

Dufferin Grove Park Newsletter

September
2024



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Dufferin Grove Park newsletter, September 2024



This newsletter is put out by CELOS, the Centre for Local Research into Public Space. Since 2000, when this little organization began at Dufferin Grove Park, we've been doing what we call "theoretical and practical research" into what makes public spaces – like parks – more hospitable and more lively. We've documented a lot of what we've seen and done, in this newsletter and on our four websites. The newsletter paused in February 2020 and resumed in June 2024.

The 27th annual Child and Family Services Pow Wow, Saturday Sept.28, noon until 5 pm: Location: soccer field and main fire pit. **From their poster:** Honouring the lives of MMIWG25 and 2SLGBTQIA+. Red Dress Commemorative Dance Special. EMCEE: **Frazer Sundown**. Arena Director: **Earl Oegema**. Head Veteran: **Tom Cowie**. Grandfather: **Albert Owl**. Grandmother: **Marilyn Sutherland**. Host Drum: **Eagle Heart Singers**. Co-Host Drum: **Debezdegush Singers**. Invited Drum: **All Nations Juniors**. Head Female Dancer: **Jillian Sutherland**. Head Male Dancer: **Ian Akiwenzie**. Head Youth Female Dancer: **Clarity Smoke**. Head Youth Male Dancer: **Kelvin Boisseneau**.
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The tetherball story

Just north of the sand-volleyball court there's a tetherball pole. Playing tetherball has been a popular activity for years, but this year the tetherball was never put up. **Here's why:** the city Recreation staff mainly stay in or beside the North West building. The city Parks staff only work outside. The Recreation staff were told that putting up the tetherball is up to Parks staff, since it's outside. The Parks staff said that since playing tetherball is recreation, Rec staff should put it up. But the hook for tying up the tetherball string is up high enough that the staff need to use a ladder. Rec staff are not allowed to use a ladder until they've had official ladder training and certification. None of the staff have had that training. So the tetherball stayed in the supplies cupboard all summer long.

September Park programs

1. **Pickleball** on the hockey pad, all of September: **adults** Tuesday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday 5.30 to 8.30. **Over 60:** Monday Weds mornings 9.30 to 12.30 . **Family (age 6 and over)** Wednesday 5.30 to 9.30, Saturday and Sunday 9.30 to 12.30. This is first come first serve, for a fee of \$4.50 for adults, \$2.25 for older adults, children and youth free.

2. **Private group permits** can be booked on the dry hockey pad for any unassigned time. When no such permit is booked, the unassigned times will be available for pickleball or bike polo, whoever gets there first (no exclusive-use permits were assigned for bike polo this year).

3. **Make-your-own pizza days** (drop-in): every Sunday in September, noon to 2.30, cost \$4 (to be paid inside NW building, no cash). Schools can book a visit if they ask.

4. **Friday Night supper:** to Sept.27, 6 to 7.30. Menus and prices TBA. Payment by pre-booking or on location via POS transaction, or cash (exact change). Location is outdoors on the east-facing plaza by the North West building; inside the building if it rains. The three-year potluck supper that kept the Friday suppers alive until the building reopened, continues at that location and time as well, everyone welcome.

Registered courses in the North West building kitchen:

Children and youth 2-hour classes, running for 9 weeks:

Ages 6 to 8: Saturdays from Sept.28, 10.30 a.m. until 12.30, (cooking), cost is \$57

Ages 9 to 12: Saturdays from Sept.28, 1 to 3 pm, (cooking); Sundays from Sept.29, 10.30 a.m. to 12.30, (baking), cost is \$57

Ages 13 to 17 (youth): Fridays from Oct.3, 5 to 7 pm, (cooking); Sundays from Sept.29, 1 to 3 pm, (baking), cost is \$56.

Online registration starts Sept.10: <https://efun.toronto.ca/torontofun/Start/Start.asp>

The North West building is open for drop-in and washroom use from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. every day except closed on holidays.



The Dufferin Grove community wood ovens: an update

1. The bigger community wood oven, just south of the North West rink building, which had thousands of cooking fires over a period of 28 years, needs to have the oven dome rebuilt (everything wears out eventually). The original oven builder said he'd be willing to rebuild it, when the oven friends asked him. But city parks staff were not interested in talking to him. Instead, they sent the problem over to the city's Capital Projects Design and Delivery team, in February. This team has not asked to talk to the **oven friends** nor have they given any hint of their plans so far.

2. The smaller community wood oven near the cob kitchen is working fine.

Sundays: make-your-own pizza program from noon until 2.30 (last day is Sept.29). Run by city rec staff. For \$4 (e-payment, no cash) you can buy a ticket from staff at the northwest park building, walk down to the playground, roll out some dough, cover it with pizza sauce and cheese, and give it to the staff to bake in the oven.

Community use: After 2.30 when the Sunday pizza time is done the oven is nice and hot -- that's the time when neighbours can fire-roast their Thursday farmers' market vegetables. It's a good way to use up the fire that's left from the pizza time.

"Oven friend" (definition): a term for anybody who wants to do fire cooking, and help preserve this traditional way of preparing and preserving food. **To find out more: mail@dufferinpark.ca.**

Foods to cook in the community wood oven by the playground:

Sunday: fast, intense (fire cooking) with the fire still in after the pizza time is done:

For example, eggplants (e.g. for baba ghanoush)/ tomatoes, fire roasted for sauce (easy to freeze for winter use)/ onions/ peppers/ squashes/ potatoes

Monday or Tuesday: slow, using the leftover oven warmth after the fire is out: for example, drying Roma tomatoes, apples, apricots. Winter keepers.

*Firing up the park's outdoor wood oven only for two hours of pizzas is kind of wasteful. Community use for cooking all kinds of other food for two additional days, using all the rest of the heat generated without adding more wood, is **brilliant**.*



Messages from park friends to Recreation director Cathy Vincelli

Back in the spring, the acting citywide recreation director came to a meeting (requested by park friends and CELOS), at the renovated NW park building, to talk about the spring and summer programs at Dufferin Grove. Before the meeting, park friends wrote letters to the director, to let her know what they loved about the park. **A few excerpts:**

Maggie Anderson: *"I spent hours walking my baby, meeting neighbours....As my daughter grew, we spent days in the park playing and making lifelong friends."* **Gail Skikevitch:** *"My grandchildren loved to sit and watch the fire in the wood stove, see the shinny hockey players get ready to go out on the ice, and have a cup of hot chocolate and a cookie, or mini-pizza from kitchen. It felt just like one big family room in the basement of a home."* **Johanne Pulker:** *"Community is the assumption that 'strangers' are friendly. Friday Suppers, standing in a long line of hungry people, meeting new -neighbours at the same table, taking grandchildren to the sand pit where all they had to do was start digging and someone else with a shovel was a new friend."* **Andrea Holtslander:** *"Park staff made and served affordable healthy food at the cob kitchen snack bar, hosted various craft projects, or set up a 'tea party' in the sandpit. My kids always knew they could call on the staff if they needed to, and the staff knew them well."* **Peter Thillaye:** *"There was always some member of staff or park friend that could advise, suggest or enable something that a family needed or was interested in. This meant that the whole park was always in play, always humming."* **David Rothberg:** *"Never have I enjoyed being in a park like Dufferin was in the early 2000s. People who worked in the park knew who you were.....The staff was invested in doing a good job. That job was making the people who used the park happy....Nobody who worked at Dufferin seemed bored."* **Simon Evans:** *"One of the things that struck me was the engagement between park users and the staff, building ideas and allowing the staff the freedom to help start various activities. The cob wall was a perfect example, and it....had a ripple effect that was felt for many years."*

After the meeting, Cathy sent a list of what staff would support: It included "Ovens Open for Thursday Markets • Vegetable Harvests • Friday Night Suppers (may include support from Market vendor group) • Cob Café & Snack Bar...."

Friday Night suppers have started up slowly, and the ovens can be used to cook the farmers' market produce after the Sunday pizza fire. But the cob café didn't happen at all (see page 5).

The cob kitchen: In 1997, City Council approved \$3100 for the construction of a park food cart for Dufferin Grove, to be used at the playground in spring/summer/fall. This food cart served coffee, tea, juices, and some healthy snacks prepared at the rink clubhouse kitchen. It operated under the “*special events*” food rules, but it proved so popular that it became a daily event in summer. **Toronto Public Health** inspectors were supportive, but late in the summer of 2004, they sent word to Recreation management that proper sinks, refrigeration, and a counter for food preparation must be installed by the wading pool by summer 2005 in place of the playground food cart.

Park friend **Georgie Donais** said – “*if we have to have sinks, we can back them with a community-built cob courtyard and make something beautiful.*” With the help of a **\$2500** grant from the **Toronto Parks and Trees Foundation**, she set about working with many park friends of all ages, supported by rec staff, to build a little courtyard around the sinks. The sinks were installed by city plumbers, and city staff ran electricity to the courtyard. Collaboration flowered, prompted by a public health order! Together, park friends and staff created an outdoor gathering-place. The courtyard walls are made with a sand-clay-straw mix known as “*cob*” or “*monolithic adobe*”, which is mixed by foot and applied by hand. The building style is called “*vernacular building*,” that is, it’s a building made by people for exactly what they need, rather than by architects.

From 2006 on, the cob kitchen was used as a popular café for 4-6 hours a day, for the months when school was out. During those years, the snack bar daily income on 4 sample days in July ranged from \$450 to \$1200 (depending on the weather). Those funds were used to pay for the food supplies, for the work of the cooks and servers, and – often there was extra – for other park programs.

The covid lockdowns shut everything down on March 2020, and then the North West corner construction shut down rink house kitchen access for another 2 years. Then, in May, the recreation director promised that the cob café would return this summer. But first, after 4 years of neglect, it needed quite a bit of maintenance work, which recreation management said was the responsibility of Parks. So we invited the Parks manager to a site meeting on May 7. Two weeks before the meeting date, thieves came in the night and stripped out all the copper from the plumbing. That would mean the city plumbers would need to get involved.

Two brand-new Masters of Architecture graduates, local to the neighbourhood, came to that cob kitchen meeting. **Elizabeth Antczak** and **Izzy Mink** had been excited by the

cob kitchen's history of *vernacular building* made with natural materials. They offered to put together a proposal for fixing the whole structure. Parks staff said, go ahead, show it to us. Three weeks later, after lots of research including with the original building coordinator, Georgie Donais, Elizabeth and Izzy sent Parks staff an illustrated 41-page proposal, which they would carry out in cooperation with Parks tech staff.



The proposal went in on May 31. No response. After three weeks Celos followed up, and included **Councillor Bravo** on the email. No response then either, from anyone.

And no cob café either. By then the shiny new North West corner kitchen was open, but it became obvious that recreation management had no plans in place for rec staff to prepare any food for the playground, not in the new kitchen either.

Then, on July 29, Parks general supervisor **Andrea Chow** set up a cob kitchen meeting. After some discussion of whatever the staff got from reading, or not reading, the proposal, Andrea dropped the bombshell. There would be no collaboration. Parks have no staff certified to fix the cob kitchen, she said, but non-certified people aren't allowed to do it either. Any community work will have to be only surface-level (decorate the walls with a mosaic or a mural). Whatever went on in 2005 to build the structure, and the yearly work by rec staff since then to maintain it, is now against the rules. It sounds like, after 15 good years (before 2020), it's over. But that little piece of oh-so-useful vernacular architecture sure had a good run!

Globe article on playgrounds: On August 24 the Globe ran a full-page article, written by Amberley McAteer, with the title "Why are our playgrounds so boring?" She contrasted Toronto playgrounds with the "unique elements" of "risky" playgrounds in Copenhagen. *"All their spaces seem to have one thing in common: chilled-out parents, watching their kids from a distance with a coffee or glass of wine in hand from the designated café, a hallmark of Copenhagen playgrounds. (A real-life coffee-shop lady at the playground? I am stunned.)"*

Of course, there was coffee and more (snacks, swim diapers, but not wine) for sale at the cob kitchen at the Dufferin Grove playground for over 15 years. And there were city playground staff, as there still are in Denmark and other European countries, *"to keep an extra eye out."* **Gone from Dufferin Grove now, but not forgotten.**

A letter from Adam House (430 Gladstone just north of the park):

From **Hayley Kingstone** (staff at Adam House): *“There will be a **“Walk with Refugees” fundraiser on October 5th.** It aims to raise funds for renovations and services that directly benefit our residents. We will be walking 8.3 km across Toronto, beginning at one of our residences at 231 Booth Ave and ending at our main residence at 430 Gladstone Ave, where we’ll celebrate with a BBQ. It would be wonderful if members of our community could join us for the festivities, as their support makes a tremendous impact on our residents and staff. To find out more: <https://www.adamhouse.org/walk-with-refugees-2024>”*



Farmers’ Market, every Thursday at the North West corner building, 3 to 7 pm

Nicole Jacobs, the market manager, sends out a weekly market news bulletin. There are vegetable and fruit farmers, plus meat, fish, and dairy, bakers, brewers, prepared foods to eat at the new café tables. A recent sample:

*“A brand new coffee vendor starts this week: **Mr Macaw**” offers organic, fair-trade, brazilian coffee - hot or iced....**Reyes Farms** says it will be the last week to get **“donut peaches”** - so tasty! and (as promised), early-fall apples are now here - “ginger gold” and “ida red”, (to name a couple...)**Organic corn** is still available from **Nature’s Way organics**....and tomatoes, **tomatoes**, everywhere!! this is the one crop that **ALL the growers have right now!** (and **Kooner farms**.is selling **roma** tomatoes by the bushel, fyi..) **Pop-up vendors this week: Laneway Distillers, Casa Shrooms and Sopsicles Toronto**....Some not-for-profits to look for: Toronto Public Library, Cycle Toronto, Greenpeace Canada. **Special guests: “Papalote” Cuban-style music quartet.**”*

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