why). A second step, once that has started to work? Put a deductible or fee on ER visits (see p. 8 for why).

EDITORIAL ADDENDA

Applying, and not applying, market principles to specific topics

By DAVID PRICE

Why GPs should not be in any insurance scheme

General practitioner doctors (GPs) should not be in any insurance scheme (public or private) because we should all visit one once per year – a certain expense – to catch small problems before they become big ones.

A *certain expense* should not be included in any insurance program (public or private) because the insurance provider will be forced to add the whole cost of that certain service to the premiums or taxes, versus only adding a portion of *possible costs* in the case of possible-but-not-certain events. If you “insure” certainties, you just end up adding a management level between you and that certain cost – one of the major problems with Canada’s current medical system.

We are so used to being frightened of large medical bills that we don’t realize how little a GP visit should cost us, and that we are paying for them anyway (plus an upcharge for the politicians’ and bureaucrats’ “work”).

Do the math.

What should a GP make per year, net of expenses?

How much will his or her rent, staff and other costs total?

Add those two items together and divide by the number of work hours in a year.

The result is your cost for a WHOLE HOUR of his or her time. It ain’t that much, and remember that, eventually, your taxes would go down as the government exits the medical field, giving you back those dollars to find a doctor.

Remember too that the shortage of doctors is the result of government mismanagement. We have no lack of professionals in non-medical fields, including very, very technical and demanding ones. Why? Because sufficiently able people enter them for all the benefits, including (but not only) the earnings. When the government tries to decree what prices will be, and set a maximum on earnings, and so on, people exit a given profession.

As Ronald Reagan quipped: “If the government were put in charge of deserts, there would soon be a lack of sand.” So it is with GPs in Quebec (and elsewhere in Canada).

Are you worried about GPs all demanding a take-home pay of \$10 million and setting their prices with that goal in mind? If that were to happen, young people would enter the profession in droves and drive down prices, until we had about the right number of doctors, making about what it takes to motivate someone to do that job. My guess: it is less than \$10 million per year.

Exception!
Why emergency rooms should be government run

There is one exception to a private market: emergency rooms. Markets can’t work when people have little information and no time to make decisions. For this reason, it makes sense to have one public insurance scheme for the whole country covering everyone for emergencies. But, in order to keep abuse down and the ERs unclogged, there has to be a deductible, i.e. a fee for each visit to the ER. Once the GP market is fixed, this fee should be higher than an occasional visit to a GP so the “walking wounded” choose the GP visit.

There could be exceptions for certain objective conditions, e.g. heart attacks, strokes, concussions, and there should be clear marketing campaigns to help people make the right decision, but there has to be a cost to an ER visit, or we will continue to see them used to the maximum and overwhelmed.

We have to steer people into a functional but cheaper alternative, and markets can help.

Why any medical system will always be unstable

A lot of people wish for a return to the advent of Medicare in the 1970s, when things seemed to work better.

Why could we make things work then, but now – when, as a society, we are so much richer, with so many more resources (e.g. computers, medical technology) – we can’t. (One quick answer: the oldest Boomer was about 30 years old then, not an age of peak medical consumption.)

The longer answer is that any system of medical care will always be made financially unstable by improvement. Imagine a public system where all costs are correctly anticipated and funded by taxes. Everything will work fine – until there is a new technology that is not funded. At that moment, the system will not work for those who want or need that service, until all the work is done to define and pay for it. Put another way, we could likely provide everyone with 1970s healthcare today. But who would want it?

A private system is similarly always being destabilized. Imagine a system where everyone is insured against all possibilities, and the insurers have done their actuarial math correctly and are charging the right premium amounts so they are solvent, and all costs get reimbursed when they come up. What will make this system cease to work perfectly? Again, a new procedure. It will be outside the scope of the insurance, and unfunded. The system won’t work for those who want or need that new service, until the premium and policy adjustments are made.

And, of course, these two “Imagine a system that...” scenarios are pure fiction. We are always making mistakes, and compounding them; and uneven demographics (e.g. Baby Boomers!) make things worse.

The question is: Which system is more flexible and more likely to give us results that we want? A freer, albeit regulated, market? Or the current government-managed system?

How would the MSP work?

We would likely not want everyone gambling in the stock market with their medical savings plan (MSP). The answer – a 1970s-esque paternalistic one – is to create tranches of savings with more risk being allowed as certain dollar thresholds are reached.

The first tranche of saving would have to be invested in risk-free assets (federal government debt?). After the first X number of dollars had been saved, the second tranche would be created that could invest in triple-A bond funds (or whatever), and then tranches for passive equity funds (or whatever), and then managed equity funds and then individual stocks and so on.

Again, with the computing power that we have now, keeping track of this money would be no big deal, but it would be *your* money and you would spend and invest it more efficiently than the government.

Could this model be applied to other fields?

Yes. A forced RRSP could get rid of QPP/CPP and a forced unemployment savings plan (a USP?) could get rid of EI/UI. Think how small and inexpensive government could be...

WESTMOUNT INDEPENDENT

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Editor

Advertising sales

David Price: 514.935.4537
editor@westmountindependent.com

Arleen Candiotti: 514.223.3567
advertising@westmountindependent.com

Chief reporter: Laureen Sweeney

Accounting: 514.223.6138

Graphics: Ted Sancton

office@westmountindependent.com

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Write about yourself or a fictional character

McEntyre Creative Writing Competition asks: Who are you?

BY LAUREEN SWEENEY

The recent holidays may have provided an ideal time for some local school-age residents to let their imagination and creativity go to work on “Finding yourself.”

This is this year’s theme of the McEntyre Creative Writing Competition, which is open to Westmount residents, students and members of the Westmount Public Library in grades one to six and through high school to secondary 5 (grade 11). The deadline is March 22.

“We invite you to write about how, when, or where you, or a fictional character, might find one’s true self,” says Liz McCallum, the chief judge. “You can do this through a story, a poem, or an essay, but always keeping in mind the idea of community.”

Quoting Mahatma Gandhi, the com-



From left, chief judge Liz McCallum and children’s librarian Wendy Wayling.

PHOTO COURTESY OF L. MCCALLUM.

petition’s website notes “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” What you write is up to you, it explains.

“The aim is to be creative! Some of the ideas for this year’s theme as posted include: “What will you be when you grow up? Is the real you hiding behind a mask?” Also proposed: “Could you write a story/poem about a journey of self-discovery? What kind of person do you or your character want to be? Does helping others help someone grow as a person? How would your character contribute to a community? Is there a moment that changed you or your character forever?”

The annual competition was conceived and established by the late Peter McEntyre, Westmount mayor from 1969 to 1971. McEntyre donated his mayoral pay to show his opposition to Quebec’s obligatory salary for the mayoralty, stating it should be considered community service as had been through the years.

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NOUVELLES

PROCHAINE SÉANCE
DU CONSEIL

Mardi 3 février

NEWS

NEXT COUNCIL
MEETING

Tuesday, February 3



Rappels pour la saison hivernale

Trouvez toutes les informations municipales pour l’hiver en un seul endroit : collectes, déneigement, stationnement, activités sportives et bien plus encore ! westmount.org/hiver



Winter Seasonal Reminders

Find all the municipal information for winter in one place: garbage collection, snow clearing, parking, sports activities, and much more!
westmount.org/winter

Abonnez-vous aux avis du Portail citoyen !

Créez votre compte dans le Portail citoyen ou modifiez vos alertes existantes pour recevoir des rappels par courriel ou SMS, à vous de choisir ! Vous recevrez un rappel la veille de chaque collecte prévue à votre adresse.
citoyen.westmount.org

Opérations de déneigement

La Ville rappelle l'importance de porter une attention particulière aux restrictions de stationnement affichées et de veiller à déplacer votre véhicule lors des opérations de déneigement.
westmount.org/deneigement

Opt in to notifications in the Citizen Portal!

Create your Citizen Portal account or modify your existing one to receive notifications by email or SMS, as you prefer! You will be reminded the day before a scheduled collection at your address.
citoyen.westmount.org

Snow Removal Operations

The City reminds residents to pay close attention to parking restrictions and to ensure their vehicles are moved during snow removal operations.
westmount.org/snowremoval

Collecte de sapins de Noël

La collecte des sapins est prévue les semaines du 12 et du 19 janvier, selon l’horaire habituel des résidus de jardin.
westmount.org/collectes

Christmas Tree Collection

Christmas trees will be collected during the weeks of January 12 and January 19, according to the regular garden waste collection schedule.
westmount.org/collections

Info-Neige App

Download the Info-Neige app to track snow removal operations, on mobile or online. Available on the App Store and Google Play.
westmount.org/snowremoval

Application Info-Neige

Téléchargez dès maintenant l'application Info-Neige pour suivre les opérations de déneigement, sur votre téléphone ou en ligne. Disponible sur l’App Store et Google Play.
westmount.org/deneigement

BIBLIOTHÈQUE ET ÉVÉNEMENTS COMMUNAUTAIRES

LIBRARY AND COMMUNITY EVENTS

Projection spéciale : *To Catch a Thief* (1955)

22 janvier, 19 h, Victoria Hall. En anglais. Rejoignez-nous pour cette projection spéciale du film classique d'Alfred Hitchcock ! John Robie, cambrioleur à la retraite, doit prouver son innocence en démasquant un imposteur qui cible les riches touristes de la Côte d’Azur.
westmount.org/evenements



Club de cinéma documentaire : *Posthumans* (2025)

28 janvier, 19 h, Salle Westmount. En anglais. Après des années de dépendance aux appareils médicaux, la cinéaste explore des solutions alternatives pour gérer son diabète et découvre les implications profondes de l’augmentation de l’être humain. westlib.org

Rencontre d’auteurs — *Mental Illness: A Family Affair*

24 janvier, 14 h, Salle Westmount. En anglais. Avec les auteures Susan Grundy et Susan Doherty. Les auteures abordent les réalités souvent invisibles des proches aidants, notamment le chagrin, l’épuisement et les limites du soutien familial. westlib.org

Author Discussion—*Mental Illness: A Family Affair*

January 24, 2 p.m., Westmount Room. With authors Susan Grundy and Susan Doherty. The authors address the often invisible realities of caregivers, including grief, exhaustion, and the limits of family support. westlib.org

Documentary Film Club: *Posthumans* (2025)

January 28, 7 p.m., Westmount Room. After years of relying on medical devices, the filmmaker investigates alternative ways to manage her diabetes and uncovers the profound implications of human enhancement.
westlib.org

New at the Library: *Maker Café*

Fridays, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., Studio. Drop by Maker Cafés, The Studio’s adult-only drop-in times, to work on your creative projects. Open to Library members, no registration required. Contact studio@westmount.org for any questions. westlib.org

Parlons opéra ! — *Clown(s)*

25 janvier, 14 h, Victoria Hall. Parlons opéra ! invite le public à découvrir de façon vivante les grands opéras de la saison avec Pierre Vachon, chanteurs et pianiste. Cette édition présente *Clown(s)*, une fresque mêlant langue inventée, musique et magie. westmount.com/evenements

Nouveauté à la Bibliothèque : *Café création*

Les vendredis, 10 h à 12 h, Studio. Venez aux Cafés création, les heures d’accès libre du Studio réservées aux adultes, pour travailler sur vos projets créatifs. Ouvert aux membres de la Bibliothèque, sans inscription requise. Contactez studio@westmount.org pour toute question. westlib.org

Let's Talk Opera!—*Clown(s)*

January 25, 2 p.m., Victoria Hall. Let’s Talk Opera! offers an engaging introduction to the season’s major operas with Pierre Vachon, singers, and a pianist. This edition features *Clown(s)*, a spectacle blending invented language, music, and magic.
westmount.org/events



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

LISTEN TO ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE, KEEP IT GOING

In a conversation with me before the November 2 election, Mayor Stern spoke of the wealth of expertise Westmounters are willing to offer by volunteering and he told me he would like to engage these Westmounters.

The Environment and Sustainability Advisory Committee's (ESAC) recommendations adopted by city council at the September 8, 2025 meeting attest to the expertise offered by our citizens. I hope our city council will implement the recommendations to advance sustainability, protect green spaces and enhance biodiversity.

ESAC met monthly from July 2024 to August 2025, when it tabled its report for feedback to city council, which was subsequently adopted. One recommendation is to hire a director of sustainability and climate resilience.

At the November 17, 2025 city council meeting during question period, Councillor Antonio D'Amico was asked by a resident if he would resign from ESAC, noting that he had only attended 50 percent of the meetings. Furthermore, it was noted that Councillor D'Amico voted against the committee's recommendation to reduce landfill by voting in favour of reinstating weekly garbage pick-up.

Councillor D'Amico missed an opportunity to offer an immediate solution for special needs of some families such as offering a weekly pick-up similar to the leaf pick-up and to educate and motivate his other constituents on the benefits of bi-weekly garbage pick-up. [The bi-weekly pick-up schedule] has led to a significant increase in composting and recycling, and reduced landfill from Westmount. In his reply to the ESAC resignation question, Councillor D'Amico added that the advisory committee would not continue, although its report recommends the committee continue and develop recommendations as new innovations appear.

At the December 8, 2025, city council meeting, Mayor Stern apologized for a disrespectful comment that he made into a hot mic towards a questioner at a previous council meeting. He stated that he expects "better of myself" and "residents expect better from the mayor."

Mayor Stern and Councillor D'Amico: we need you to be the model of heartfelt openness in listening to all views respectfully and supporting citizen advisory committees' work with the needed cooperation and resources. A respectful collaborative attitude will encourage citizens with expertise and willingness to serve to improve Westmount. Despite limited city council

and city administration support, the ESAC report attests to the invaluable contribution of volunteer expertise. I hope the committee's recommendations will be implemented to make Westmount a leader in urban sustainability and protection of green space and biodiversity.

KATHERINE WALSH, GROSVENOR AVE.

EXPERIENCE SHOWS: FEWER GARBAGE PICK-UPS DO NOT INCREASE RECYCLING

There have been several opinions put forward by well-intentioned residents regarding the relationship between the frequency of garbage collection and its environmental impact.

I have been involved as an engineer and project manager on many environmental projects around the world for the World Bank, the United Nations and other entities for over 40 years. The project list also includes many transportation planning projects, and let's face it, efficient garbage collection is in large part a transportation planning issue, and the truck exhaust is also an environmental problem.

The projects I've led included, for example, the waste and recycling collection for Panama City, with about a million residents. There, we introduced proper recycling treatment in a relatively disorganized city with huge wealth disparities.

So I'd like to share with you that the frequency of garbage collection does not cause a reduction in the amount of garbage that ends up in landfills, nor cause an increase in recycling. It's a red herring, to use a smelly metaphor. The reverse is true: it is the increased use of recycling that will allow the reduction of garbage collection headed to landfills.

In Westmount, we have noted a decrease in landfill waste and an increase in recycling, and that is a good thing. Logically that it is principally because we have enlarged the list of items that can be included in recycling bins: paper, glass, plastic, metal, cardboard packaging, aluminum foil, etc., and we've communicated this information to residents. Whether the remaining waste gets picked up every week or every second week is irrelevant. The important issue is proper communication with residents so they fully understand what can be recycled, as pointed out in Ms. Winton's letter (December 9, p. 9).

Our family could actually get by with waste pick-up only once per month, as we produce so little, but I feel for those young families and seniors who need a weekly solution. The environment, after all, also includes people.

PATRICK MARTIN, THE BOULEVARD

Editor's note: Martin was a city councillor

Mayor Stern defends Summit dog-leash status quo/compromise

Oakland Ave. resident Joseph Yermus sent Mayor Michael Stern a 1,000-word email on December 15 opposing unleashed dogs in Summit Woods. He copied the *Independent*.

Yermus is known for his stance against the existing compromise at the municipal park (see, for example, his letter of October 7, p. 7). Under that current by-law, dogs are required during opening hours to be leashed all the time, at some times or never – depending on the season.

Yermus made points about the city's insurance policy (if a loose dog were to bite someone), Summit Park's use by non-Westmounters and hygiene, summarizing "These arguments significantly strengthen the case for a strict 'fenced parks only' policy. The argument for confining off-leash

dogs to fenced parks [i.e. dog runs] is not just about safety – it's about fiscal responsibility, environmental stewardship and respecting what OUR community owns."

Mayor Stern's reply, on which the *Independent* was also copied, stated among things: "The city's rules regarding dogs and off-leash areas are set out in the current by-law adopted by council and are in force. An enforcement regime is in place, and compliance is monitored by our Public Security services. While I appreciate residents taking the time to raise issues, the existing framework reflects council's decision and is being applied as intended."

Yermus replied again: "Laws/by-laws can be changed and adapted to needs of the constituents."

from 2006 to 2017. – DP.

PLEASE REDUCE CAR-CHARGING RATE

I would like to bring up an issue that speaks, I believe, to an attitude. The current fee for charging an electric vehicle in Westmount is \$2/hour, as voted by the last Westmount city council. Up to that vote, it

had been the same as the charging fee across Montreal of \$1/hour.

Would Mayor Stern find a way of reverting the charging fee to be the same fee as the rest of the island of Montreal, indeed of Quebec, of \$1/hour? The current fee is decidedly anti-ecology even though it might be good for the accounting sheet.

ROGER JOCHYM, LEWIS AVE.



Leonid Stachtchenko (1929-2025)

It is with great sorrow and heavy hearts that we announce the passing of our cherished father and grandfather Leonid Stachtchenko. He passed away peacefully in his home on the night of December 30th, 2025, at the age of 96.

Leonid was born in 1929 in Nice, France, and moved to Montreal in 1948 where he started his career at Canadair, becoming an aerodynamic specialist. After retiring, he turned towards consulting, contributing to the research and development of vertical axis wind turbines until well into his eighties. His career brought him to many places around the world, from North America to Europe, Indonesia and China.

Leonid lived life to the fullest, always embracing new challenges. An avid sportsman, he anchored as goalie the McGill soccer team that went on to win the Intercollegiate league title in 1952. He was also a gifted artist who created many beautiful paintings. He loved gardening, baking and taking scenic drives and strolls to the park with our family dog Melba.

Leonid is survived by his beloved wife Denyse Pelletier, his treasured daughter Caroline and her husband Luc Auer, his loving grandchildren Hans, Frederick, Max and Sophie as well as several nieces and nephews.

Leonid was a man of formidable intellect, determination and warmth. His absence will be dearly felt by all who were lucky enough to know him, but his spirit will forever live in our hearts.

The family will receive condolences on Friday, January 16th at 13:00 at St-Léon church of Westmount (4311, blvd de Maisonneuve O), followed by a funeral service at 13:30.

Bringing Eduardo in from the cold



9 Lives
LYSANNE FOWLER

Eduardo was noticed by our neighbour at the top of the hill. She would entice him



to her kitchen door with plenty of fresh food. He would come every day so it was decided he would be taken in promptly as he evidently had no home to go back to. Here he is after being rescued, still a bit wet from the snow, when he was being hugged and vetted by the kind veterinary group at the Monkland Clinic. After his physical, they advised that he is a three-year-old neutered male and that his exam-

ination and blood work are perfect despite his ordeal. So I am fostering him, and I am looking forward to placing him with a loving family in our neighbourhood. Eduardo is resting now, his fresh bed is set by the radiator where it is beautifully warm, with his food and water bowl beside him. Please do not hesitate to contact me at my email, lysfow@gmail.com, for more information on adoption and photographs of him. Eduardo is very handsome and quite cuddly so there will be numerous photographs to present! Wishing you a Happy New Year, your neighbour, Lysanne



Westmount
A-dog-tions
LYSANNE FOWLER

To start our New Year, best wishes to you and our appreciation to you for your interest in adoption. Every family makes a difference, and we hope that you will open your arms and your homes to a wonderful pet friend in your family.


Buddy is a wonderful companion – loyal and engaging. He has just gone through a big change, losing his owner recently, and, after a few temporary stays with friends, has transitioned to Gerdy's Rescue & Adoptions for adoption. Buddy is a very handsome white four-year-old Maltese mix, weighing about 15 pounds, very healthy, up to date with his inoculations and neutered. As he is settling into his foster home quite well, he is keen on pleasing and good on his own for a few hours, but best with older children.

He would enjoy being with another dog in the home. As to cats, it seems that he has never met one. Buddy is a tiny bit vocal at the onset when left alone so best not in a condo or apartment. Please do not hesitate to refer to the Gerdy's Rescue & Adoption website at www.gerdysrescue.org for more information and wonder-

Best Buddy

ful photographs. You can open the link therein to fill out their adoption application form, providing your contact information and interest. You can also find the adoption form link directly at gerdysrescue.org/adoption-form/. The volunteers can also be reached at their email address info@gerdysrescue.org directly, to discuss adoption and answer your questions about Buddy. Please do not hesitate to reach out, a wonderful little companion awaits a new family. Your neighbour, Lysanne





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Social Notes

VERONICA REDGRAVE

Victoria Ave. block party brings in Santa *and* Frosty

Party at its Victoria Ave. office – open to the public – couldn't be missed. Under a twinkling tent, Frosty (yes, the snowman) offered welcoming hot chocolate. The fun eve featured deli delights, and of course, holiday desserts. Candy canes were a hit!

Christina Miller's team helped excited children meet Santa for a much-loved

photo op. Sweaters were the style of the night as puffer jackets were quickly discarded in the heat of the shoulder-to-shoulder room.

There was a palpable sense of "the neighbourhood" as young and old mingled with Westmount Public Security, there to support the family *fête*.



Frosty, municipal law enforcement and cocoa.



Charlotte Matte, Pascal Couillard, Francesca Sgambetterra, Christina Miller, Santa and Andrea Usher-Jones.

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Ste-Marcelline launches \$8-million fundraising campaign



Social Notes
VERONICA REDGRAVE

Recently, Villa Sainte-Marcelline (VSM) officially launched its fundraising campaign announcing a three-year objective of \$8 million. The largest fundraising campaign in the school's 65-year history was announced by the evening's event chair Olivier Setlakwe, who has a daughter in Grade 2 at the school.

Monies raised will go towards the long-term vitality of the school; infrastructure projects; maintenance of the bursary program and continued investments in educational programs and activities.

A new board of directors for the Villa Sainte-Marcelline Foundation was created two years ago. Since then, it has successfully raised \$2.7 million through a silent campaign.

The official launch evening raised over \$189,000, which will go towards the major campaign, bringing the foundation's total to \$2.9 million raised to date towards the goal of \$8 million.



Jennifer Cosgrove and Olivier Setlakwe.



Michael and Eli Gentile.



Rosemarie Bertrand.

Over the past two years, thanks to donors, the school has completed many renovation projects: the library, theatre room, washrooms, technology and computer equipment, student area living spaces and a new music school.

Along with Olivier Setlakwe, other board members attending were president Viviane Croux, senior vp corporate finance BMO Commercial Bank; vice-president Michael Gentile, founding partner/senior portfolio manager Bastion; Hubert Lacroix, strategic council, Blake, Cassels & Graydon; and Vivian Nguyen, Vivian Nguyen Avocate.

Attending with his wife Jennifer Cosgrove, Setlakwe – head of capital markets Quebec, Canaccord Genuity – was introduced by VSM Foundation president, Marcelline alumni Rosemarie Bernard, Jacques Maurice Group.

Noted amidst the bubbly and balloons were Rosemarie's mother Dominique Bertrand and her husband Jacques Maurice, Groupe Jacques Maurice Scotia McLeod.

De-icing salt costs city \$1 million for winter

BY LAUREEN SWEENEY

To be ready for the current ups and downs of the recent freeze-thaw cycles, Westmount city council approved an expenditure of more than \$1 million December 8 as Westmount's share of the de-icing salt in a group purchase with the city of Montreal.

The purchase was coordinated by Montreal with Compass Minerals Canada Corp., according to the resolution moved by Councillor Jeff Shamie and approved unanimously.

Westmount anticipates the purchase of

approximately 10,000 metric tonnes for the current 2025-2026 winter season, as initially adopted at the council meeting April 7. This includes estimated totals of some \$344,310 for the 2025 portion and \$688,621 for 2026, resulting in the need for a purchase order of some \$1,032,932.

While the 2026 winter so far has reportedly resulted in unusual winter temperature variations, they are not abnormal, according to meteorological records. The effects in Westmount with its hills and even slight variations in altitudes, requires the significant use of salting, as reported historically.

Thaw, rain create many puddles on city's streets



Looking south at Lake Victoria-on-Somerville, as seen January 8. No salt needed there!

PHOTO: INDEPENDENT.

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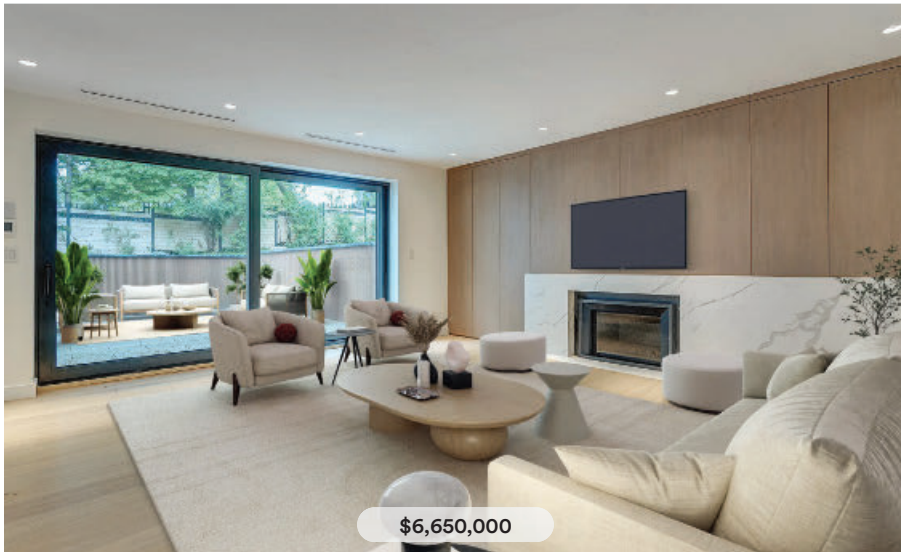
We welcome your letters but reserve the right to choose and edit them. Please limit to 300 words and submit before Friday 10 am. Email us at: editor@westmountindependent.com



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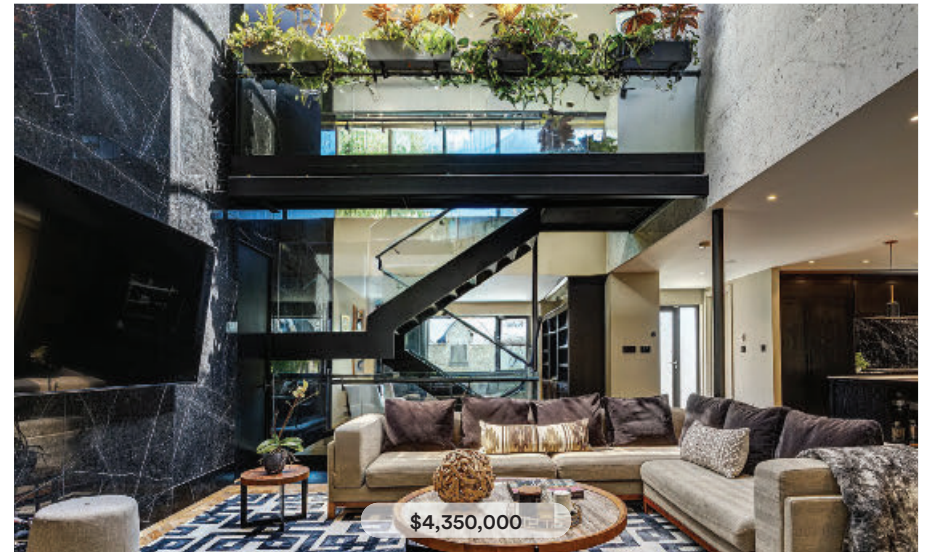
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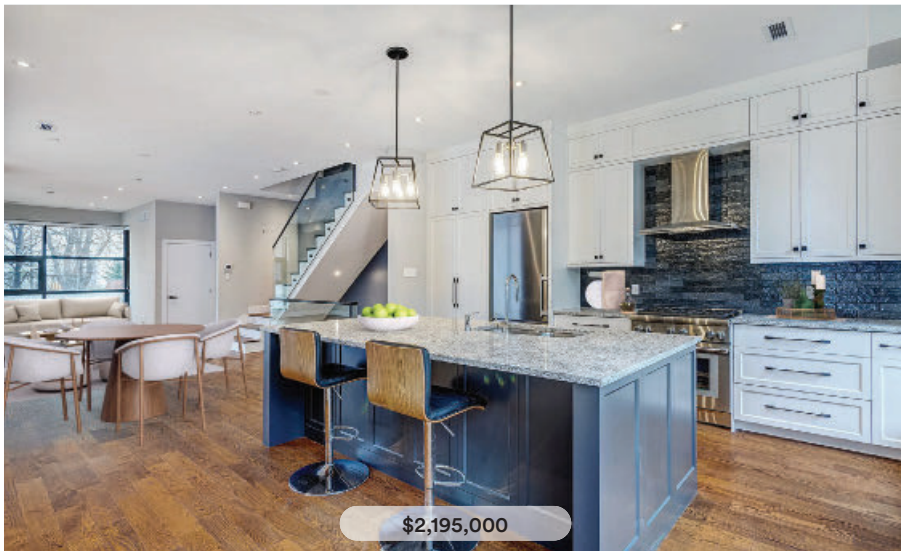
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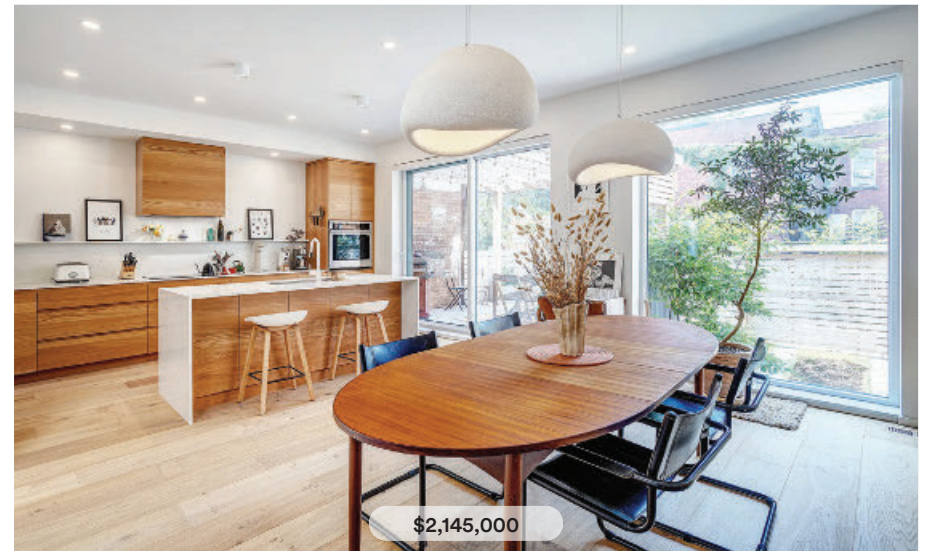
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