

Spring 2015
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INSPIRATIONS EXPRESS

A Snapshot of Our Special Needs Community
Un coup d'oeil sur notre communauté aux besoins particuliers

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An online edition

designed to bring you the most current special needs news in between editions.

Featured in this edition

| | |
|---|---------|
| ApprentiChef event with the Montreal Centre for Learning Disabilities | 3 |
| Rick Hansen visits Montreal's QPAT | 5 |
| Montreal Camera Club and Friends Helping Others visit the Friendship Circle | 7 |
| Notebook Express | 9 |
| Genetic screening - The power of choice | 10 |
| Seeing Voices Montréal | 11 |
| Adapted Travel with Mike Cohen | 12 & 13 |



Steven Atme with student Sélin Nasra De Lucia after addressing students at Edward Murphy Elementary School. Steven first spoke at the EMSB's KINDERGarten press conference. (Photo credit, Rocco Sperenza)

Read the article on Page 6

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ApprentiChef Cooking event celebrating World ADHD Awareness Day

By Suzie Lazar

The Montreal Centre for Learning Disabilities (MCLD, formerly known as the Learning Disabilities Association of Quebec, Montreal Chapter 1), Janssen, TDAH Centre du Quebec and AQETA (Association québécoise des troubles d'apprentissage) celebrated the annual World ADHD Awareness Day in a special way by providing more than 50 children with ADHD and their parents the opportunity to live a most memorable and rewarding experience. The event was made possible by Janssen, who gave an educational grant to create and support the day.

Eight families that are members of MCLD took part in a cooking workshop with Chef Pasquale Vari and his team. Hosted at The Institut de tourisme et de l'hôtellerie, this was a unique event where together with the chef, children ages 11 to 14 cooked a full course meal and once it was completed, they proudly served it to their parents.

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While the children worked closely with the renowned chef in the kitchen, the parents attended a

lecture given by Dr. Hechtman, a reputable doctor who specializes in ADHD research.

Dr. Hechtman, a McGill University professor and Director of ADHD research in the division of child psychiatry, spoke about on-going research programs for children between the ages of 12 to 17 with ADHD.

Her lecture included details on research conducted to develop new interventions for these children that includes multi-module studies – medication, parental training and social skills training for teenagers – each module dependent on the other.

This event was unique as parents were able to meet other parents who are familiar with the challenges that arise as result of having a child with ADHD. While the parents talked, the children were developing their culinary skills.

Equally important, this was a social event for the children with ADHD. They had the experience of socializing in the kitchen while working in teams, listening to the head chef's cooking instructions and then serving their finished products to their parents in the restaurant.

Listening, following instructions and socializing is a challenge for children with ADHD. But, with an accurate diagnosis combined with the right support and resources, ADHD can be a manageable condition.

Based on the feedback, both the children and the parents were delighted with this event. As one parent remarked: "Your invitation to the cooking school/parent's workshop was a God-send. Thank you so much for including us. We both really appreciated it."

For information visit www.ldmontreal.ca, email info@ldmontreal.ca or call 514-482-7196.



Chef Pasquale Vari with students from the MCLD. (Photo courtesy of Pierre Giard Photographie)



Linda Aber with a student from the MCLD. (Photo courtesy of Pierre Giard Photographie)



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Rick Hansen: A Difference Maker in motion

“You never know when the penny will drop”

By Wendy Singer

It is not every day that we get to meet a true Canadian hero. After a day of meeting and greeting teachers at the Quebec Provincial Association of Teachers convention on November 27, Inspirations Coordinator of Educational Outreach Linda Mahler and I joined hundreds of Quebec teachers to listen to Rick Hansen deliver the keynote address.

Hansen was injured in a truck accident when he was 15 years old. The diagnosis: a spinal cord injury (SCI) that paralyzed his physical functions below his waist. “My whole life felt like it was shattered along with my spine,” shared Hansen to a captivated audience. “It hit me like a brick. I was ready to give up on the most important thing in life - hope.”

After spending months in a Stryker bed that turned him every three hours, Hansen came to a realization that would change the course of his life: “I knew that if I could start working my arms, things would happen,” he said. He realized that he was still the same person, he still wanted to teach physical education to kids, and that “it’s not about your legs, it’s about your heart.”

Hansen wheeled himself across the stage with an energy that matched his thoughts. “This chair is not a symbol of disability, it’s my chariot,” he exclaimed.

Best known for his Man in Motion World Tour - a 26-month trek that logged more than 40,000 km through 34 countries and raised \$26 million for SCI research and quality of life initiatives, Hansen continues to grow and inspire. He has moved from supporting SCI to finding a cure. “The World Health Organizations states that there are 1.3 billion people living with disabilities. We need to live while we dream for cures. We need role models and leaders to lead the way.” This Man in Motion is all that, in every sense of the word, and more. He is a Difference Maker.

Hansen’s family and teachers never let him off the hook. They continuously inspired him to remove the handicap he was putting on himself. In turn, he encouraged every teacher in the room to continue encouraging their students to follow their dreams.

The Rick Hansen School Program is a comprehensive set of resources for administrators, teachers and students designed to increase disability awareness, accessibility



Rick Hansen (Photo credit: Rick Hansen Foundation)

and inclusion, and empower young people to make a difference in their school, community and the world. Stay tuned for the Spring/Summer 2015 edition of Inspirations for more information.

To learn more, visit <http://www.rickhansen.com/What-We-Do/School-Program> and visit www.rickhansen.com/DM for more information.



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Summit School has been educating children with developmental disabilities for over 50 years. Summit School provides an education to students who range in age from 4 to 21 years old. Programs are individualized, based on the needs of each student. For more information regarding Summit School, please visit our website: Summit-school.com.



KINDERgarten at the EMSB: Aims to reduce bullying and acts of aggression

By Wendy Singer

The English Montreal School Board (EMSB) started the new year off with the launch of their KINDERgarten campaign. This initiative promotes the work done by Kindergarten teachers in developing social-emotional learning in the classroom and providing tools for the children to reduce bullying and acts of aggression, and to foster compassion and kindness. KINDERgarten is an effective response to Bill 56, An Act to prevent and stop bullying and



Steven Atme speaking at Edward Murphy Elementary School. (Photo credit, Rocco Sperenza.)

violence in schools that was passed by the National Assembly on June 12, 2012.

During a press conference at Parkdale Elementary School on January 16, it was explained that at the start of the new school year in September 2015, Kindergarten teachers across the EMSB will begin activities that sensitize their students of the importance of respect and kindness, from speaking nicely to one another to random acts of kindness.

An impressive roster of speakers shared their stories of being bullied in school. Claudia Marques, radio personality from The Beat 92.5 FM, spoke about her difficult experience at school as an "overweight child with glasses who didn't know how to fix her hair," and how this eventually turned into anorexia and a whole new set of troubles. A beautiful woman leading a successful career, Marques hit the mark as she encourage the Parkdale students in attendance to be proud of who they are and be kind to one another.

Steven Atme attended Parkdale Elementary School from 1998 to 2001, and then attend-

ed Summit School. He wished there was an initiative like KINDERgarten when he was younger. Steven has autism and was bullied due to his lack of social skills and behavioural issues. "Students threw rocks at me, scratched me, made fun of me and called me names," he shared. "I felt like I didn't fit in because of my autism diagnosis and because of my behavioural issues."

Now 21 years old and in his fourth year of studies at the McGill Conservatory of Music, Steven is a pianist, composer, piano teacher, and public speaker. His words at this press conference brought many in attendance to tears, as he encouraged the Parkdale students to "stand your ground and speak your mind to stop bullying, and know that whatever dreams you have, you can pursue."

Steven then sang The Prayer, a number that he mastered in the I Can Dream Theatre Group's most recent hit, Hannibal, The Musical.

Steven's talk garnered much attention, and as a result, he has now embarked on a speaking circuit. His first stop was at Edward Murphy Elementary School, where he



Claudia Marques speaking at the EMSB-KINDERgarten press conference.

shared parts of his speech 'Special people have dreams too' to a fully engaged gym of students.

"The introduction of this new campaign makes it clear that we must start sensitizing our students to this very important issue at a very young age," says EMSB Chairman Angela Mancini. "While we certainly address the topics of kindness and bullying in class at all levels, the implementation of a formula which will have Kindergarten students exposed to it from their very first moments we hope will set the tone for how students treat their classmates for the rest of their school days."

Peter Hall School is a private school recognized and subsidized in the public interest by the Ministère de l'Éducation du Loisir et du Sport.

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Montreal Camera Club and Friends Helping Others:

A smile for a smile

By Wendy Singer

Help-Portrait was founded by celebrity photographer Jeremy Cowart and Kyle Chowning in 2008 with the mission of empowering photographers, hairstylists and makeup artists to use their skills, tools and expertise to give back to their local community.

Every year on December 6, photographers, hairstylists and makeup artists all around the world find people in need, take their photographs and portraits, print the photos and deliver them. All of this is free of charge.

Help-Portrait is about giving portraits, not taking them. The photos are not for a portfolio, website, or sale. It's about giving people who otherwise couldn't afford photography a chance to capture a moment, a memory, and a whole lot more.

The Montreal Camera Club and Friends Helping Others, coordinated by Diane Dupuis-Kallos, is one of Montreal's unique Help-Portrait initiatives. For the past five years, this group of volunteers has been visiting several organizations throughout the month of December. This year, fortunate

organizations included Hôpital Marie-Enfant, and The Friendship Circle.

Using a simplified version of the Help-Portrait, The Montreal Camera Club and Friends Helping Others sets up photography studios on site, welcoming anywhere from 25 to 75 subjects per organization. While they forgo including hairstylists and makeup artists at their sessions, these expert photographers have no problem bringing out the natural beauty of their subjects. They make them feel comfortable with their warmth and friendly conversation, which always brings out an abundance of warm smiles.

In addition to donating their time and expertise, this team of eight volunteers, and several others who come when needed, all chip in to cover the cost of printing the photos and the cds which are given to all subjects. And they love what they do. "We get as much, if not more, out of giving back to the community," shares Dupuis-Kallos. "It makes us so happy."

The Montreal Camera Club and Friends Helping Others visited the Friendship Circle during their Chanukah party on December 21. "This project fits with our motto at the Friendship Circle, which is to brighten the lives and souls of families with children with special needs," shares Leibebe Rodal, Assistant Program Director at The Friendship Circle. "Most often, this is the only time a family has the opportunity to have a family portrait taken. Diane and the team do an incredible thing."



Quinton, with his mother, receiving a present from Chani Rodal at The Friendship Circle Chanukah party. (Photo courtesy of The Montreal Camera Club and Friends Helping Others)



Rachel and Chana with their Friendship Circle volunteer Noah Cohen at The Friendship Circle Chanukah party. (Photo courtesy of The Montreal Camera Club and Friends Helping Others)



The Help-Portrait Team at The Friendship Circle. (Photo courtesy of The Montreal Camera Club and Friends Helping Others)



Friendship Circle volunteers with Anna (Megan Broadman) and Elsa (Erika Hazan). (Photo courtesy of The Montreal Camera Club and Friends Helping Others)

For information about The Montreal Camera Club and Friends Helping Others contact Diane Dupuis-Kallos at ddkphotos@yahoo.ca. For information about The Montreal Camera Club visit www.montrealcameraclub.com.



Leibebe Rodal, Assistant Program Director at The Friendship Circle, holding Friendship Circle volunteer Justin Lieberman. (Photo courtesy of The Montreal Camera Club and Friends Helping Others)



Current Trends in ASD Conference 2015



Tuesday, March 31, 2015

JED BAKER No More Victims - Protecting those with ASD from Cyber-Bullying, Internet Predators and Scams; and Social Skills Training

Wednesday, April 1, 2015

BRENDA SMITH MYLES The Hidden Curriculum
ISABELLE HÉNAULT Sexual Education for Adolescents with an ASD (*presentation in French*)

Thursday, April 2, 2015

CATHERINE FAHERTY Self-Knowledge and Self-Advocacy in School-Aged Children with ASD
PETER VERMEULEN Autism as Context Blindness

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Notebook Express

By Wendy Singer

Rekinexion, headed by **Lisa Marcovici**, is the Brain Gym® expert here in Quebec, and the largest supplier of workshops and Educational Kinesthetics courses in the province. Their goal is to provide learners of all ages and skill levels with the tools necessary to reinforce the brain-body connection, to provide a solid foundation for the physical skills of learning and to support optimal development and growth.

Lisa believes in sharing her knowledge and generosity not just at home, but anywhere she can help. On December 3, she transformed her spacious studio into a Peruvian club in order to raise funds to support and contribute to the teaching of Brain Gym® in Peru.

Guests enjoyed sampling home-made sumptuous Peruvian delicacies, were mesmerized by a Peruvian folk dance featuring local Peruvian dancers from the

Club Libertad de Trujillo Filial Montreal and **Le Ballet Folklorique Esencia del Perú**, and had the chance to win a multitude of door prizes. The event was a success, raising over \$2,000 for Brain Gym® Peru.



Carol Ann Erickson, International Faculty member of Brain Gym International, Lisa Marcovici, Brain Gym Consultant and director at Rekinexion, Luz Marina Bernal Munoz teacher and founder of Brain Gym Foundation in Lima, Peru, Irish Sullivan, Kinesiologist and Brain Gym Consultant from Ottawa.

Pama Foundation is committed to spreading awareness and helping better the lives of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). They achieve this by raising funds that are given to families who need support.

Each year during the holiday season, this foundation organizes a special event called Pama Claus, where children with autism are welcomed into a sensory friendly environment to take photos with **Santa Claus**. This year's event took place at St-Brendan's Hall on December 7, and was organized by Pama's board of directors, including **Josie Verrillo, Anna-Maria Macone, Sonia Dei Tigli, Anne Cotignola, Donna Renda, Alessandro Loffredi** and **Stefania Dei Tigli**.

Children participating in this event avoid the long line-ups at the mall, and the chaos and noise that go along with it. At Pama Claus, every child, along with their family can take as long as they need while sitting and chatting with Santa.

After their photos were taken, the kids enjoyed activities such as inflatable games, obstacle courses, holiday treats for everyone, and more. Approximately 40 children came to take their photo with Santa.



Santa greeting a child at the Pama Claus event. (Photo courtesy of Pama Foundation)

On October 21, the **Summit School Theatre** presented their original production *You'll Never Walk Alone* at an elegant fundraising dinner theatre event at the Rialto Theatre where \$95,000 was raised. The evening's performance was in tribute to **Norman Spencer**, and his years of dedication and guidance as Chairman of the Board of Summit School.

The performance was masterfully directed by **Jesse Heffring**, with choreography by **Jean Leger** and musical direction by **Dara Murphy**. The show was put together by the school's students, staff and members of Montreal's artistic community, and included over 80 performers.

Set at the Albee Theatre in 1910, the show merged Vaudeville with newly emerging silent film. It was heartwarming and mesmerizing to watch students and professionals blend boundaries and draw out the best in each other through

acting and dance.

As Heffring explained to reporter Bill Brownstein in a video interview: "These kids have disabilities, but their abilities outshine those disabilities. We think this theatre and this show are big, but our kids talents and abilities are big as well. So they both fit together."



Olivier Leger and Shane Stevens in The Summit School Theatre show You'll Never Walk Alone at the Rialto Theatre. (Photo credit, Thierry Quenette)

Parents, family, staff and friends of students of **The Mackay Centre School** and **The Philip E. Layton School for the Blind** received an extraordinary Christmas gift when they attended the 2014 annual school play *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* on December 18.



Students performing in Willy Wonka at The Mackay Centre School. (Photo credit, Gaye McConnell)

This adapted version was spearheaded by **Luca 'LazyLegz' Patuelli's Projet RAD**, which provides people with various disabilities the opportunity to take inclusive urban dance classes that are adapted to their needs. At Projet RAD, they believe that everyone, regardless of abilities, can attain their goals and share their passion in their own way.

The Mackay Centre School gym stage was set with all sorts of chocolate and candy delights, enticing the audience right into Willy Wonka's world. From those that are visually impaired to those in wheelchairs, every student in the school was in costume, dancing their hearts out as they had rehearsed for months.

The Projet RAD team ensured that, no matter what the ability, all students found their groove. Their smiles, music, and an elaborate light show made every class' routine spectacular, from Helen and Sam's classes performing *The Golden Ticket* to Jessica's class with *The Oompa Loompas* and *Violet*.

Kudos to staff members, Principal **Patrizia Ciccarelli**, Vice-Principal **Joe Anne Désir**, and the Projet RAD team for their creativity and months of hard work.



Luca "Lazylegz" Patuelli and Patrizia Ciccarelli at the Willy Wonka show at The Mackay Centre School.



Genetic screening - The power of choice

By Julie Kristof

In many ways my daughter Miriam is just like other seven-year-old kids. She enjoys her friends, is lazy about practicing reading and loves playing with her older brother when he lets her. But unlike most little kids, Miriam wakes up nauseous most days before school. Nurses help her stay healthy during the day in her Grade 1 class at the Mackay Centre School as she is fed by tube and receives other needed therapies through the Mackay Foundation. At her age she is starting to understand that she is not "normal," and her path in life will be different than most of her friends. It breaks my heart.

Here's the rub -- it was all completely avoidable.

My husband and I are both carriers of a genetic flaw that can lead to a child being born with Familial Dysautonomia (FD), a common and devastating hereditary disease prevalent among Ashkenazi Jews. We did not know this before Miriam was born.

We had not been tested. But we could have been.

Miriam was diagnosed with FD when she was 18 months old. FD is a progressive and fatal neurological condition that impacts her body's ability to regulate itself. That means that she doesn't feel pain appropriately, can't judge temperature, has volatile blood pressure, a fast heart rate, can't swallow properly, among many other symptoms. With the Complex Care group at the Montreal Children's Hospital, we manage appointments with at least a dozen specialists, follow up on potential treatments and receive a variety of social support. Clearly, the disease has changed the course of our lives in many ways.

Familial Dysautonomia is hereditary and associated mostly with people of Ashkenazi Jewish (Eastern European) descent. Like many Montreal Jews, I was tested for Tay-Sachs disease in high-school. I knew I wasn't a carrier for Tay-Sachs so I thought I was safe. In fact, Tay-Sachs is only one of the common genetic conditions associated with Ashkenazi Jews. There are dozens that can be detected by a simple blood test.

But there is little awareness among those in the Jewish community that they should get tested, nor how to do so.



Miriam (Photo courtesy of Julie Kristof)

L'École Peter Hall est une école privée, reconnue d'intérêt public et subventionnée par le ministère de l'Éducation du Loisir et du Sport.

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The Montreal Jewish Genetic Disorders Fund (MJGDF) is a volunteer-run organization established in 2006 to address this gap. We are dedicated to increasing awareness of:

- Jewish genetic disorders and the need for screening
- The testing options that exist for Montrealers
- Reproductive choices for couples.

We work closely with the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC) as well as private companies to make sure that everyone can access testing to the extent they want.

Today, the MUHC is looking for participants for a groundbreaking study that is comparing the effectiveness of online genetic counseling versus in-person. The MUHC wants to cut the wait times currently associated with genetic screening. Participants are asked to fill out questionnaires prior to going through either the online or in-person counseling and those at risk will be sent an electronic requisition to undergo a blood test for genetic testing at the Montreal Gen-

eral Hospital. There are many reproductive alternatives for carrier couples depending on the beliefs and values of the people involved.

For more information or to sign up for the study and carrier testing, contact Guillaume Sillon, genetic counsellor at the McGill University Health Centre. 514-934-1934 ext. 43707 or guillaume.sillon@muhc.mcgill.ca.

Individuals interested in learning about all testing options can visit testjgd.com.

Julie Kristof is a mother of two and a community activist.

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Seeing Voices take on The Montreal Improv:

A language-less night of physical comedy

By Wendy Singer

Seeing Voices Montreal consists of a diverse group of volunteers ranging from native ASL (American Sign Language) users, native LSQ (Langue des signes québécoise) users, ASL students and other individuals from the Montreal Deaf community. They bring outstanding performances to Montreal audiences, including last year's smash hit *Deaf Snow White*, where hearing and Deaf actors shared the stage.

On January 9, a full house of excited improv fans gathered for the second-ever Visual Improv comedy night. This unique, language-less event brought five Deaf improvisers from Seeing Voices Montreal and five hearing improvisers from The Montreal Improv to the stage, finding a common language through laughter and clever physical comedy.

Mark Rowland, a Montreal-based improviser who has performed around the globe, hosted the evening at the Montreal Improv Theatre, with ASL-spoken English interpretation provided by Jordan Goldman.

Improvisers from both teams were called up to act in various sketches that began with an offer of either a word or location to build their scene around. The improvisers worked together, creating hilarious antics that had the house rolling. Although all improvisers were outstanding, it was delightful to watch Sera Kessab from Seeing Voices perform once again after seeing her play a memorable Dopey in *Deaf Snow White*.

The improvisers were given points based on audience response to all of their sketches. The evening's winner was Lar Vi from Team Montreal Improv.

It was fascinating to watch the team members interact, taking their sketches to unimaginable heights, and providing bit after bit of uproarious comedy. Most fascinating was the ability for all players to feed off of each other's ideas and actions without the use of the spoken or ASL word.

While everyone shone in their own right, it was hard to beat the Seeing Voices team, whose ability to use physical comedy without words was magnificent to watch.



Pierre Olivier Beaulac-Bouchard (Seeing Voices Montréal), Sera Kessab (Seeing Voices Montréal), and Lar Vi (The Montreal Improv) performing at Visual Improv at The Montreal Improv.

For information about Seeing Voices Montreal visit www.seeingvoicesmontreal.com. For information about The Montreal Improv visit Montrealimprov.com.

22.03.2015





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Adapted Travel by Mike Cohen

The MoMA experience and a new place to stay in New York City

NEW YORK CITY - If you are headed to New York City anytime soon, here is a good tip: purchase the CityPASS (<http://www.citypass.com/new-york>). New York sure does appreciate its Canadian tourists and this has been underlined in recent years by the establishment of an NYC & Company office right at 99 Blue Jays Way in Toronto. By logging on to www.nycgo.com you can begin planning your activities.

We were only in town for a few days and while the other two members of the family saw some Broadway shows, I wanted to do some exploring. But where does one start? New York CityPASS includes admission to NYC's top six attractions: the Empire State Building Observatory, The Met, American Museum of Natural History, MoMA (The Museum of Modern Art), Top of the Rock or Guggenheim and the Statue of Liberty or Circle Line Cruises. It is valid for nine days from first day of use. Not only do you get to skip ticket lines, you save 41 percent.

I had never been to MoMA (MoMA.org) before, described as the foremost museum of modern art in the world. Established in 1929 as an educational institution, MoMA is a place that fuels creativity, ignites minds, and provides inspiration. With extraordinary exhibitions and the world's finest collection of modern and contemporary art, MoMA is dedicated to the conversation between the past and the present, the established and the experimental. Its mission is helping you understand and enjoy the art of our time.

MoMA is located in midtown Manhattan, at 11 West Fifty-third Street, between Fifth



The Accessible Icon Project represents something you do not see at too many museums. (Photo courtesy of MoMA)

and Sixth avenues. MoMA's holdings include more than 150,000 individual pieces in addition to approximately 22,000 films and four million film stills. Upon arrival, pick up a mobile device free of charge on floors 1 or 6. Photo ID is required. You can also use your own handheld device via MoMA's public Wi-Fi network or download the free APP at MomMA.org/mobile.

It is best to start off on the 6th floor to see any special exhibitions on and then work your way down. The fifth and fourth floors features paintings and sculptures from the 1880s to the 1940s and the 1940s to the 1980s respectively: the likes of Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Claude Monet, Vincent van Gough, Roy Lichtenstein, Jackson Pollock and Andy Warhol. Floor 3 focuses on architecture and design while contemporary galleries (prints, illustrated books and media) highlight the second floor. Near the lobby, on the main floor, you will find an art lab and a sculpture garden. There are theatres down below showing different films. You must go to the film desk to find out the schedule and get a special ticket.

MoMA recognizes the diversity of the general public's abilities and needs, and it offers a variety of programs and services to ensure the accessibility of the Museum and its collection. All public areas of the Museum and entrances are wheelchair accessible. Entrances with power assist doors are located on Fifty-third and Fifty-fourth streets between Fifth and Sixth avenues. Wheelchairs are available free of charge on a first-come, first-served basis and are located in the checkroom in the main lobby. Motorized wheelchairs are permitted.

Wheelchair-accessible restrooms, each situated next to a water fountain, are located on all floors except the Theater 2 level and the entry level of The Lewis B. and Dorothy Cullman Education and Research Building. A single-user/family restroom is located on the fifth floor. Elevators are located throughout the Museum. FM assistive listening devices (headsets and neck loops) are available for all Gallery Talks. Sign language interpretation is provided for Gallery Talks on the fourth Sunday of the month at 1:30 p.m. Sign language interpretation is available for all events with at least two weeks

advance notice and CART captioning

MoMA Audio is T-Coil compatible, and transcripts of all audio programs are available upon request from the audio desks. All MoMA theaters, lobby desks, ticketing desks, audio guide desks, and one of The Edward John Noble Education Center's classrooms are equipped with induction loops that transmit directly to hearing aids with T-Coils. Public telephones with volume control and TTY are located on the ground floor, in the vestibule of the public restrooms. The floor plan and select special-exhibition brochures are available in large print and Braille from the lobby information desk. An audio program for blind and partially sighted visitors that provides detailed descriptions of key works from the Museum's collection is available free of charge at the audio desks.

Family Programs at MoMA introduce kids and adults to modern and contemporary art through gallery conversations, art workshops, artist talks, film screenings, activity guides, websites, and interactive spaces. Museum and program admission are free.

MoMA is open Saturday through Thursday, 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and Friday, 10:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. Museum Admission is \$25 for adults; \$18 for seniors and 65 years and over with I.D.; \$14 full-time students with current I.D. There is no cost for members and children 16 and under. For information, call (212) 708-9400, or visit MoMA.org.

WHERE TO STAY: We stayed somewhere new on this trip, the Omni Berkshire Place (<http://www.omnihotels.com/hotels/new-york-berkshire>) at 21 East 52nd Street between 5th and Madison- a great location. I was particularly impressed with the live chat assistance available on their website as I planned the trip. With the simple click of the mouse there was someone at the opposite end answering all of my questions in real time. I also signed up free of charge for the Select Guest Loyalty Program, which provides you with complimentary perks such as free Wi-Fi Internet service, access to a 24-hour business center and a state-of-the-art fitness center with a sundeck overlooking midtown Manhattan. You also get a free shoe shine, pressings, the newspaper, morning beverage of your choice, express check-in and check-out, customized room preferences and bottled water.

This luxury Omni Berkshire Place is steps away from Fortune 500 companies and some of the city's most illustrious sites like Fifth Avenue Shopping, St. Patrick's Cathedral, Rockefeller Center, Central Park and Broadway theatres.

We stayed in a spacious Madison Suite, overlooking 52nd Street and Madison Avenue. These magnificent 781-square-foot

suites feature a large master bedroom with an oversized bath that includes separate shower and soaking tub along with generous counter space. There are two telephones in the bathroom. We very much appreciated the in room safe. The separate living area has an extremely comfortable pull-out sleeper sofa, club chair, desk and an iHome© audio system. The hotel has a very helpful concierge desk. Across the street is Isadora's Café, which has an absolutely endless array of items to choose from. It is just perfect to bring dinner back to the room before a show.

ADA Accessible Rooms are available with King-sized beds for guests who need such amenities. These rooms feature larger and wider entryways for accessibility. Bathrooms include either a roll-in shower or a room with a standard shower and tub. Both have a hand-held showerhead and grab bars for support. The toilet also has grab bars and, along with the sink, is no higher than 30 inches from the floor. Also offered is visual notification for the hotel alarm system, door, and phone. For more information about the hotel, call 1-888-444-OMNI or locally at 212-753-5800.

SPECIAL NEEDS: New York City is committed to ensuring accessibility for visitors with special needs, and has equipped all buses with lifts for those in wheelchairs and those who have difficulty climbing stairs. In addition, many subway stations contain elevators, ramps, visual display signs, accessible public telephones and tactile and audio features on vending machines. Passengers with disabilities are eligible for reduced fares on most trips by using their Medicare card as proof of eligibility.

Big Apple Greeter is a welcome program that connects visitors with volunteers who enjoy sharing a walk through one or more of New York City's unique neighborhoods. There are more than 300 volunteer greeters with special-interest expertise, including accessibility issues and foreign language skills.

To assist those with special needs, Scootaround, a wheelchair and scooter rental business, makes sure travelers are totally mobile no matter where they go. Whether the destination is a cruise, a convention, a



The 24 ounce Porterhouse Steak at Morton's



The lamb spareribs at China Grill are beyond delicious.

swanky vacation or a trip to the Big Apple, Scootaround features a toll-free line with friendly operators available 24/7 and delivery to and pick up from wherever you are.

Vega Transportation offers luxury wheelchair service that is safe and reliable. For more than 20 years, they have helped redefine wheelchair transportation through their customized vehicles. Along with a multilingual and rigorously trained staff, the vehicles are customized with wheelchair lifts, high top roofs and doors, special suspension, front and rear air conditioning, wheelchair locks and TVs with DVD players.

The Broadway Accessibility Initiative, the result of a partnership between organizations Alliance for Inclusion in the Arts and G-PASS, offers theatergoers with disabilities the opportunity to enjoy more Broadway shows. Currently featured on Broadway in Catch Me If You Can, the program's services include I-Caption for hearing impaired patrons, D-Scriptive for blind and low-vision theatre-goers and ShowTrans for non-English-speaking audience members. All are available free of charge at every performance. For more information, visit inclusioninthearts.org.

For more information on transportation and cultural venues and their accessibility, download the Official Accessibility Guide. The Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities will send the Official Accessibility Guide free of charge to people who inquire via telephone at 212-788-2830. (The guide is also available to download from http://www.nyc.gov/html/mopd/downloads/pdf/accessibility_guide.pdf). The 100-page, large-type book provides resources and specific accessibility reviews for cultural institutions, theaters, nightlife and sports venues and tours.

DINING OUT: New York City is indeed the place to dine, with an endless array of choices to please your palate. Needless to say, there are no shortage of kosher restaurants here either.

Morton's 5th Avenue (www.mortons.com/newyork) is located in the heart of Midtown Manhattan (551 5th Avenue, at 45th Street). Its expansive dining room can accommo-

date large parties or an intimate dinner for two while the private boardrooms are the ideal setting for meetings, celebrations and events. Bar 12-21 is the perfect gathering place for a cocktail or lite bite.

Morton's offers a diverse list of wines with a portfolio of producers from both domestic and international wineries. General Manager Michael Rains has been at this location since it opened 21 years ago, starting out as a server. He is very hands on, visiting each table at the very pretty two tier restaurant which seats 280 diners.

We enjoyed an absolutely outstanding dinner at Morton's. Our server John made sure to explain the menu to us in detail, including the specials. A fresh loaf of bread, with whipped butter, arrived at the table as we began the task of deciding what to order. One member of our party started off with a glass of champagne. While there were a lot of appealing appetizers, we opted instead for a chopped salad which was more than large enough to share. For the main course we opted for what Morton's is known for. Two members of our party shared an eight ounce center-cut filet mignon while I favored the center-cut prime rib eye. Both of these items were cooked to perfection and literally cut like butter. As for the generous portions of sides, we shared the sour cream mashed potatoes and the hash brown potatoes. As for dessert, they have a number of specialties which are described in detail before you make your order. That is because they take 20 minutes to make. We were ever so tempted by the Chocolate Molten Cake, served in a bowl covered with ice cream, whipped cream and sundae sauce. It is a good thing the three of us shared it because I do not know how one person can consume this decadent offering.

Morton's also has veal, pork, chicken, beef short ribs, scampi, sea scallops, crab cakes, shrimp, Chilean sea bass, and lobster and crab legs on the menu.

If you are headed to New York anytime soon and want to check out this Morton's, make



The Onion Rings are a big favorite at the Hard Rock Cafe.

reservations in advance at 212-972-3315. The restaurant is accessible, with a accessible front door and accessible elevator leading down to restrooms with accessible stalls.

CHINA GRILL: During this trip we also dined at the fabulous China Grill (www.chinagrillmgt.com) at 60 West 53rd Street, which happens to be the birthplace of this extraordinary dining spot. In 1987 China Grill New York opened to a packed dining room and immediate critical acclaim. By its fifth anniversary, the restaurant was as busy as ever and regarded as one of the hottest destination spots in New York City. Owner Jeffrey Chodorow's labor of love, his first and only venture into the restaurant world, had proven to be an enduring success in a scene where restaurants seemed to come and go overnight. Over 20 years later, China Grill Management and its affiliates continue to produce some of the most original, critically acclaimed and wildly popular dining hotspots in major cities across the globe. CGM and its affiliates own, operate, create concepts, and /or consult in creating some of the most acclaimed and innovative restaurants in Miami, New York, London, Mexico City and now Dubai. We experienced the China Grill in Miami five years ago and were excited to get a reservation in the Big Apple.

Virtually every dish at China Grill is prepared on the grill or in a wok, using sauces strictly for flavor. Portions are generous, and artfully presented on bold, oversized plates, and above all, meant for sharing. We toasted the evening with some champagne and then ordered a pair of starters: the fall off the bone lamb spareribs, plum and sesame glazed and the curried chicken satay, with chilled sesame noodles and toasted peanut sauce. For our main course, we opted for the curry miso black cod, with sweet soy glazed Chinese broccoli and yuzo-miso butter sauce and the grilled Szechuan beef, with sake soy spicy shallots and cilantro. As for sides, we had the five vegetable fried rice and the lobster mashed potatoes. We did save some room for dessert and the chocolate seduction and the mandarin ginger crème brûlée won out. Our server, Pedro, was excellent at describing all of the dining options available – and there are plenty. We were also impressed to see Emily Roth, the assistant general manager, so active in the service. Not only did she bring some of the items to the table. She also cleared the plates on a few occasions. We very much appreciated the care the staff took to cater to one family member who had an issue with sesame seeds. They went out of their way to explain what was in each dish and separated the seeds wherever possible.

China Grill is not just a meal, it is an experience. We thoroughly enjoyed every morsel of food that came our way. This venue itself is very pretty with soaring 30-foot ceil-

ings, multi-level dining platforms, two fully stocked bars and a centralized open kitchen which creates an eye-popping visual counterpart to the restaurant's mouth-watering cuisine. During warm weather months, China Grill's outdoor patio offers the perfect oasis for any event. It is right across the street from MoMA. You can call 514-212-333-7788 for reservations. The restaurant is wheelchair accessible.

HARD ROCK TIMES SQUARE: I have always been a big fan of the Hard Rock Cafe (www.hardrock.com) chain and enjoy checking out the different incarnations when I travel. Last summer I did so in Nice, France, so when I found myself in the Times Square area on Saturday night I could not resist stepping inside the 1501 Broadway location to rock my senses with tantalizing food and drinks and enjoy their awe-inspiring rock memorabilia collection. The Times Square cafe features priceless pieces of rock 'n' roll memorabilia from Hard Rock's world-famous collection, including artists with New York roots, such as John Lennon, Jimi Hendrix, The Ramones and Bruce Springsteen. The lively restaurant is a popular destination for locals and travelers from all over the world with multiple seating areas, an enthusiastic staff and an extensive menu of high-quality American fare. The street-level Rock Shop carries an assorted line of Hard Rock merchandise including city-specific products such as T-shirts, sweatshirts, pins, leather jackets, key chains, watches, baseball caps, glassware and more. The Hard Rock opened at its current location in 2005 at the historic Paramount Theater, right in the heart of Times Square. I love the menu at the Hard Rock and on this night I had the delicious legend burger, topped with smoked bacon, cheddar cheese, a golden fried onion ring, crisp lettuce and vine ripened tomato. It came with crispy fries. For dessert I had the sensational oreo cheesecake. There are so many selections to choose from, including a number of other burgers, sandwiches, starters, salads and entrees such as grilled Norwegian salmon, fried shrimp platter and a cowboy rib eye. The facility does have an elevator for people in wheelchairs to get to the different levels.

Mike Cohen can be reached at info@mike-cohen.ca. See his travel advice column at www.sandboxworld.com/travel.



The beautiful lobby of the Omni Berkshire Place Hotel.



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NEW WEBSITE

Our new and improved website makes it easy to read all of our editions, catch up on all the in between edition news with our online Inspirations EXPRESS, read our blog, and check out all the upcoming events. Our database of special needs resources is more accessible. You can now click on the section you'd like to see without having to peruse the entire database.

We would like to thank Simon Li, an intern from John Abbott College, for his many months of hard work in building this new, user-friendly website.

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