

LOCAL NEWS

Green burial

The Notre-Dame-des-Neiges cemetery has started offering a new service wherein trees are planted instead of tombstones to commemorate a loved one. According to officials, it came about from a demand by clients who wanted something more environmentally friendly than placing a coffin into the ground.

A song for hope

Profile. To coincide with kids heading back to the classroom, the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) wanted to celebrate the tenacity of its community, as well as start the year off with a bang. So, it enlisted the help of Tony Picciuto and Randi Katz, two LaSalle residents with a penchant for delivering show-stopping entertainment.



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The result? A music video that pays tribute to students, teachers, and parents – all to the tune of the original song "Share the Love (We're Better Together)."

"We wanted it to be uplifting, high-energy, and perfect for students and their parents," Picciuto said. "It's something to rally the students, and to get them to feel a little better about heading back to school during such an uncertain time."

The LaSalle residents are the leaders of The Directors Showband, a 12-piece group that provides live entertainment for private parties, corporate events, galas, and fundraisers. The local band has been active for over two decades and, under normal circumstances, plays over 70 events each year.

Naturally, the current circumstances are anything but normal. After seeing their business dry up due to a lack of private and public events, the singers opted to hone their focus on something that has eluded them in recent years – songwriting.

"We had to think about how we could shift and adapt our business to keep doing what we love – and so we started writing again," Katz explained. "In the past, we were so busy with live events that we never had a chance to really focus on songwriting. But suddenly, we had all the time in the world."

In February, the duo released the product of this rediscovered passion for songwriting, in the form of their original tune "Valentine." It caught the attention of Mike Cohen, the EMSB's communications manager, who was



Tony Picciuto and Randi Katz are the leaders of a 12-piece showband. /COURTESY – STEVE GERRARD

looking to create something special for the board.

And just like that, "Share the Love (We're Better Together)" was born.

Set over a catchy guitar riff and inspired by folk-rock bands like Mumford & Sons, the empowering anthem salutes the resilience of the EMSB community and relishes in the hope that better days are coming.

The project was a labour of love for the two artists, who were paid a fraction of their usual rate.

"We set out to write a song that would make people happy and spread a sense of unity," Katz explained. "And I think we did just that."

500

Number of EMSB students involved in the music video.

Music Video

The upbeat record is accompanied by a music video featuring over 500 students from 25 EMSB schools, as well as two adult centres. Shots of Picciuto and Katz at Mount Royal's Beaver Lake are scattered among snippets of children in school, making the best of the experience while sanitizing their hands and putting on their masks.

"The more I think about it, the more I realize that the song

and the music video meant as much to us as it did to the kids," Picciuto reflected.

Added Katz: "We wrote it for them, but it helped us deal with our own feelings surrounding the pandemic and gave us an outlet for our creativity during the lockdown."

As a fitting end to the project, the duo performed the song live in the schoolyard of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce's Saint Monica Elementary School, surrounded by cheering students and smiling teachers. Next up, they hope to continue honing their songwriting craft, while also finally returning to performing at live gigs.

To learn more: thedirectors.ca

Politics. School board elections back on

After being postponed twice in 2020, the on-again, off-again English school board elections have officially been rescheduled to take place on September 26.

According to deputy education minister Alain Sans Cartier, the government opted to officially reschedule the vote in the wake of rising vaccination rates.

"The improving health situation opens the path to this course of action," he wrote in a letter released by the Education Ministry.

Initially set to take place last fall, the elections were postponed twice – first in October, and then later in December. In both cases, the decisions were based on the worsening COVID-19 situation, as well as the legal challenge surrounding Bill 40, the legislation that aimed to abolish English school boards in favour of service centres.

However, with this new date, it appears that anglophone school board voters are finally heading back to the polls for the first time in over seven years.

Reactions

Response to the government's decision was swift, with various anglophone community groups expressing deep disappointment and concern that the rescheduled date will lead to low voter turnout.

With the anticipated federal election and the municipal vote set for November 7, the Quebec English School Boards Association (QESBA) noted the decision means some voters will likely have to head to the polls three times in the span of a few weeks.

"If English-speaking Quebecers will be called to the polls three times within such a short time, the turnout for school board elections is likely to be abysmally low," the association wrote in a statement.

These thoughts were echoed by Marlene Jennings, the president of the Quebec Community Groups Network, which represents various anglophone organizations.

«We hope that the circumstances involving multiple elections on multiple dates and the continuing challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic will not have an adverse effect on voter turnout.»

Noel Burke, QESBA Vice-president

"This is tantamount to voter suppression," she said. "In a true democracy, governments must do everything they can to encourage electors to exercise their democratic right to vote. And with the fourth wave of a pandemic upon us, these are clearly not winning conditions for a good turnout."

Both the QESBA and QCGN are in favour of twinning school board vote with municipal elections to ensure a higher turnout, as is the case with some other provinces. They argue that doing so would reduce costs, and make voting more efficient and convenient.

"The government has missed an opportunity to innovate in the field of democratic reform by testing twinned elections in a limited format," said QESBA vice-president Noel Burke.

The Ballots

Notably, the actual vote will boast very few competitive races, as 88 per cent of seats were elected unopposed at the end of the nomination period, which lasted from September 21 to 27 of last year.

As such, there are only a few positions left to be filled when voters head to the polls.

In the English Montreal School Board, most of the candidates were acclaimed, including new chair Joe Ortona and nine of the board's 10 commissioners. The final spot will be a battle between the incumbent Julien Feldman and challenger Irwin Rapoport for Ward 3.

Voter turnout for the last elections – in 2014 – was 16.8 per cent.

DANIEL SUCAR



Anglophone community leaders are expressing their deep disappointment at the government's decision. /ARCHIVES