

# Special Report

## Danforth East's revitalization slow and steady

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When Melanie Ferreira and her husband decided to open a restaurant on Danforth Avenue between Coxwell and Woodbine everyone asked them why.

Ferreira had served as the pastry chef at Movenpick and her husband, Arul Chettiar, had been a chef at the Royal York hotel. The two could have opened up a restaurant anywhere in the city and had a fighting chance at survival.

But, they knew something about this area of the Danforth other chefs might not.

They've called it home for 11 years and thought the area was on the cusp of something great. That was two and a half years ago and it appears it is still on that cusp.

But, many think it's getting closer. "Only someone who lived in the neighbourhood would know the true potential of it. It has a long way (to go), but we are moving toward that direction," Ferreira said.

### YOUNG FAMILIES

"We saw in the 11 years that we lived here there was a constant change in demographics. There were a lot of young families moving in...and there was nothing in the offering. It was still a big chance because there was nobody else that had come."

While the western Danforth has thrived under the Greektown moniker with people from all over descending on the area for souvlaki or a coffee, it's eastern neighbours have languished. But, the area radiating from East Lynn Park – just east of Melanie's Bistro – has been changing. Slowly.

A few years ago at nearly the same time, but independently, local residents and local businesses got together to form the Danforth East Community Association (DECA) and Danforth Mosaic Business Improvement Area (BIA).

The two represent slightly different areas (Monarch to Main for DECA and Jones to Westlake for the BIA), but both have helped to breath new life into their section



Staff photo/NICK PERRY

Melanie's Bistro co-owners, Melanie Ferreira and Arul Chettiar, chose to locate their business in the Danforth Avenue area in which they live.

of the Danforth. From jazz in the park to art in the park to a family fun festival there are now feet on the street in a way there wasn't five years ago.

A huge draw has been the East Lynn Farmers' Market, which runs every Thursday in East Lynn Park. It was started four years ago by the now area councillor Mary Margaret McMahon and a few other "farmerlicious femmes" from DECA.

"The market has totally transformed our neighbourhood," McMahon said. "With the market

it's now the community hub."

From a corn roast to a square dancing event, the market is more than just a place to get fresh strawberries or tomatoes. It's even helped to boost sales of businesses in the local area on Thursdays.

"I really think the farmers market has made a big difference in the community," said Natasha Granatstein, DECA co-chair.

The market isn't the only new addition to the neighbourhood, some new businesses have also set up shop in recent years

including Carter's ice cream, Cozy Cafe and Bakery, Home Hardware, and Better Bulk. Those new businesses are enticing the locals to stay in the neighbourhood.

McMahon and her husband have lived in the neighbourhood for 16 years and up until a few years ago they never went out close to home.

"We never hung out in the neighbourhood at the beginning. There was no real draw," McMahon said. "We went to Greektown, to the Beach or downtown for our meals."

In the last few years the draw has started. Granatstein, who's lived in the area for seven years said the commercial strip has improved.

### LOCAL SHOPPING

"It's getting better," she said. "It feels that way to me and neighbours who've been here 30 years feel that way too."

"I can do most of my shopping locally."

She said the area has gone from having few places to get a cup of coffee to being a cafe mecca - of the newest businesses to open its doors fits that bill. Patisserie La Cigogne at Monarch Park and Danforth avenues is the second location of the French-style bakery.

Juan Li, one of the owners, said they were originally thinking of expanding to Greektown or the Beach, but they couldn't find the right space.

"The people, the residents in the neighbourhood are very nice. There's a lot of young families and young professionals," she said. "We think we choose the right place."

On a summer weekday afternoon the place was quiet, but Sarah Kiriluk said it's packed on weekends.

The local resident is an enthusiastic cheerleader for her neighbourhood. She believes there is still room for improvement, but she sees momentum in the place she's called home for four years.

"I don't like it when we say I want the neighbourhood to gentrify. I don't want a Starbucks here, but I do want a nice coffee

## In The Neighbourhood

The following events and groups contribute to the ongoing revitalization of the Danforth East area:

- Danforth East Arts Fair (DECA)
- East Lynn Farmers' Market (DECA)
- Jazz in the Park (BIA)
- Dine Around the Danforth (BIA)
- Art of the Danforth
- Danforth Business Revitalizations (DECA)
- DECA Bikes

shop. This place is great," she said of La Cigogne. "I think the neighbourhood is really cleaning up and growing by leaps and bounds."

While Kiriluk and McMahon are big supporters of their neighbourhood, both agree there are still some things missing - a book store and a clothing store, for example.

### SLOW MOVEMENT

"I don't think the neighbourhood can support that just yet. It will, but not yet," Kiriluk said. "It's not going to happen overnight. It's very slow to progress, but you can feel it. The movement is there."

Litsa Kostouros isn't quite as optimistic. The chairperson of the Danforth Mosaic BIA said the number of empty stores in the BIA's borders have gone up in recent years and locals aren't shopping close to home – she said they're going to big box retailers.

"I don't think they're doing well," she said of businesses.

Kostouros owns a building near Donlands Avenue so that's where her experience lies, as well as what she's hearing from other landlords. She believes new higher-density residential development is what is needed to turn the area around.

"The future looks good because the population in the area is going to change soon once one or two condos (are built)," she said. "That will create an influx of people in the neighbourhood

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