

## Students pay tribute to a resident's enduring imagination

By SUSAN PURCELL



**a** MCGILL STUDENT delivering hot meals to the Benny Crescent apartment complex made an unusual and happy discovery about one of her clients. She learned that living with mental illness for many decades had failed to stifle this man's love of his chosen profession—architecture.

That client was L'Abri resident **George Harris** (at left), a graduate of Yale University School of Architecture. Some 35 years after schizophrenia forced him to give up a successful career in the US, he still regularly designs buildings from his imagination.

"I began to discover George's story through speaking with him and his roommates

**Rick and David**" says **Michelle Shi**. "When Rick invited me in, I saw stacks and stacks of George's beautiful drawings. I learned that he spends three to four hours a day working on his art. When he spoke about his work," she said, "he was so passionate, his face lit up."

Out of this friendship emerged *Project Imagination*, an effort to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness through art, self-expression and community. Created by McGill Students for Santropol Roulant (a community food hub operating a major Meals-on-Wheels

program), the project went public in early April with an exhibition of George's drawings at Santropol's sprawling downtown space. Present to admire his work at the opening were over 60 people, including McGill students, Santropol staff and members of the L'Abri community.

George's framed drawings depicted facades and interior plans of hotels, homes and cottages, all rendered in fine detail. Also on display were quick sketches drawn on napkins by Rick.

Santropol generously provided appetizers and drinks for the vernissage, which included an informal talk with George, Rick and David, and concluded with a word of thanks from our own **Campbell Stuart**.

"The student organizers were so articulate, so dedicated," notes L'Abri coordinator **Cathy DeChambeau**. "They put a lot of work into the show. It was amazing to see!"

George thanked everyone for attending. To the student organizers he said, "I've been wanting to have a show for years, and you have made this possible." There were tears in his eyes. 🍷



GEORGE RENDERS HIS DESIGNS, LIKE THIS ONE OF A HOTEL, IN FINE DETAIL.



PROJECT IMAGINATION MODERATOR (IN CAP) WITH BENNY CRESCENT RESIDENTS (LEFT TO RIGHT) DAVID, RICK, AND GEORGE.

SAM BIETEL

**MONTRÉAL WALKS FOR MENTAL HEALTH**

**SAVE THE DATE!** Join us Sunday, 14 October 2018 | Note new meeting point: Place Émilie-Gamelin (Berri-UQAM Metro)



# Roommates' openness impresses OT students

By JOE FERRACUTI

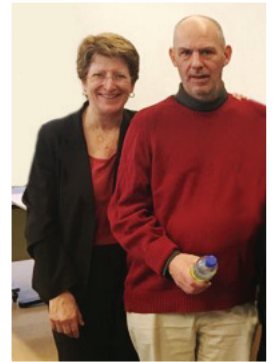


Some students are now pondering work in mental health

**B**ENNY APARTMENT residents **David, George, and Rick** spoke to a class of occupational therapy students at McGill University on 27 March 2018. They shared stories of their lived experiences of mental illness with the students, including the struggle and stigma of living with mental illness, and the support and stability they have found with L'Abri. They also spoke about the community they find in living together and supporting each other over the many years they have lived as roommates. George mentioned the upcoming exhibit of his architectural drawings at Santropol Roulant (*see page 1*).

The OT students were very engaged in the lecture, listening attentively and asking many questions during the discussion period. Some students even said that this class has made them want to pursue work in the field of mental health.

This is the seventh year that the residents from the Benny apartment have spoken at the university as guest lecturers. The professor, **Suzanne Rouleau**, noted that each year the students rate this event as the highlight of the class. 🌱



MCGILL OT PROFESSOR SUZANNE ROULEAU WITH DAVID FOLLOWING THE PRESENTATION

JOE IS A MCGILL STUDENT WHO RECENTLY COMPLETED A SOCIAL WORK PLACEMENT AT L'ABRI.

# Icy Montreal sidewalk upends a daydream

By CATHY DECHAMBEAU



Pierre's community rallied 'round when he needed it most

**I**N JANUARY, as **Pierre Jodoin** (*at left*)—of our Jolicoeur apartment—was walking to his local coffee shop, he kicked a chunk of ice that lay in his path “just for fun.” One minute Pierre was enjoying happy memories of kicking ice in his childhood, and the next, he was flat on the ground.

A friendly neighbour helped Pierre up off the icy sidewalk, and he managed to return home. Visiting at the apartment the next day, I noticed Pierre's discomfort and saw his swollen wrist. His roommate **Bronko** and I encouraged Pierre to go to a health clinic, where an x-ray revealed a broken radius in his forearm, and a broken humerus in his shoulder. So off he went to the hospital for a cast and a sling. One week later, Pierre underwent surgery to reset his wrist.

Despite suffering a lot of pain, Pierre feels lucky to have had Bronko by his side to help with cooking, washing and dressing, and to accompany him to all his appointments, and open doors. He also appreciates the apartment volunteers who brought over muffins and meals, the home care worker who helped with bathing — and yes, his coordinator, who bought him some easy-to-put-on clothes!

Now Pierre is back to his independent self. But he will always remember how a whole community helped him out when he needed it most. 🌱

CATHY, ONE OF OUR COORDINATORS, INVARIABLY SEES THE LIGHTER SIDE OF LIFE.

## VOLUNTEER PROFILE



SAM BEITEL

JOAN ESAR IS A WOMAN OF MANY TALENTS AND INTERESTS: APARTMENT VOLUNTEER, EVENT PLANNER, GENEROUS HOST, NOTED SCULPTOR, AND CITRUS FUNDRAISER!

# Joan Esar

## An outstanding volunteer happiest flying below the radar

By CECILY LAWSON

ONE OF THE HIGHLIGHTS of L'Abri's annual outing to Île St-Bernard is the trek to Joan's nearby cottage to sit on the verandah and watch the sunset. Joan and her poodle, Luna, form the welcoming committee as everyone settles in for an hour of relaxation, snacking on chips and grapes and sipping juice.

Joan Esar has been a volunteer at L'Abri for about ten years, and the ease with which she hosts a group of three dozen residents, volunteers and staff during our annual Île St-Bernard outing is typical of the way she embraces L'Abri. "Joan is someone who is always ready to help out," says executive director Cheryl Lafferty. "She orchestrates the holiday party every year with tremendous enthusiasm, competence and grace, and flies below the radar when kudos are being handed out. When she saw that we needed a new vacuum cleaner, she simply went out and bought one for us, refusing to be reimbursed. Plus, she brings in gifts from her friends, and gets them to donate to L'Abri in lieu of giving her birthday presents. And that's just a small part of what she does for L'Abri."

Joan is a noted sculptor who studied at École des Beaux-arts de Montréal and Concordia University, then taught sculpture for many years at the Beaux-arts, and later at Université de Québec à Montréal, becoming a mentor to several Quebec artists. She and her late husband, well-known Canadian painter **Jacques de Tonnancour**, travelled extensively, particularly in South America. These travels inspired her creations, many of which reference ancient civilizations. Examples of her work can be found in private and public collections.

A member of the volunteer team at the Park apartment, Joan is much loved by the three residents of the apartment, **Karen, Terryann and Eileen**. "She is very present for us," says Terryann, "and very kind. If we need to run an errand, she is there to drive us. And she invites us to her home for dinner and often treats us to a meal at Nino's, our local Italian restaurant." Eileen is herself an artist, and appreciates Joan's support of her work. "Joan always comes to my vernissages, and this past year she bought a painting done by one of my classmates. She's very warm and very generous on all fronts."

No story about Joan would be complete without mention of her contribution to L'Abri's annual citrus sale. Where others encourage a few friends to buy a box or two, for Joan it's an industrial operation where she takes orders from many people in her high-rise apartment building, then picks them up and delivers them herself. And of course, she always buys an extra box for the residents of the Park apartment. **A**

ENTHUSIASM  
COMPETENCE  
AND GRACE

### UNSEEN HANDS

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**We'd love to hear from you!**

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CECILY IS VICE-PRESIDENT OF L'ABRI'S BOARD, AND A VOLUNTEER ON THE BAHAMA APARTMENT TEAM.



# A ritual to nourish the spirit

By JEROME KIERANS




RECENTLY HAD one the most enriching spiritual experiences of my life. I attended the Bar Mitzvah of **Evan**—the son of a colleague from the hospital where I work—at Temple Beth Tikvah in Dollard-des-Ormeaux.

A Bar Mitzvah is a Jewish coming-of-age ritual for boys. At age thirteen, they become accountable for their actions and able to participate in all areas of Jewish community life. Preparation may include attending prayer services, study at a Hebrew school, and work with a tutor to learn Hebrew and Torah cantillation.

As I sat down with the other men, separate from the women, everyone greeted me with "Shabbat," meaning "good Sabbath" in Hebrew. We were told to pray beginning from a certain page of the prayer book. On the righthand side, the text was set out in Hebrew; on the left, in English. We were directed to various pages many times during the four-hour service. Then the Holy Ark was opened and a sacred scroll removed. Officials read and sang from it, as did Evan and his father. We all smiled at Evan's talent with Hebrew, scripture and music. I thought of myself at that age, with my King James Version of the Bible.

There were many more prayers, psalms and lessons for Evan, his family members and the Jewish community at large. Close to the end, there were uttered the words "Shabbat Shalom." We all kissed the sacred scroll, and it was replaced and enclosed in the Ark.

I was filled with awe, and proud to have been a part of it all. 

JEROME LIVES AT THE BESSBOROUGH APARTMENT, AND IS ALWAYS EAGER TO BROADEN HIS KNOWLEDGE.

## FAMILY ALBUM

### Stacks of juicy fruit READY TO GO!



SAM BIETEL

AT Mountainside Church on the first day of distribution for our citrus fundraiser, Concordia University hockey players unloaded a truckload of oranges and grapefruit, and neatly stacked the tons of citrus in preparation for the oncoming rush of customers. Tons of thanks, guys!

## Residents' praise tickles volunteers

OUR Volunteer Appreciation Dinner was held in March, following the Annual General Meeting. A resident from each apartment stood up to describe how each volunteer team member brightens their lives. **Pierre's** words made a volunteer smile (*above*), while a comment from **Alysse** (*at right*) sparked hilarity at her table.



SAM BIETEL



JENNIFER MORRISON

< Brasilia apartment volunteers **Stephanie Cameron** (*left*) and **Pat Hamilton** chased away a cool draft by sheltering under Pat's colourful shawl.



## FAMILY ALBUM



BAHAMA resident **Beverley Hartley's** festive outfit (*inset*) captured the mood of the season at our Holiday Party in December. In a new twist, everyone was invited to share the spirit of giving by bringing an anonymous gift. A riotous scene unfolded at each table (*at right*), as gift bags and wrapping were opened to reveal the surprises within. It was a perfect end to an evening featuring fruit punch, turkey with all the trimmings, and delicious desserts – all spaced out by a lively round of holiday singing.



SAMI BIETEL



AFTER foul weather forced us to cancel our trip to the cabane à sucre—not once, but twice—we were delighted to wake up to bright sunlight the day of our late April bus trip to Mont-St-Grégoire. Pictured at left saluting the sun were (*left to right*) **Shmoal Loterman**, coordinator **Star Gale**, **Warren D'Souza**, **Brent Laughren**, **George Harris**, **Jerome Kierans**, executive director **Cheryl Lafferty**, **Luc Belleau**, **Karen Bassett**, **David Seymour**, **Florence Kastner** and **Marie-Josée Piché**. After a walk in the fresh air, everyone was ready to dig into a hearty lunch (*far left*) of bacon and eggs, potatoes, and pancakes drizzled with the nectar of nearby maple trees. Resident **Karen Bassett** (*near left, middle*) was lucky to share the day with her mother **Mary** and her dad, long-time volunteer **Bob**.

SAMI BIETEL



## Volunteers help resident reconnect with Chinese traditions

By SUSAN PURCELL

SOMETHING MAGICAL happened at Chinese New Year thanks to two of our volunteers. **Gary**, a young resident at our LaSalle apartment—who is of Chinese heritage—grew up in suburban Brossard, but followed his family to Edmonton when they moved there many years ago. He later returned to Montreal, where a struggle with mental illness led him to Nazareth House, a downtown shelter for homeless men. Last summer, Gary moved to L'Abri en Ville, along with two other Nazareth men.

Noticing that he kept to himself much of the time, LaSalle apartment volunteer **Peter Reynolds** was pleased to get a 'yes' from Gary, when he was asked if he would enjoy an outing to Brossard in mid-February for the Chinese New Year. Peter's two young daughters would be joining their extended Chinese family, the **Pangs**, for a celebration meal at a local restaurant. Although Peter would be out of town for the event, fellow volunteer **Maxene Rodrigues** was ready and willing to drive Gary there, and to accompany him to the dinner, where the Pang family welcomed Gary warmly.

Getting there was an adventure, as Maxene and Gary lost their way in Montreal's infamous construction mess approaching the bridge to the South Shore. Once at the restaurant, they were greeted warmly by Peter's children and an assortment of family members. Before long, their large table was piled with a variety of scrumptious Chinese dishes, and the conversation was bubbling.

"I've never seen Gary eat that much," observed Maxene. Not a big talker, Gary was heard chatting easily in Cantonese with one of the family uncles.

Later in the evening, when it was time to prepare red envelopes for the traditional children's Lucky Money, Maxene contributed to the pool for Peter's daughters. "Gary told me that it was a *faux pas*," Maxene related with amusement, "because I'm not married and therefore should not give Lucky Money."

ON THEIR TRIP BACK to the LaSalle apartment, Gary taught Maxene how to say 'Happy New Year' in Cantonese. "He made me repeat it until it sounded right", she said later. "I only remember that it sounded like 'gwang hay fat choy'."

Recounting the day's events to his coordinator, **Cathy DeChambeau**, Gary rated the outing a 9 out of 10. It was undoubtedly a good start to the Year of the Dog! 🐕



## Notre club de lecture

Parlons de livres et de bien d'autres choses

Par MARIE-JOSÉE PICHÉ

ON SE RENCONTRE une fois de temps en temps pour le plaisir de se voir et d'entendre le sujet des lectures dont on a tirées de bons sentiments. Les bénévoles de l'appartement Brasilia, leaders du « book club », apportent fromages et biscuits salés qu'on dépose sur la table à café, au centre des divans, afin de nous régaler.

Chacune y va de son cru, en racontant ce qu'elle a vu de l'ouvrage qu'on peut parfois faire circuler dans le groupe ou même le passer à une lectrice intéressée. Et si certaine n'a pas réussi à déchiffrer un bouquin, elle arrive quand même à attirer l'attention via son intérêt pour les journaux, le cinéma ou un voyage. Cela dit, tout le monde a son mot à dire... 📖

MARIE-JOSÉE EST RÉSIDENTE DE L'APPARTEMENT BRASILIA. ELLE LIT ACTUELLEMENT LE ROMAN POLICIER « LA MAISON D'À CÔTÉ » DE LISA GARDNER.





## NOTES FROM THE OFFICE

## A day in the office

## NOTES

By CHERYL LAFFERTY

There is no such thing as a typical day in an office like ours, which is geared to ensuring the smooth functioning of our 30 residents in 10 apartments!

## Paperwork

Rents need to be paid, along with *Hydro* and *Videotron* bills, supplies must be bought and files filed. When donations (hopefully) come in, they must be processed. There are thank you notes to send, and reports to write to foundations we are asking for support.

## Resident care

Of course, there are residents to see and appointments to keep. Our coordinators keep in contact with the healthcare teams who work with our residents, and sometimes accompany a resident to see their psychiatrist or nurse. They meet with residents weekly, and notes on these and other meetings must be written and filed. Prospective new residents must be interviewed, and sometimes help given to prepare a resident who is well enough to move on from L'Abri.

## Planning &amp; communicating

An enjoyable task for staff is planning activities and annual events to bring together residents and volunteers. There are always emails to write to our 60 or so volunteers, and meetings with them to give and solicit advice. Several committees are led by volunteers, and staff attend when needed. Staff sit on committees in the community dealing with such things as housing for people facing mental health challenges, and the annual *Montreal Walks for Mental Health*. We supervise McGill social work students and enjoy the mentoring process. As executive director, I attend L'Abri's board and executive meetings, and follow up on business discussed.

## Focus on mission

Part of what makes L'Abri one of a kind is our focus on mission: providing safe, stable and affordable housing to persons living with a severe mental illness, within a supportive and caring social environment. As staff, we aim to keep L'Abri residents and the organization as a whole moving ahead within that context. Getting to our goal is never predictable—or *typical*—but it is always rewarding.

CHERYL IS L'ABRI'S INDEFATIGABLE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR.



## A WORD FROM JOE

## Our intern reflects on the idea of home

By JOE FERRACUTI



I ENTERED my student placement at L'Abri en Ville hoping to learn about mental illness, housing, community resources, and social work skills. What I did not expect to learn about was the invaluable community of L'Abri, and the impact that has on its residents.

During my time here, I have seen how this community encourages and supports its members in their growth. Examples include roommates supporting each other in their day-to-day activities, L'Abri events involving all of the residents, and the community rallying around **George** at his vernissage at Santropol (see page 1).

The idea of "home" can sometimes be overlooked when addressing the issue of housing. At L'Abri, it seems so central. I think this is one of the things that makes L'Abri so successful, and leads some residents to stay for years—or even decades.

I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to spend time at L'Abri, learning from **Cathy**, **Star**, **Cheryl** and all of the residents. I know I will carry what I have learned with me as I continue my studies and as I begin my career, however that might look. 🌱

JOE HAS BEEN DELIGHTFUL TO WORK WITH DURING HIS INTERNSHIP AT L'ABRI.

## Governance for 2018-19

THE MEMBERS of L'Abri en Ville's Board of Directors for the 2018-19 term were introduced on 12 March 2018, at our Annual General Meeting, held at the Unitarian Church of Montreal.



Our Board team (left to right): Charles Pearo, Luc Belleau, Christian Nielsen, Campbell Stuart, Susan Purcell, Gael Eakin, Eric Widdicombe, Sam Beitel, Afric Eustace, Cecily Lawson, Dale MacDonald, Suzanne Herscovitch, Sheila McCarthy, and Sandra Baines.

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#### SHARYN SCOTT

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## 2017 Annual Report

To obtain your copy of our 2017 annual report, phone us at 514 932-2199, or email us at [info@labrienville.org](mailto:info@labrienville.org) to receive an online version.



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