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THE Orléans Star

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This is just one of the houses on Taffy Lane in Orléans that attracts hundreds of Christmas display enthusiasts to the small street every year. See story on page 17. FRED SHERWIN/PHOTO

2024 budget approved with 2.5% tax hike

By Fred Sherwin
The Orléans Star

Ottawa city council recently passed the final operating and capital budgets and with them a 2.5 per cent tax increase.

The increase equates to an additional \$105 on the municipal portion of the urban residential property tax bill for a home assessed at \$415,000 and \$86 on the average rural residential tax bill for a home of the same value.

Most of the revenue generated by the increase will be used to keep up with increased operating costs due to continued growth.

The budget sets aside considerable funding to address affordable housing. \$15.7 million has been set aside for the housing and homelessness investment plan, \$3.1 million for other homelessness programs and \$1.3 million to support the social housing program.

The City will also invest \$5 million to advance the Integrated Transition to Housing Strategy and \$30 million in affordable housing as part of the Housing Long-Range Financial Plan.

Another \$4.6 million will go to increase the capacity of the City's family and emergency shelters.

City council rejected a motion to freeze transit fares in 2024 that would have cost the average household \$8. Instead fares will be going up 2.5 per cent overall to keep them in line with the tax increase. In fact, user fees will be going up by 2.5 per cent across the board including recreational fees and facility rental fees.

As for the east end, Orléans South-Navan will get \$1.35 million in 2024 and \$7.7 million in 2025 for a new district park located beside

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2 ►



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COMMUNITY BRIEFS

Christmas Angels event raises \$8K for families with seriously ill children

ORLÉANS – On Saturday, Dec 9, the Taproom 260 restaurant and entertainment venue hosted the Christmas Angels fundraising event to raise money for families with children who are undergoing treatment for life-threatening illnesses. The evening featured music by three different bands – The Beer Nuts, Spitfire 91 and Right On Special – who donated their time to entertain the crowd. Over \$8,000 was raised through a silent auction and raffle with dozens of prizes donated by local businesses. The annual event was once again made possible thanks to Taproom 260 owners Andrew and Anne Marie Quincy, manager Anne Petersen, lead organizer Patrick Lowell and Long and McQuade which has donated the sound equipment for the past 12 years.

Orléans blind-deaf athlete Kevin Frost wraps up another successful year

ORLÉANS – It's been a heck of a year for Orléans blind-deaf athlete Kevin Frost. After successful careers in speed-skating and cycling, Frost took up golfing more six years ago. His progression in the sport has been nothing short of incredible. In the past year alone, he finished first in the B2 category (under five degrees of vision) at the Canadian Blind Golfing Championships, third at the North America Blind Golfers Championship in San Antonio, Texas and seventh at the World Championships in South Africa. Golfers who are blind are accompanied by a "caddie", who gives them the direction and distance for each shot. The rest is up to them. Away from links, Frost was given a new service dog in August after his old service, Louis, had to be retired last year. Having to adapt to his new service dog, Woody, was a fairly short process, but not without its challenges for both man and dog. As the calendar is about to turn over to another year, Frost is looking forward to getting back on the links and the chance to improve on his results in 2023. In the meantime, sales of his book *Deaf Blind Champion: A True Story of Hope, Inspiration, and Excellence in Sport and Life* continue to do well. You can purchase a copy for yourself or as a present for someone on your Christmas list on Amazon.



City to invest more money in parks and roads in Orléans

Continued from page 3

the Francois Dupuis Recreation Centre in Avalon; monies to resurface Frank Kenny Road between Russell and Colonial, Innes Road between Portobello and Frank Kenny, and Wall Road between Mer-Bleue and Tenth Line; and intersection modifications at Tenth Line and Brian Coburn.

Orléans East-Cumberland will get the following:

- \$200,000 to replace swings and pathways at Des Pionniers Park;
- \$495,000 for renewal work at the Ray Friel Recreation Complex, including the replacement of the wave system;
- \$4.665 million to resurface Innes Road from Portobello to Frank Kenny;
- \$2.695 million to resurface Innes Road from Jeanne d'Arc Blvd. to Tenth Line;
- \$575,000 for the renewal of the township bridge on Wilhaven Road;
- \$150,000 to renew the pathways in Queensway Ridge Park;
- \$32,000 to replace the baseball fence at Queenswood Ridge Park;
- \$75,000 for temporary traffic-calming measures throughout the ward.

Meanwhile, residents in Orléans West-Innes Ward can expect the following in 2024:

- \$400,000 for a new spray pad at Roy Park in Chapel Hill;
- \$619,000 to replace the curbs and resurface the parking lot at the Orléans Library and Barrington Park;
- \$112,000 to replace the baseball fencing at Blackburn Park;
- \$139,000 for new pathways to connect Willowbark Drive to Windflower Way and Anglehart Avenue to Du Grand Bois Avenue;
- \$936,000 to resurface Meadowglen Drive from Orléans Blvd. to Boyer Road;
- \$2.7 million to resurface Innes Road from Jeanne d'Arc Blvd. to Tenth Line Road.
- \$31,000 for a dedicated left-turn signal from Innes Road to Viseneau Drive;
- Monies for a new dedicated left-turn signal on Bearbrook Road at Westpark Drive into Louis Riel high school;
- Monies to design a sidewalk linking Notre Dame Road to Jeanne d'Arc Blvd. with completion expected in 2025/26.



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2023 turned out to be a rough ride in more ways than one

By Fred Sherwin
The Orléans Star

2023 will be remembered as the year two letters became a household word. Before the year began, the use of the letters AI in the English vernacular was the sole domain of

2023: The year in review

IT geeks and video game nerds – no offence to video-gamers.

As the year comes to a close, everyone has used the term AI in talking about everything from options on a new car to the future of the human race itself.

The one single event that catapulted AI into the mainstream happened at the tail end of 2022 when OpenAI released ChatGPT on an unsuspecting world. After that, it didn't take long for ChatGPT to become the most controversial technological tool in recent memory, sparking debate about the authenticity of everything from university essays to stories in the local newspapers.

Within months, dozens of get-rich-quick schemes started popping up in social media

platforms using AI-generated endorsements from famous celebrities without their approval and often without their knowledge – the most notorious being Quantum AI which an AI-generated script over a video of Elon Musk speaking at a conference. The irony is that Musk is the founder and owner of Open AI.

Here in Ottawa, 2023 will be remembered as the year the city's transit system came under fire for piling up staggering losses financially and staggering setbacks in Phase 2 of the LRT.

In August, a staff report suggested that OC Transpo would incur \$39 million in losses by the end of the year. Within two months, that estimate rose to more than \$50 million, sparking recommendations from cutting services and laying off drivers to increasing fares and potentially the transit levy on residential property taxes.

What is at issue is a lack of customers. More than 18 months after the COVID pandemic, ridership is still less than 75 per cent of what it was before the pandemic. The single biggest reason for the low ridership numbers is the federal government's decision to allow employees to work from home



An explosion rocked the Avalon Vista community on Feb. 15, destroying four homes under construction and sending eight people to hospital. Kody Troy Crosby, 35, was found guilty for deliberately causing the blast and sentenced to five years in prison. FILE PHOTO

for a maximum of three days a week – a move that was entrenched in the collective bargaining agreement reached to end a 12-day strike by Treasury Board and Canada Revenue Agency employees in May.

As for the LRT, it was just one bad news story after another in 2023, beginning with more weather and equipment-related shutdowns last winter to a constantly

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16

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Caring community answers the call yet again

By Fred Sherwin
The Orléans Star

Canada may be caught in a recession, but that hasn't stopped the Orléans community from opening up their hearts and their wallets to help their fellow residents.

The season of giving started with Santa's Parade of Lights when a record crowd filled the firefighters' boots and used the Tap the Boot app to raise more than \$25,000 and donate over 8,000 toys.

Although Orléans residents have always been generous in the past, parade organizer Bob Rainboth was blown away by both the sheer number of people who came out to see the parade and the money and toys they donated.

"It was such a thrill to see 150,000 plus people enjoying the parade, especially the young ones, but it was an even bigger thrill to see them donate so much money and toys, which will be used to help lessen the burden for a lot of families this Christmas," says Rainboth.

On Dec. 9, hundreds of people packed the Taproom260 restaurant and concert venue on Centrum Blvd. to support the Christmas Angels event and help raise more than \$10,000 in the process the money will be

used to purchase gift cards for children who are being treated for severe illnesses such as cancer.

In between the Parade of Lights and the Christmas Angels fundraising event, local firefighters held their annual Christmas food drive on Saturday, Dec 2. Nearly 14,780 food items were collected at participating grocery stores throughout Orléans along with more than \$18,000 in monetary donations in support of the Orléans-Cumberland Community Resource Centre.

The food and money will not only help feed financially challenged families over the holidays, it will go a long way to keeping food on the shelves of the Resource Centre's food bank well into February. It also augments the items the food bank has received from donors and supporters of the OCCRC's Christmas program.

Each year, the Resource Centre offers assistance in the form of toys and seasonal food items to families facing financial hardship. This year, more than 360 families registered for the program.

Local businesses and organizations can support the program by making a lump sum contribution, the amount of which is based on the size of the family they wish to



Fire fighters, volunteers and staff at the Orléans-Cumberland Community Resource Centre all pitched in to make this year's Orléans Fire Fighters Food Drive another huge success. FRED SHERWIN PHOTO

support. The money is then used to buy gift cards and specialty food items.

While Christmas is only a few days away, the OCCRC is still encouraging members of the community to donate to the program and the food bank.

Although area residents have been incred-

ibly generous again this year, the food drive fell 10 per cent short of last year's total. In the meantime, demand for emergency food supplies is at an all-time high.

To donate simply drop by the OCCRC located in the Centrum Plaza across from the Shenkman Arts Centre or visit croc.ca.

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2023

What can be said about the year we've just been through? I've been contemplating this editorial for several weeks now trying to come up with some positive pearls from the past 12 months, but I'm hard pressed to find any except for the fact that it's over.

There is nothing positive to say about a year that began with the ongoing war in Ukraine and will end with the continuing military action in Gaza that has so far resulted in the deaths of over 12,000 people including more than 6,000 children.

2023 began with Canada and much of the western world sliding into a recession. By February we were already in one.

The pandemic years were already tough enough on small businesses, but at least there were government programs available to keep most of them afloat. 2022 was supposed to be a bounce-back year, but lingering supply chain issues caused by the pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine resulted in runaway inflation which brought any expectations of rebound year crashing to the ground. Still, most small businesses were just happy to be open again even if sales weren't what they had hoped. At least, they could look forward to 2023.

In spite of the claims by economists that we were in a recession, things actually started looking up for small businesses in the spring, especially compared to the three previous years. But things started to slow down again over the summer. Local restaurants and other small businesses could feel and see a shift in their sales that continued through the fall.

Some have hopes that things will pick up over the holiday season as they traditionally do, but they are not so optimistic about the next few months. And then there's the issue of having to pay back their CERB loans. It's the program which provided a \$60,000 loan to small businesses during the pandemic of which \$20,000 would be forgiven if they paid \$40,000 back by the end of the year. The only problem is that due to the failure of the economy to bounce back from the pandemic, most small businesses are still having trouble trying to pay their rent, let alone pay off a \$40,000 loan.

The Canadian government has since put in place an 18-day extension to pay the \$40,000 back. And there's an additional lifeline of 67 days if you apply for it through the bank. But the reality is they are no more able to pay the money back on Jan. 18 or Mar. 25, than they are today.

It has not been a good run for most small businesses. 2023 started out with a sense of optimism in the air. "It couldn't be any worse than 2022," they thought. If it wasn't worse, it definitely wasn't much better.

What lies ahead in 2024 is anybody's guess. The hope is that the recession will end soon, people will start spending their money and all will be right with the world. You and I can help turn that hope into a reality by supporting local businesses here in Orléans. Not just during the holiday season but over the coming months as well. Make it your New Year's resolution and keep it this time.

— Fred Sherwin, editor

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THIS IS ONE FAD THAT HAS
REACHED THE END OF ITS SHELF LIFE



Generosity of Orléans residents and businesses is heart-warming

As we approach the end of 2023, I would like to wish the residents of Orléans a very Merry Christmas, happy holidays and a happy New Year!

Ontario is facing an affordability crisis and for many in our community, this year has not been an easy one. Many have struggled to pay the bills, find an affordable place to call home, access child-care or simply to be seen by a family doctor. I share your concerns and frustrations and have been fighting for you at Queen's Park.

But I also know that Orléans residents have stepped up to help our neighbours and friends in need during these tough times.

Whether it was delivering food and supplies, providing mental health supports, organizing food drives or raising funds for services clubs and religious institutions, Orléans residents have once again shown what it means to be exemplary citizens and have made Orléans a better place to live.

I want to thank the District 7 firefighters with the Ottawa Fire Services and the Orléans-Cumberland Community Resource Centre (OCCRC) for hosting their annual food drive in Orléans. Through all your generous donations, 14,820 food items were

collected and over \$12,000 in monetary donations were made in support of the OCCRC.

The Dominion City Brewing Co also hosted an incredible Christmas market with carolers, Santa Claus, a meat press, and last but not least, some of their finest beer. Christmas markets like this help bring our community together, so I am thankful for all of Ottawa's small businesses who go out of their way to organize these

fun festive events.

Just like small businesses, parents and students have also stepped up during the season of giving. I was happy to attend Cairine Wilson Secondary School's Annual Holiday Craft Fair, which features over 100 vendors offering a variety of crafts, holiday décor, baked goods, and so much more! Each year, they fund-raise around \$4,500 in support of student learning.

As we celebrate the holiday season, I encourage you to continue to support our local organizations and if you can be generous with your donations.

I hope you are all able to spend quality time with family, friends, and loved ones.

Once again, I am wishing you all a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year!



**Queen's
Park
Corner**

Stephen Blais

Presenting the 31st annual Fredzee Awards

Welcome to the 31st edition of the annual Fredzee awards. This where I get to name some of year's biggest winners and losers and hand out a few awards.

When I came up with the first Fredzee Awards 31 years ago, I did so to avoid having to write a real column. I figured, "How difficult could it be?"

Turns out, in the years when there's been a lot going on it, almost writes itself. Unfortunately, 2023 has not been one of those years. In fact, aside from the never-ending Trump saga south of the border and the horrific conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza, it's been a pretty boring year, especially here in Canada, and particularly here in Ottawa.

So it was a Herculean effort to make this year's selections as non-lame as possible. Anyway here are they are... the 2023 Fredzee Awards. Please hold your applause until the end.

Biggest Local Stories of 2023

- 1) The Avalon explosion. The blast, which occurred on Feb. 15, destroyed four homes under construction, sent eight people to hospital and damaged several residences nearby.
- 2) Federal public workers go on strike for 15 days in April causing a backlog in passport applications and other federal services.
- 3) The trial for the organizers of the so-called Freedom Convoy protest in downtown Ottawa in 2022. The trial went on for 30 days in September and October before adjournment. It will continue in 2024.



Non-story of the Year

To Justin and Sophie Gregoire Trudeau's separation. I know – I had to be reminded about it too.

Newsmakers of the Year

Travis Kelcey and Taylor Swift – As much as I wanted to keep them off this list, the fact that they were among the top searched names on Google says it all.

The Isn't That Ironic Award

To this year's Burning Man Festival which was declared a disaster area after torrential rains completely flooded the festival site, leaving thousands of attendees stranded for two days without food or proper sanitation services. Why is it ironic? The festival is held in Nevada in what normally is a desert.

The Things That Make You Go Hmmm Award

A 24-year-old Afghanistan man had a 7-centimetre long pencil removed from his head by German surgeons after he complained about blurred vision and headaches. Apparently, the pencil got lodged in his head during an accident that

happened about 15 years ago when he was only nine.

The WTF Award

In a story right out of a plot for a horror movie, household goldfish are being flushed down the toilet and ending up in the Great Lakes where they grow into 16-inch monsters threatening the lakes' ecosystem.

The We've Seen This Movie Before Award

goes to the South African pilot who, while flying a private charter, saw a Cape cobra, whose bite can kill someone in as little as an hour, under his seat. The quick-thinking pilot immediately turned the plane around and landed at the nearest airport, during which the snake disappeared never to be seen again.

The I'd Rather Have A Lump of Coal Award

To the woman in Iowa who handed out three types of pierogies on Hallowe'en with a sign "Only one pierogi per child." Not sure how many she had left over, but we're guessing quite a few.

The Dumbass Tourist Award

To the tourists whose gondola capsized and sank in Venice, Italy throwing them all into the drink after they refused to stop taking selfies.

The Wait 'Til Your Father Gets Home Award

To the 12-year-old boy in Ann Arbor, Michigan, who stole a forklift in November

after someone left the keys in the ignition. The boy ended up leading police on a low-speed chase during which 10 parked cars were destroyed.

The He Couldn't Wait To Go To School Award

To the nine-year-old Saskatoon boy who stole a city bus in September and took it on a three-block joyride in his pyjamas. The bus eventually came to a stop after it bumped into a truck and another city bus. Nobody was injured, although the bus suffered a cracked windshield and broken mirror.

The Things That Make You Go Hmmm Award # 2

To the Arkansas man who wanted a drink so badly he decided to throw a cinder block through a liquor store window, grab some booze and run. Unfortunately for the would-be thief, the window was made of plexiglass causing the cinder block to bounce back and hit him in the head and knock him unconscious. The whole event was caught on videotape.

A Special Place in Heaven

To Matthew Perry, Shane MacGowan, Bob Barker, Gordon Pinsent, Sinéad O'Connor, Tina Turner, Jimmy Buffett, Paul "Peewee Herman" Reubens, Robbie Robertson, Gordon Lightfoot, Rosalynn Carter, Dick Butkus, Suzanne Somers, Tony Bennett, Jim Brown and the Iron Sheik to name just a few of the celebrities who passed away in 2023.



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East end councillor refuses to do the same over and over again

In her book *Sudden Death*, civil rights activist Rita Mae Brown writes – “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.” – a quote that is often wrongly attributed to Albert Einstein.

Every year, the east end receives a paltry list of investments representing a smaller and smaller slice of this city’s pie.

Despite the best intentions of some, including the Mayor and his team, we’re left with vague assumptions, underfunded promises, and another “maybe next year.”

This year, I said no. That’s not good enough. We deserve better. We deserve better than to come to a budget discussion with no substantial projects in our suburb to discuss.

We deserve better than getting zero out of 63 proposals to improve the aging infrastructure in our neighborhood, all of which were suggested by you over the past year.

So, I will not do the same thing over and over again. I will not support a budget that doesn’t add anything of real substance to the

east end while we let the streets of Orléans fall apart.

We must not take a whole year to design a trail that already exists or carry out a geo-

technical study for a street that’s in such poor condition it is beyond simply being resurfaced, even though staff have been telling me for five years that it’s fine.

We cannot allow our festival square to fall into

such a state that the elderly can’t even walk down the street without tripping and falling, or continue to pretend that there’s nothing wrong with whole rows of lampposts being broken for over a year without any solution to improve safety, even temporarily.

We cannot invest nothing in vital infrastructure connections to support growth in south Orléans, or treat our rural village neighbors as second-class citizens, ignoring their infrastructure needs by transferring their property tax dollars to other parts of the city

If I had supported this year’s budget, I’d be consenting to the east end being ignored yet again. I did not consent. And so I voted against it.



Matt Luloff

Orléans East-Cumberland

Budget 2024 includes investments in Ward 19’s parks and roads

In a marathon session, council successfully greenlit the \$5.8 billion 2024 City of Ottawa Budget, maintaining a 2.5% cap on property tax increases despite persistent inflation.

My unwavering advocacy for Orléans South-Navan has yielded results, securing important investments for the ward.

Budget 2024 is investing over \$17 million into revamping our ward’s roads including several sections of Innes Road, and the much-anticipated completion of Frank Kenny Road between Russell and Colonial. The city will also spend nearly a half million dollars on new multi-use pathways along Orléans Blvd., Pineglade, Esprit, and Brockstone, plus \$1.9 million for bridge rehabilitation in our rural area.

Responding to my concerns after last year’s engineering review, the problematic intersection at Brian Coburn and Tenth Line is now included in the city’s 2024 Network Modification Program. Residents can expect to see improvements that will make the intersection safer and more efficient.

Parks are getting a decent slice of the

pie too. There’s \$1.3 million for kick-starting the François Dupuis Park, with an additional \$8 million coming in 2025. And another investment in our beloved

Miracle League will expand the fully accessible playground at Notre-Dame-des-Champs Park.

While I’ll give credit where it’s due, I can’t help but think our rapidly growing ward needs more than our roads repaired

and parks expanded. This budget, although seemingly balanced, could do more to tackle our pressing mobility issues. Positive chats with the Mayor and staff have given me confidence that a plan to balance transportation challenges with the breakneck pace of development in Ward 19 will be front and center for the city in 2024.

I consider budget consultations to be a year-round activity and want to thank you for your collaboration. Your engagement and ongoing feedback are crucial in shaping our community’s priorities. I look forward to the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead in 2024. Until then, I’m wishing you a very happy holiday and cheers to a New Year!



Catherine Kitts

Orléans South-Navan

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Orléans Outstanding Youth Award recipients announced

By Fred Sherwin
The Orléans Star

The *Orléans Star* is proud to announce the recipients of this year's Orléans Outstanding Youth Awards.

The Orléans Outstanding Youth Awards were first launched in 2005 as a way to recognize the many accomplishments of young people living in Orléans and the surrounding community.

They are unique in that there are no specific categories, instead individuals can be nominated for their achievements in a given area or in a combination of areas.

The *Orléans Star* received 21 nominations in total this year and each one was deemed as being deserving of receiving an Outstanding Youth Award.

The list includes the two top students of the 2022-2023 graduating class, one from the English school boards and one from the French boards, one of the top young bowlers

in the province, two of the top high school track athletes in the province, two members of the Cairine Wilson Secondary School improv team that won the city championship last year and placed fifth at the national championship.

Each recipient will receive their personalized trophy during an award ceremony at École secondaire Béatrice-Desloges on Sunday, Jan. 7 which will feature performances by several talented local musicians and dancers.

The Orléans Outstanding Youth Awards would not be possible without the generous support of presenting sponsors Collège La Cité, Université St.-Paul and Collège Boréal; platinum level sponsor Richcraft Homes; gold level sponsor M.L. Bradley Ltd. and more than a dozen individual award sponsors.

Profiles of all 21 recipients will be published in the *Orléans Star* for several weeks following the award ceremony.

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MATTHEW LULOFF
Orléans East-Cumberland
Orléans-Est-Cumberland



LAURA DUDAS
Orléans West-Innes
Orléans-Ouest-Innes



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The Help Our Students Program (HOST Program) was founded in 2010 by two local friends to help Ottawa students living in difficult financial circumstances stay in high school until they graduate.



Help Our Students
PROGRAM

These students, selected by their school, are working hard to stay in school but it isn't easy for them. In far too many cases, they don't know when their next meal will be, they wear hand-me-downs all through high school and, if they go out with their friends, they certainly can't buy anything.

Many need to either quit school to get a job to support their family or take on too many part-time hours that cuts the amount of time they have for schoolwork. The HOST Program now gives the students \$150 per month (September to June), sent directly to their own RBC bank account. The HOST Program gives them hope that they may be the first in the family to graduate high school, hope to go to college or university, and hope to realize their dreams.

"When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, my family was hit hard. So hard, that I wasn't sure I could even graduate high school. My family needed me to drop out so I could help put food on the table. Then, one day, I was called into the guidance counsellor's office and told some remarkable news – I had been selected to receive an award, so I could keep going to school. I would be given \$110 per month for the school year. Having that money in my pocket changed my life dramatically. Suddenly, I could contribute to the family by buying groceries. I also bought shoes for my two little sisters, which we could not afford before. But most importantly, Help Our Students gave me hope.

Not only did I graduate high school, but I am currently in my second year of college at Algonquin College, specializing in Child and Youth Social Work. Given my own personal life experiences, I have a deep love for social workers. One day, I hope to pay it forward and become part of that vital team. My goal is to help children in difficult situations by giving underprivileged families a chance to learn and grow together. I would like to provide families with the tools to accomplish stability for themselves and improve their daily lives.

Thank you, Help Our Students, for changing my life and giving me hope for the future."

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Please visit our website at
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The HOST Program, a registered charity (CRA # 814474730 RR001), is a rarity:
100% of all donations go to a student in need.
The Board of Directors pays all administrative costs.

Grassroots student assistance program began in Orléans

By Jeff Todd

Courtesy of the Ottawa Business Journal

In today's world, where society's problems seem more complicated than ever, a grass-roots charity in Ottawa is proving that even the smallest gifts can have a big impact. For the past 12 years, Help Our Students has been quietly changing the lives of disadvantaged high school students, \$100 at a time.

"Even today, the stories of these students bring me to tears," says Richard Lussier, the program's founder. "For example, one student is able to go to school and work fewer hours at his part-time job because there is money to help feed his siblings. Another said she was able to buy a dress for the prom when she graduated. It was the first time in her life she felt normal. But really, it is giving these young people hope. It opens up a world to them that they didn't know could exist."

The concept is simple: provide a struggling student with \$100 per month for a year so he or she can graduate high school. The monthly stipend increased to \$150 last September to account for the rising cost of living.

The concept began in 2010 with two students at St. Matthew High School and one at Cairine Wilson Secondary School.

Today, Help Our Students has assisted more than 800 teenagers in the Ottawa area. More than 200 students are enrolled in the program this year alone and in December 2022 this registered charity will surpass \$1 million in disbursements to some of the most vulnerable youth in the city.

Lussier has the letters to prove it. As part of enrolment in the program, students are required to pen a letter on how the money changed their life.

"Your money helped me put clean clothes on my body, helped me put food on the table," one student wrote. "You made it easier for me to come to school and actually get work done. Before all the help, I was stressed and insecure about never having anything. I was able to help my mom, friends and some family over time. I really wish there was a way I could repay you. I don't know where I would be without you."

For Leah Barbe, a graduate of John McCraw Secondary School, she remembers the moment a guidance counsellor called her into the office with the news.

She was just 15 at the time. In addition to her family's financial problems, she and her younger sister were dealing with other issues in the home.

"I was dealing with a lot of difficulties," explains Barbe, now 18 years old. "The guidance counselor sat me down and told me, 'I have some really good news. Take a couple deep breaths.'"

That was in December 2020. Barbe received this support until June 2022, when she graduated high school.

"For the first time in my life, it provided a sense of security," Barbe says. "It put me in control, which is something I very much enjoyed. If I needed to get something, I had the money to get it. If I didn't want to spend it, I could save for my future."

And, for the most part, that's exactly what she did.

Barbe says she saved the majority of the money, which kept her focused on her goals. She will attend Brock University in the fall for child and youth studies, with the goal of becoming a kindergarten teacher.

Of the 200 or so students now in the program, the funds are spread out among 62 high schools in Ottawa, Lussier says, representing about three kids per school.

Teachers and staff nominate deserving students and a school committee makes selections. After that, Lussier arranges a monthly wire transfer and students are free to spend the funds as they wish.

According to Lussier, the fact that Help Our Students does not micromanage how students spend the money is important. After all, most of the students in the program have never had a bank account before. A few might spend the money right away, Lussier admits. Others budget every penny and even put small amounts aside for "future savings", like Barbe did.

The point, he explains, is that students are given the confidence to take control of their lives. They can achieve success or make mistakes. While the choices students make

can vary, the overall results are hard to argue with. According to Lussier, more than 30 per cent of the students in last year's program not only graduated high school, but were accepted into college or university.

"I'm convinced that your financial assistance has kept many students from dropping out of school and is literally saving lives and providing students with a chance of a brighter future," says Thomas D'Amico, director of education at Ottawa Catholic School Board.

Lussier knows the power of second chances firsthand. In 1962, at the age 16, Lussier called his father from a pay phone in Dorval, Que. He was struggling, academical-

ly and financially, and told his dad he'd be dropping out of school. Not so fast, said his father, who drove from Cornwall to Dorval that day and handed Lussier \$100. Now go back to school, he told his son.

The family didn't exactly have \$100 to spare. Growing up, Lussier remembers that, for every paycheque that came in, cash was stuffed into envelopes marked rent, food and other expenses, to ensure there was enough left at the end of the month.

Lussier stayed in school and eventually transferred to the Royal Military College in Kingston

and graduated with a commerce degree. After a few twists and turns, he got a finance job at a now closed military hospital in Canada before landing a position at the National Arts Centre in accounts payable. Lussier would rise to the position of managing director before retiring at the age of 50 with a pension.

But he never forgot where he came from. Lussier knew he wanted to dedicate the rest of his life to helping others, he just didn't know how. And then he remembered that \$100 from his father, which changed the trajectory of his life. He has dedicated his

life to Help Our Students ever since.

"I am very spiritual and I believe that when I die, I am going to stand there and someone is going to say to me, 'I gave you a lot. What did you do with your life?'" Lussier explains. "I have a family. I have a house and not a single thing to complain about. I need to stand there and say, 'This is what I did.'"

Help Our Students has an impressive and growing group of supporters and board directors, including David H. Hill, senior partner at Perley-Roberson, Hill & McDougall LLP; Carman Joynt, retired partner with Deloitte & Touche and past chair of the board at the Royal Canadian Mint; Mohamed Sheibami, partner at Deloitte Canada; and, most recently, Peter Nicholson, president of the Foundation WCPD.

"When Richard (Lussier) reached out to me, I had never heard of Help Our Students," Nicholson says. "Put simply, I was blown away by both his personal story and the direct impact this charity is making in the lives of students. The impact is A to B — it is efficient and easy to understand. I look forward to raising more awareness for the program."

The power of the program, according to Lussier, is its simplicity. Donors love the fact that not one penny goes toward overhead — it all ends up in the pockets of high school students.

Lussier and his wife, along with the board, run every aspect of Help Our Students, although they know that this arrangement can't last forever. Now 76, Lussier has one eye on the present and another on the future. With hundreds of alumni and hundreds more students every year, he knows Help Our Students will one day need a clear successor to lead the program.

For now, Lussier is focused on the next month and the next \$150, when another student's life might change.

"It gives students hope for the world, that there are good outcomes for hard work," Barbe says. "It is encouragement. Especially going through high school, it can seem draining and pointless at times. But it's not. You should just do the best you can and be a good person."

To learn more about Help Our Students, or to make a donation, visit helpourstudentsprogram.com

(Jeff Todd is vice-president of marketing and communications at Foundation WCPD and president-elect of AFP Ottawa.)



Help Our Students PROGRAM



Richard Lussier,
Co-founder and CEO
Help Our Students



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Take a tour of Orléans' best and brightest light displays

By Fred Sherwin
The Orléans Star

Orléans has always had a reputation for having some of the best, most brightly decorated houses in Ottawa largely due to the residents of one street in particular – Taffy Lane. The small street in Orléans Wood has become a mecca for fans of exterior residential Christmas display enthusiasts for more than 40 years now and at one time was featured in *Maclean's* magazine.

One of the most brightly decorated houses on the street belongs to Peter Abercrombie, who is one of the four original residents who bought houses on the street in 1977.

The home is easily identifiable by the eight-foot wooden cutout of Frosty the Snowman carrying a candy cane in the front yard and a second cutout showing the Grinch tying a horn on the head of his faithful dog.

The home hasn't always looked the same as it does now. In the first few years that the Abercrombies lived on Taffy Lane, the house was decorated modestly with a few strings of lights. Over the years, he kept adding to it, often making decorations on his own.

One of the things you will notice about the Abercrombie's front yard Christmas display is that he doesn't use a lot of inflatables. Instead, he relies on wooden cutouts and motion lighting to create a captivating experience that has stood the test of time.

The best way to enjoy the light displays on the Taffy Lane is to leave your car on Sugar Creek Way and proceed to the street on foot. It should take you anywhere from 30 to 40 minutes to stroll down the street and return to your vehicle.

After driving or walking down Taffy Lane, turn left on to Sugar Creek Way where you will find the home of Tony and Jocelyne Sullivan who, along with family friend Bob

Presland, decorate their house every year to raise money for local charities. Last year, visitors to their display donated more than \$15,000 to the cause.

When you finish walking down Taffy Lane, you should return to your car by walking down Sugar Creek Way where you will find the home of Tony Sullivan who uses the fantastic holiday display to raise thousands of dollars for local charities with a little help from his buddy Bob Presland. The pair call themselves the Salt Water Santas because they both hail from Newfoundland.

When you eventually get back into your car, take Orléans Blvd. south to Lumberman Way on the other side of the Hwy. 174 overpass. Turn left on to Lumberman Way and then right on to Grey Nuns Drive. Follow Grey Nuns to Fieldstone Crescent where you will see two brightly lit residences – one at 1678 Grey Nuns Drive and the other just on the corner at 1692 Fieldstone.

From there, find your way back to St. Joseph Blvd. and turn left. Drive two blocks eastbound and turn left again onto Dussere Street across from the St. Hubert.

Dussere runs into Cholette Crescent where you will find the Giroux residence at 1143 Cholette Cres. on the left. There is another nicely decorated house beside it at 1135 Cholette Cres. From there, take Dussere back to St. Joseph Blvd., take a right and drive back to Orléans Blvd. where you will turn right again as if you heading back to Taffy Lane. You can also stop at the Tim Horton's on Orléans Blvd. for a hot chocolate before continue north to Jeanne d'Arc Blvd.

Once you get to Jeanne d'Arc Blvd., turn right and head east until you come to Lawnsberry Crescent. Turn right on Lawnsberry and then right again on Pintail



The Zintel residence on Henn Drive in Navan is the latest addition to the best and brightest Christmas displays in the east end. STAR PHOTO

Terrace which will take you to the Albert residence where the father and son team of Brian and Patrick Albert have combined more than 40 inflatable figures with over 20,000 lights syn-chronized to Christmas music.

From Pintail, get back on to Jeanne d'Arc Blvd. and take it to Tenth Line Road where you will head south to Charlemagne Blvd. Turn left on to Charlemagne and left again on to Princess Louise Street which has a nice light display on the left.

Once you're on Princess Louise, go to Moncrest Drive and turn left which will take you to Cheverny Crescent. Once there, you will see another wonderfully decorated house at the corner of Cheverny and Brissac Way.

From Cheverny, I recommend making your way to Trim Road and heading south to the village of Navan and Henn Drive where

you can see the newest addition to the list of the best and brightest Christmas displays in the east end at the Zintel residence.

Trust me: it's well worth the 10-minute drive from Orléans and you will see a number of nicely decorated houses on Trim Road along the way. There is also a wonderful display on Navan Road, just east of Trim.

The Zintels are also accepting donations for the Orléans-Cumberland Community Resource Centre's Christmas program in support local families in financial crisis.

Other houses that are worth checking out if you have the time are at 6086 Rivercrest Dr. in Chapel Hill, 1646 Trim Road between Watters and Portobello, and 412 Larkhaven Cres. in Queenswood Heights.

So pack the kids in the car. Fill up a thermos of hot chocolate and take the kids on a magical Christmas light tour. Who knows? It may just become a family tradition.



The Abercrombie residence on Taffy Lane in Convent Glen, left, is just one of the reasons why the little street attracts hundreds of Christmas display enthusiasts every year. The home on the right is located just around the corner from Taffy Lane on Sugar Creek Way. STAFF PHOTOS



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The Garlic King continues to rule in Orléans

STAR STAFF – Adel Azzi, aka The Garlic King, has been supporting the local community for more 27 years.

From his earliest days operating out of a small storefront on St. Joseph Blvd. next to the Dairy Queen, Azzi has sponsored local athletes and sports teams, provided food for everything from Santa's Parade of Lights to school assemblies, fed frontline workers during the COVID pandemic and the list goes on and on.

Who can ever forget his famous catch phrase, "I am the Garlic King. I can do anything!"

Most recently, Azzi supplied all the food for the paramedic ride ceremony at Ottawa City Hall in September, and was also one of the suppliers for food for the Help Santa Toy Parade in Ottawa.

He maybe the king of garlic with the best shawarma in town, but he also the king of philanthropy when it comes to small businesses which is no small feat, especially in the aftermath of pandemic which has put a pinch on many restaurants thanks to the rising cost of food.

When he wears his regal robes and crown, Azzi is one of the most recognizable personalities in Orléans, if not THE most recognizable. He and his purple van with the dome on top has become a staple of the Parade of Lights and he's made guest appearances on local TV and radio countless times..

It's hard to believe that when the Garlic King first opened in Orléans – some people may still remember the business' original name Really Lebanese – they were only the

second shawarma restaurant in the community to choose from. Now Ottawa is the shawarma capital of Canada and Adel Azzi is the king.

Azzi is especially proud of the fact that The Garlic King restaurant was one of the first shawarma restaurants in Ottawa to offer gluten-free options.

When you walk into the Garlic King's current location at 2586 St. Joseph Blvd., you are always greeted with a smile and a warm home-style welcome. The restaurant is not fancy or glitzy, but as the Garlic King says, "You can't eat table clothes and fancy dishes."

As the year draws to a close the Garlic King and his extended family would like to wish everyone a very Merry Christmas and all the best in 2024



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Passing of the torch at Century 21 Action Power Team

Century 21 Action Power Team
Special to the Orléans Star

CENTURY 21 Action Power Team Ltd., whose offices are located on Youville Drive in Orléans, has recently come under new ownership after its acquisition by brokers Marc-André Perrier and Stephen George.

Rather than an acquisition, it's more like a passing of the torch as Perrier and George take over the reins from long-term owners Pasquale Ricciuti and Suzanne Robinson, who first opened the Orléans office 45 years ago.

The pair began their real estate careers with CENTURY 21 and have been inspired by the direction that CENTURY 21 Canada is heading. They saw an incredible opportunity to carry forward the legacy built by Ricciuti and Robinson, who will remain with the Action Power Team as brokers.

"We're passionate about growth and innovation," says Perrier. "We want to expand our team, embrace emerging technologies, and leverage all the tools that CENTURY 21 Canada provides."

For George, the time was right to bring a fresh perspective to the industry.

"We've witnessed significant change during our time here," he explains. "We want to

take advantage of the cutting-edge technology and new opportunities that CENTURY 21 Canada offers to its brokerages."

Perrier's loyalty to the CENTURY 21 brand is fueled not only by the robust suite of tools and training programs available but also by the networking opportunities the company provides. He praises the brand's annual OneC21 conference, where like-minded CENTURY 21 professionals come together to connect and learn.

"Our recent experience at the OneC21 conference was incredible," Perrier shares. "We enjoyed the networking opportunities and recognized how CENTURY 21 Canada is leading the way in modernizing the real estate industry."

George is equally impressed by the brand's commitment to staying ahead of the curve. "CENTURY 21 Canada is continuously improving their technology offerings," he explains. "Their websites for every agent and their partnership with Moxi-Works are just two examples. We knew our brokerage could become even more future-ready."

Looking ahead, the new owners have innovative plans for their brokerage. They aim to attract like-minded agents that share the



Marc-André Perrier and Stephen George stand outside the CENTURY 21 Action Power Team office on Youville Drive. PHOTO SUPPLIED

brokerage's values and who can thrive in the ever-changing real estate landscape.

Their strategy involves leveraging their local expertise and focusing on the distinctive communities of Ottawa and the surrounding regions.

"It's all about serving our local commu-

nities and continuing to give back," says George. "We want to provide exceptional service and expertise in our specific areas."

CENTURY 21 Action Power Team Ltd. has been operating in Ottawa since 1978, making it one of the oldest franchises in the CENTURY 21 Canada system.

Merry Christmas



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Ring in the New Year at Caravela Restaurante on Innes Rd.

STAR STAFF – Can't afford to go down south this holiday season? Then take a culinary trip to Portugal by visiting Caravela Restaurante on Innes Road, where you can enjoy the very best in Portuguese cuisine.

When owner Fernando Diniz first opened the restaurant in December 2016, his goal was to bring a "Taste of Portugal" to food lovers in Orléans.

Born and raised on the island of Terceira in the Azores, Diniz joined forces with Chef Tom Moore, formerly of the hugely popular El Meson restaurant in New Edinburgh, to produce a menu that is heavy on seafood native to the Portuguese islands, mixed with dishes from the mainland. He also hired his friend Henrique Sousa, who also worked at El Meson, to act as maître d' and chief sommelier.

The response from local diners continues to be overwhelming, and for good reason – the food is plentiful and delicious.

Whether you order traditional dishes like the Cataplana, which is a type of seafood stew native to the Algarve region,

or the Alcatra à Terceira which is a pot roast that is slow-cooked after marinating for 24 hours in red wine, onions and garlic, you cannot go wrong.

Other house specialties include chicken, beef or shrimp skewers, Fernando's Platter, Shrimp and Scallops and Grilled Octopus. For starters, you can try the traditional Canja chicken soup, or the seafood chowder.

Appetizers also include flambéed Chorizo, Shrimp Cakes and Grilled Shrimp.

Most of the items on the menu can be ordered either spicy, medium spice, medium light, or with no heat at all.

If you still haven't made plans for New Year's Eve, then you should consider spending it at Caravela where they are taking reservations for three seatings at lunch, 5 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.

The à la carte menu includes the Soup of the Day, Chef's Salad with Shrimp Cakes and your choice of either the Oven-baked Cod, Shrimps and Scallops, the Seafood Platter, Lamb Shank, Piri-Piri Chicken, Alcatra Pot Roast or Fernando's Platter. It also includes dessert, coffee or tea, and a



Caravela owner Fernando Diniz is looking forward to welcoming guests to his restaurant on New Year's Eve. FILE PHOTO

glass of champagne. The cost is \$120 per person.

The evening has sold out every year, so

you may want to reserve your table as soon as possible. Reservations can be made by calling 613-424-9200.

The advertisement for Heritage Funeral Complex features a large, modern building with a stone and brick facade. Above the building is the company logo, which consists of a stylized 'H' with a leaf and the word 'HERITAGE' in large, serif capital letters. Below the logo, it says 'FUNERAL COMPLEX - COMPLEXE FUNÉRAIRE INC.'. At the bottom of the ad, it states 'Family owned and operated'.

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The best thing to say about 2023 is that it's over

Continued from page 3

shifting completion date for the Trillium Line which will run between Bayview Station and Riverside South. At the start of the year, it was expected to be finished in the summer. By the spring, the date was moved to November. As for the latest projection, it could be anytime between this spring and possibly Labour Day.

Here in the east end, the LRT project has raised the ire of residents living nearby who have to deal with both the construction noise and a rat infestation many believe has been a result. Meanwhile, motorists have had to deal with a frustrating stream of lane and ramp closures which don't appear to be ending anytime soon.

LRT may have been the dominating local story in 2023, but it wasn't the only story.

The biggest story in Orléans this past year was the massive explosion that rocked Avalon at 6:17 a.m. on Feb. 13. The blast destroyed four homes under construction and damaged eight nearby residences. Just over a week later, investigators deemed the incident "criminal" and would eventually have a suspect under arrest.

Kody Troy Crosby, 35, pled guilty to causing an explosion and three counts of

causing bodily harm for which he received a five-year sentence.

In April, a 51-year-old Fallingbrook man was charged with several offences after he fired several nails through a neighbour's garage door. He then broke into the house where he came face-to-face with the owners who managed to calm him down to the point where he eventually walked back out the door and into his van which he had parked in their laneway. Within 10 minutes, police had the man under arrest. His trial is still ongoing and a publication ban on his identity is still in place.

In April, hundreds of striking PSAC members picketed in front of the Peter D. Clark Building on Centrum Blvd., where local Liberal MP Marie-France Lalonde has her office.

The picketing was done without incident except for complaints from local businesses that were upset the strikers had taken up all the parking spaces in the Centrum Plaza,

On May 1, long-time Queenswood Heights resident Al Tweddle passed away.

Tweddle was the founder of the Friends of Petrie Island. He was also the driving force in getting a tennis court installed next to the Queenswood Heights Community Centre and

for many years he maintained the nearby outdoor rink during the winter. He was 84.

In October, the Ciné Starz theatre on Centrum Blvd. was forced to close after their landlord, Colonnade Management Inc., refused to renew their lease.

Later the same month, the historic Shaw House in Navan was severely damaged by a fire, forcing the Country Moments Spa and Café to close indefinitely. On a positive note, the community quickly rallied to the support of its owner and local resident Amanda Watson by donating \$37,000 to a GoFundMe campaign. Watson plans to open a second location at the Hammond Golf Club in the New Year and eventually reopening the spa in Navan.

Sticking to the positive, 2023 saw the return of a number of community events for the first time since the pandemic, including the Blackburn Fun Fair, Carivibe's Reach the Beach celebration on Petrie Island and the Cork and Fork event at the Shenkman Arts Centre.

The Orléans Craft Beer Festival in June was another huge success as was the Rib and Poutine Festival in September.

But arguably the best thing about 2023 is what didn't happen. 2023 was the first



Striking PSAC workers picketed outside the Centrum Blvd. office of Orléans MP Marie-France Lalonde in April. FILE PHOTO

time in three years when residents didn't have to go to the polls. After a federal and provincial election in 2021 and a municipal election in 2022, there was no call to the polls in 2023.

If only we could be so lucky in 2024.

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22 • December 21, 2023 • Volume 37, No. 17

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– 9pm Candlelight Communion
SUNDAY SERVICE – Dec. 31, 10am



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