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INSPIRATIONS

ARTS & TRAVEL

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The I Can Dream Theatre dazzled in their musical dramedy Remembering Titanic, which was staged in November 2016. Featured in this photo are cast members from left to right: Mitchell Newman, Michelle Perron-Elgee, Andrew Perez, Diego Noya, Steven Atme, Maxwell Po, Gabriel Fadda, Jamal Thomas, and Ainslie Macdonald. See articles on pages 6 and 9. (Photo credit, Ross White)



www.cinemasguzzo.com

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Make It Matter is a non-profit organization that funds project-specific initiatives that support quality education for all learners. At *Make It Matter*, we believe that all learners are entitled to academic resources that enhance their educational experience. *Make it Matter* is the link between the community and the classrooms that allows this to happen. We are committed to creating, with the community's involvement, a support system for administrators, educators, parents, and learners in need of financial assistance to enhance the quality of education.

Many schools and organizations within the Greater Montreal and surrounding areas are in need of additional resources to ensure that every student's educational experience is exceptional. All too often, students struggling with learning, social and physical disabilities or poverty lack the necessary funds to succeed academically. We wish to help educators bring about change by funding projects and resources to the people who request our help. The organization will accept applications annually and will selected two or more projects for which to provide funds. These project-specific initiatives include various resources; some examples include a field trip that will enhance the curriculum, new furniture for a flexible-seating classroom, additional clothing and food, materials for a science lab, breakfast programs and extra support for learners with specific needs.

Please note that projects that *Make It Matter* are unable to fund will be promoted through our website for the 2017-2018 school year where teachers are encouraged to share their classroom needs and seek financial support for their education-related projects from members of the community.

For our first year, we are happy to announce that we will be supporting the needs of St. Gabriel Elementary School in funding their Home Reading Program and Creative Arts Program. Additionally, we will provide funds for Inspirations Newspaper to facilitate their community outreach.

Our spring fundraiser will take place on Saturday, May 6, 2017. For ticket information or more information on our mission, visit our website at www.makeitmattertoday.org or contact deborah@makeitmattertoday.org.

We would like to thank you for your interest in our work and look forward to seeing you at our event and through future collaborations!

Message from the Editor

We would like to welcome readers to the inaugural edition of Inspirations Arts & Travel. Inspirations Newspaper is now in its eighth year of providing uplifting success stories in the area of special needs. Through our pages, we bring feedback from psychologists, guidance counsellors, speech language pathologists, autism spectrum disorder consultants, behavioural specialists, social workers and physiotherapists. We go into the classrooms of the intellectually and physically disabled, as well as examine how the visually and hearing impaired population cope day to day. The underlining message is that all of these people continue to be "Inspirations" to all of us.

When I first came up with the idea to launch Inspirations it stemmed from an Adapted Travel column I was writing for another publication called Exceptional Family. The column was meant to provide those extra details individuals and families affected by special needs require when travelling. I received such overwhelming appreciation from readers that I approached English Montreal School Board Director of Student Services Lew Lewis about creating our own newspaper. Thanks largely in part to our managing editor and director of operations Wendy Singer, Inspirations is thriving with two print editions distributed widely in the Greater Montreal area to English school boards, private schools, institutions dealing with special needs individuals, hospitals, doctors offices, community organizations, the media and government. The newspaper is also available at many drop-off points across the island, including the South Shore and Laval, and is expanding and reaching more parents, teachers, special care workers and students.

Our website: www.inspirationsnews.com, allows us to reach many more readers. It is used as a year round resource to publicize events, courses and accomplishments, and post back editions of Inspirations. This site hosts our 'Special Needs Database,' which has over 500 listings of resources and continues to grow. We have also instituted a recognition program, honouring a teacher in the fall and a caregiver in the spring.

Previously we published a special Inspirations Express online edition twice a year. We are now converting that into Inspirations Arts & Travel. Please share your feedback.

Mike Cohen

In Full FX: Magnificent paintings tell an interesting story

By Wendy Singer

In the Fall 2016 / Winter 2017 edition of Inspirations, we featured an article about Fragile X syndrome (FXS) in which we interviewed artist and founder of X Fragile Québec Frédéric Bruneau. Bruneau and his wife have a son who has the full mutation of FXS.

Also co-founder of the Fragile X clinic at the Centre Hospitalier de l'Université de Sherbrooke, Bruneau founded X Fragile Québec after seeing the great need for support for FXS families in the province.

Bruneau was invited to exhibit his show In Full FX at Galerie Carte Blanche in Montreal from October 26 to November 8, 2017, giving Montrealers the opportunity to meet him and see his magnificent paintings.

His abstract portraits weave complicated, raw, truthful tales. Looking into the eyes of his portrait subjects, it is clear that these tales are intensely personal. Through his art, Bruneau shares his struggles with bipolar disorder, and the frustrations and the beauty that he experiences on a daily basis with his son, and with FX.

While Bruneau's art is inspired by his son, these paintings inspire us to look into the souls of our loved ones and recognize both their chaos and beauty.

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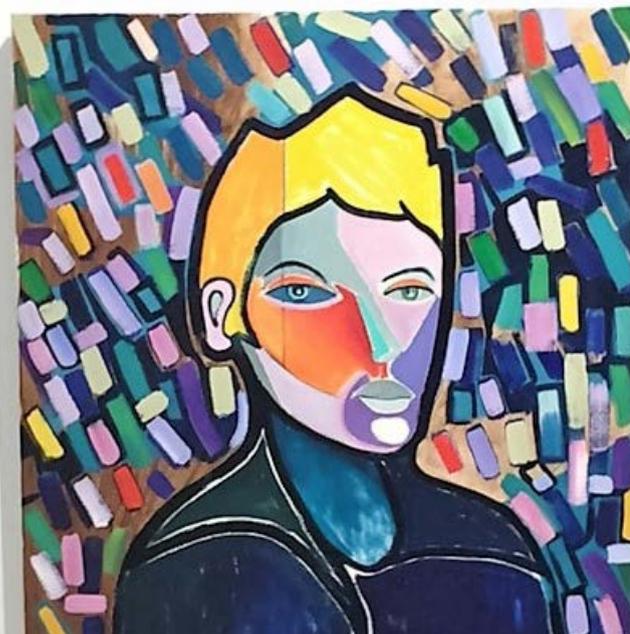
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Perobikose Jr. by Frédéric Bruneau (Photo courtesy of <http://www.galeriecarteblanche.com>)

The Village addresses mental health on stage

By Eleni Giannakas

Captivating the audience, Tina Milo tells the story of a woman who is auditioning for the role of a depressed character. Describing the scenario in actions and words, Milo shows us exactly what it is to be someone who is suffering from a mental illness such as depression.

This theatrical production of *The Village* took place at the Centaur Theatre in Montreal. It was part of their Wildside Festival and in just 50 minutes, this production informs the audience of what goes through the character's head. Milo performed and created this production along with the help of Dijana Milošević and Neša Paripović.

Tina Milo has over 20 years of experience in theatre, film and television. She is currently living in Montreal and has toured in many places, such as in Europe, the U.S.A. and Canada. Milo has a brilliant passion that cannot be described by words.

She switched back and forth between the character's life and the role that the character is auditioning for. She shows us the difference between someone who can function and who doesn't have a mental illness, compared to someone who is suffering from a mental illness and cannot function.

The character in *The Village* must separate reality and her role's audition. She is dealing with a lot of emotion and is struggling with her inner self. This is very realistic and hopefully shows people that they should take caution and be more open about subjects surrounding mental illness.

Mental illnesses, such as depression, bipolar disorder, suicidal tendencies, schizophrenia and others, are something that will affect one in five people in their lifetime. This play is a great way to raise awareness, as it is accurate and full of insight.

As someone who has been suffering from mental illnesses since Grade 7, this production warms my heart. I'm glad it exists and that I got to see it. Tina Milo brought such a passion to this subject and it represents the passion that people can have, even in their time of distress.

Anger, confusion, sadness, fatigue, numbness, suicidal thoughts, and many other symptoms can all take place when someone is struggling. As Olympic athlete and mental health spokesperson Clara Hughes says, the best thing to do is to listen to people, even if you don't understand. Just be there for them.

I advise everyone and anyone who is struggling to seek help. You're definitely worth it and you deserve to dream big and have happiness.

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Tina Milo on stage in The Village at The Centaur Theatre Company's Wildside Festival 2017. (Photo credit, ©Una Škandro)

Being Rachel: A documentary

By Wendy Singer

Those of you who saw Summit School's Performing Arts production of *Rachel at Risk* in 2014 won't soon forget it. This powerful drama based on the lives of students at Summit School was laced with important life lessons. Through the real characters portrayed, we had the opportunity to learn about their struggles and admire their undeniable strength.

Jesse Heffring knew that the story told in *Rachel at Risk* was too important to end after the final curtain call. So, while directing the show, he filmed rehearsals. The result is *Being Rachel*, a magnificent documentary about the making of *Rachel at Risk*, from script creation to showtime.

The documentary had us glued to our seats, moved by the courage and resilience of the Summit School students as we bore witness to their realities while preparing and putting on a play about their lives. *Being Rachel* presents an invaluable opportunity to share Heffring's vision and the students' stories with a larger audience, breaking down barriers far and wide.

Outta Here shines at the Wildside Festival

By Wendy Singer

The Summit School Performing Arts is known for its stellar productions, developed and written by director and media arts teacher Jesse Heffring, Dara Murphy, and the student actors. They presented their most recent production *Outta Here* at Concordia's D. B. Clarke Theatre in the spring to rave reviews.

When the Wildside Festival's co-curator Johanna Nutter saw *Outta Here*, she was impressed, referring to it as a "master class in authenticity". Nutter and Roy Surette, artistic and executive director of the Centaur Theatre Company and co-curator of the Wildside, saw the potential of the show, and were motivated to share it with a greater audience.

Outta Here is an entertaining, well-crafted piece of theatre in which all 35 actors shine. As we are led on an adventure with the five lead students, we are privy to their beautiful, touching, humorous personalities. They were poised and animated as they weave through pointed dialogue which shared their thoughts on having developmental disabilities. Fun musical numbers, engaging choreography, and comedy kept the energy of the show high.

To Heffring, staging *Outta Here* at the Wildside Festival was the golden opportunity that he was hoping for. "We want to share our students stories and abilities with a greater audience. These are young people who don't get the opportunity to play in the 'big game', or win awards or achieve academically. For them, this performance is their winning touchdown, their homerun, their standing ovation."

This mission was accomplished. As Montreal Theatre Hubs's Camila Fitzgibbon reported: "The humour, wit, creativity and production value displayed are singularly impressive, and it's fundamentally impossible not to be moved by such unadulterated spirit on stage. A profound wake-up call of sorts, it reminded us of the transformative power of theatre and prompted us to go back to basics and redefine what constitutes a great performance: sincerity, humanizing, disarming, inspiring. Immaculate, *Outta Here* is a complete breath of fresh air. You will be changed."

To read more about *Outta Here* visit our blog at inspirationsnewsmtl.blogspot.ca.



The stars of Summit School Performing Arts play *Rachel at Risk*, Melissa Nower, director Jesse Heffring, Samuel Lewis, and Nadia Caballero at a private screening of *Being Rachel*, a documentary film. (Photo credit, Wendy Singer)

I Can Dream Theatre knocks it out of the park with *Remembering Titanic*

By Mike Cohen

I have heard a lot of great things about I Can Dream Theatre over the years. As the editor of Inspirations Newspaper, which focuses on upbeat stories related to special needs, I was persuaded to attend the company's fifth production entitled *Remembering Titanic* by my colleague Wendy Singer.

With a cast of 24 actors taking to the stage, this year's production was touted as being bigger and better than ever as the company celebrated its official non-profit status. Over the period of two nights at the Eric Maclean S.J. Center for Performing Arts of Loyola High School in NDG, a group of young actors, ranging in age from 19 to 45, performed an original script mixed with modern song and dance to chart toppers like 'Don't Stop Believin'' by Journey and 'We Are The Champions' by Queen.

What is so unique about this? The cast includes those with special needs such as autism and Down syndrome.

Opening night marked the company's first-ever gala, with all proceeds benefiting continued programming, including workshops and employment opportunities for its members. Pierre Fréreau, founder and senior associate of Fréreau & Associates, was the honouree. The evening included cocktails and hors d'oeuvres and the

opportunity to see the play's premiere. *Remembering Titanic* is a musical comedy based on the infamous story of the Titanic. Audience members did see many familiar characters. Yet the story was not like the one you may remember. We attended the second show. There was a packed house, filled it seems by mostly family and friends of the performers. You could sense the pride and it was emotional to witness the many well deserved standing ovations.

Hats off to the entire team!

Steven Atme hosts talent show

By Wendy Singer

The Special People Have Dreams Talent Show, founded and organized by Steven Atme, will take place on April 29, 2017. It will be an afternoon to remember, full of talent, artistic expression, and surprises. The show will feature a variety of acts that will showcase the musical, singing, and acting skills of many different people with special needs.

Five years ago, Inspirations columnist and I Can Dream Theatre actor Steven Atme, wrote a speech titled 'Special People Have Dreams'. His goal in sharing his story of living with autism was to educate about autism, break down barriers, and decrease bullying.

Atme is now living his dream, presenting his speech to EMSB schools and beyond. He has spoken in Montreal and Chateaugay, and keeps adding to the list of destinations. A piano teacher and composer, Atme teaches piano to people with and without autism.

His hope for the talent show is to give his performers the opportunity to exceed expectations. "Families go through so much frustration because society can't see the value of their loved ones with special needs," shared Atme. "I want the show to be a fun experience for them."

The show will take place at Lindsay Place High School in Pointe-Claire. Tickets are on sale now at <https://goo.gl/rQQ44Bs>



*The I Can Dream Theatre dazzled in their musical dramedy *Remembering Titanic*, which was staged in November 2016. (Photo credit, Ross White)*

Music for Autism International drums up rhythm at Giant Steps School

By Wendy Singer



Marianne Béchard and Jordan play at the Extraordinary Rhythms concert. (Photo credit, Ross White)

Last fall, Giant Steps School (GS) teamed up with Music for Autism International. Their mission was to conduct a seven-week pilot project that introduced GS students and their families to high quality, professionally performed music in an environment where individual differences are celebrated.

Over the past several years, Music for Autism International has observed the positive effects of live classical music performances on hundreds of youths with autism in classrooms across continents and cultures.

One of the goals of this pilot project was to provide the opportunity for GS students to embrace rhythmic movement, as well as to provide instruction in musical technique. All students participated in percussion workshops over the course of the session.

The project ended with the concert Extraordinary Rhythms, held on December 16, 2017 at the F.C. Smith Auditorium. It showcased the rhythmic work of a few GS students, and culminated with a masterful finale that included every student in the school.

While every number in the program was a true work of art, Jonathan's rendition of *Flight of the Bumblebee*, by Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov, and adapted by McKenzie Camp, percussionist from San Francisco, truly showed the importance of music and how students connect with it. Remarkably, Jonathan learnt how to play the piece on the marimba in only four rehearsals.

Henry Tillman, chairman of Music for Autism International, and chief executive officer Jill Bradford were in attendance to share in the success of the show, along with program spokesperson Sophie Prigent.



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The Spectrum Productions filmmakers take to the stage at the seventh annual screening and fundraising gala at The Rialto Theatre. (Photo credit, Margaret Thompson Photography)

Celebrating filmmakers with autism

By Wendy Singer

On November 2, Spectrum Productions welcomed over 450 people to the Rialto Theatre for their seventh annual screening and fundraising gala. Under the direction of Liam O'Rourke and Dan Ten Veen, all of the 90 films screened were produced by young adult filmmakers who have autism.

Films are produced at Spectrum's summer camp and throughout the year at their studio. The students learn translatable skills as they work on their films, providing excellent training opportunities and potential for employment, which is Spectrum's ultimate goal.

This work is not only rewarding to O'Rourke and Ten Veen. The filmmakers take great pride in their work, and you can only imagine the thrill they experience when seeing their ideas come to life on the big screen.

To add to the success of the evening, over \$45,000 was raised for Spectrum Productions. This funding will help this non-profit organization continue to do the wonderful and important work they are doing with youth and young adults with autism.

This event was not exclusive to Montreal. Spectrum took their show on the road, wowing audiences in Toronto as well with the talent of their young apprentices.

For information about Spectrum Productions visit productionsspectrum.com.

TV shows and special needs

By Eleni Giannakas

NCIS

Delilah Fielding, played by actress Margo Harshman, is a computer specialist who does web and information security and intelligence analyst work for the United States Department of Defense in Washington D.C. on the show NCIS. She was paralyzed due to a spinal injury and now uses a wheelchair. You can watch Delilah in action during the amazing season 11.

NCIS was released and premiered in September of 2003. This show is still presently running on CBS every Tuesday at 8/7c. You can also watch previous and current episodes on Global TV's website, at www.globaltv.com/ncis/.

ÇA ME REGARDE

There are three seasons of Ça me regarde, a French talk show that focuses on all sorts of disabilities, diseases, and illnesses. Along with many guests for the show, Christine Rousseau and Kévon Breton run this show every week.

Ça me regarde provides a lot of useful information on many topics such as paralympics, autism, and other chronic disorders.

This show is an AMI (Accessibilité Média Inc.) production and you can view it online at: www.amitele.ca/category/ca-me-regarde.

SPEECHLESS

Micah Fowler, an American actor who has cerebral palsy, plays the role of JJ DiMeo on ABC's Speechless. In the television show, his character also has cerebral palsy. Fowler must also be mute in the TV show and uses many facial expressions to get his message across.

The young actor got the role of JJ on his 18th birthday. The show was released in September of 2016. Fowler also works very closely as an ambassador with the Cerebral Palsy Foundation (CPF).

For more information log on to ABC's website: www.abc.go.com.

THE MIDDLE

Actor Atticus Shaffer plays the odd character of Brick Heck on The Middle, a TV show that airs every Tuesday at 8/7c on ABC. The show was released in September of 2009 and still runs presently.

At the young age of 18, Shaffer is still following his acting career while having type IV OI of Osteogenesis Imperfecta. This disease is sometimes also called "brittle bone disease," which is rare and lifelong.

Atticus Shaffer has won the RJ Mitte Diversity Award at the Media Access Awards in 2010 for his role in The Middle television series.



*Atticus Shaffer
Photo File*

One brother's testament to the Centre for the Arts in Human Development for people with special needs

By Kristopher Mancini

In the Faculty of Fine Arts at Concordia University, the Centre for the Arts in Human Development (CAHD) gives participants with special needs the platform to express what is currently happening in their lives without judgment or naysay. Lisa Mancini, 23, was diagnosed at age six with pervasive development disorder not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS), encompassed under the autism spectrum. Attending the CAHD, my sister was able to express her emotions in a creative way that would not be possible in any traditional classroom setting. Through student interns and professional therapists, Centre participants learn how to tackle goals that can be set and strived towards over the course of the therapy.

After just a few months of participation, my sister has never looked happier after a day spent in the Centre. "What makes our Centre very unique is it's under a creative arts therapies paradigm. The first part is to provide clinical services through the creative arts therapies for people with special needs," says Stephen Snow, co-director of research at CAHD.

With a very strong research focus, the program's directors are always adjusting the program and trying to bring the efficacies to the spotlight. This is done through open houses, and large-scale musical productions with the program's participants. "CAHD is a training site for graduate students who are studying art, drama and music therapy," says Lenore Vosberg, the Centre's co-founder and director of clinical services and public outreach. "We work on social skills, human development, building self-esteem, self-confidence and communication skills. We tackle these goals over the course of three years, and by the time they graduate it's evident that most participants have made great strides in the accomplishment of their own personal goals."

My sister has had many breakthroughs since attending the CAHD, one being that she is not alone and other people share similar problems and worries. "I feel happy, I am able to relate with other people in my group, and people actually listen to me," says Lisa. "I feel less anxious." My sister's eyes light up when asked about her day at the Centre. Some activities that she participates in include painting, drama, and dancing. As a first-year student, she attends the program twice a week. "I like going to school, I like to socialize with the other adults because they can understand me," says Lisa, with a big smile. My sister also receives one-on-one counseling to discuss some of her own personal issues, something that is rarely seen at other Quebec universities.

The Centre takes referrals from the West Montreal Readaptation Centre, Miriam Home or a local CLSC. For more information about Centre for the Arts in Human Development, visit concordia.ca/cahd.



CAHD participant enjoying the creative arts therapies.

(Photo courtesy of CAHD)

I Can Dream Theatre hits the road

By Wendy Singer

As part of their mission as a non-profit organization, I Can Dream Theatre (ICDT) has created the ICDTravelling Troupe. Their intent is to provide schools with a condensed version of their top-notch annual productions.

Not only will the ICDTravelling Troupe provide more opportunities to showcase the extraordinary talents of adults with special needs, it will also stimulate awareness and social interaction between its members and the community.

The travelling musical shows run from 45 to 60 minutes long, and feature approximately 12 cast members who act, sing and dance. Performances are ideal for an upper elementary and above level audience.

Ultimately, ICDT is proud to share the amazing abilities of people with special needs to the Montreal community.

For information and bookings email icandreamtheatre@gmail.com. Bookings are available on Fridays during the school year.

John Grant High School students create wonderful mural project on lockers and walls

By Eleni Giannakas



*Sinthia Cousineau, Marie Francis, and Marcio Melo
(Photo credit: Eleni Giannakas)*

Marie Francis, a teacher at John Grant High School in Côte Saint-Luc, says she wanted to get rid of the depressing “prison gray” walls in the building and instead brighten up the school hallways and do so in a creative way.

John Grant is a high school of the EMSB that targets students who have academic struggles or who have mild to severe intellectual impairments. It focuses on getting some students a Pre-Work Ministry Certification, instead of a high school diploma.

Ms. Francis assigned 21 of her students to create a mural along the lockers and walls of the hallway on the third floor of John Grant. Her student teacher, Sinthia Cousineau, took charge of this project and worked alongside artist Marcio Melo.

The John Grant mural project was carried out from February 13 to 15. Students were eager to work on this for three days and it built up their will to learn about the theme, aboriginal culture and art.

Sara, a student partaking in this project, says, “My favourite part was brainstorming. This art and creativity comes out of our hearts.” She was very happy to talk about the project, showing me her favourite sections of the mural. Selena, Allison, and Maurine are students of Ms. Francis and are also working on the mural project. They all agree that they love it and they wish it could continue. All three girls liked different aspects of this mural such as painting, drawing, and designing.

Mr. Melo, an architect by profession, took part in this project. This added to the 170 murals he’s already done around Quebec. He moved from Brazil to Montreal to start his career and to follow his passion of art. “This project allows everyone to collaborate and share space with each other,” he said. “The students can express themselves as they are in the present moment.”

The 21 students created beautiful murals across lockers and walls on the third floor. This will be a three-year production, as they

will continue across the whole corridor to brighten up the lives of the students and their environment. They hope this will become a trend in schools so that everyone has a chance to express themselves creatively.

“This mural project has a community collective impact,” says Ms. Cousineau, who, despite only having been a student teacher at John Grant for a few months, has developed a close connection with her students and enjoys what they’re doing together.

Ms. Cousineau jumped at the opportunity to do this mural and guided the theme of Canadian aboriginal cultures. Ms. Francis agrees that this project is indeed wonderful for everyone.

You can view a video of the making of the mural by Sinithia Cousineau here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WxeX_agA0sk

Or visit her website:
<http://www.sinthiacousineau.com/>

Visit Marcio Melo’s website:
<http://marciomelo.com/>



*Allison partaking in the mural production
(Photo credit: Eleni Giannakas)*



Wide Awake at Galileo

By Eleni Giannakas

It's not everyday that a group of students try to get U2 to come preform with them in their gym, yet that is exactly what the 88 special needs students at the Galileo Adult Education Centre in Montreal North are attempting via their production being overseen by arts teacher Anna Persichilli.

Galileo has around 1,000 students and there is essentially three schools in one: a special needs school, where the students are multi-level independent learners; a section for adults who wish to obtain their high school diploma or other credits; and a program for immigrants who are learning the basics of English and French.

With classes based on their learning level, special needs students range in age from 21 to 65 years. It is a welcoming environment and they have many methods of therapy, such as arts, music, and pet therapy!

Ms. Persichilli loves the band U2. Someone suggested doing a production about them, but she declined. When the students found out, they begged her to do it. She then agreed, and thus *Wide Awake* was created.

Galileo's students have put on multiple productions in the past, such as *Grease*, *Michael Jackson*, and a spin on the *Wicked Witch of the West*. The students are all very eager for these plays and enjoy finding ways to express themselves with art, music, and dance. Each production has gradually become bigger and better, with more and more people demanding to view them.

"These plays improve social skills, and confidence in these special needs students. It also allows them to find something to focus on and become more active," says principal Martina Schiavone, who encourages these activities noting that it helps with the SIS Program.

SIS (Social Integration Services) allows adults to acquire the necessary skills to be able to integrate and participate in society to their fullest potential.

This play is about a boy named Paul and his record player. It is a tale about overcoming grief and how friendship can pull us out of our darkest moments. "This play is about grief and how to cope with it using art," says Ms. Persichilli. "Grief is a universal pain, art is the vaccination against it."

You can view their promotional video here: <https://goo.gl/IvW7H9>.



Galileo students with staff memebers. (Photo credit, Eleni Giannakas)

Galileo's celebrity teacher

Vanessa Grimaldi, a 29-year-old special needs teacher at the Galileo Adult Education Centre, has become a huge celebrity in recent months due to her "starring" role on ABC TV's reality show *The Bachelor*. On a recent episode seen by millions of viewers, she brought bachelor Nick Viall for a hometown date and right into her classroom at Galileo. It was an emotional scene for everyone. Vanessa is loved by her students and colleagues. Her mother, Mary Mercuri, is an academic advisor at Laurier Macdonald Career Centre in St. Léonard.

The Bachelor airs Mondays (8 p.m. ET) on ABC.



Vanessa and Nick in her classroom.

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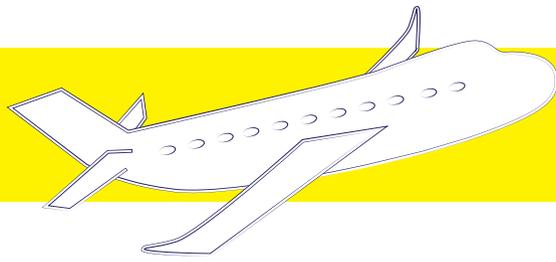
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Hong Kong: Airport is one of the most accessible in the world

By Daniel Smajovits

Hong Kong: It's hard to describe Hong Kong. The cosmopolitan city is equal parts contemporary and ancient, with an unrivaled, exciting intensity that makes Manhattan feel like Halifax. Half way around the world, towering skyscrapers, designer stores and an endless stream of suits cast shadows over wet markets, street vendors and a way of life seemingly unchanged for hundreds of years.

Getting there: Both Air Canada and Cathay Pacific operate more than 25 non-stop flights from Toronto or Vancouver per week. With a flight time ranging between 13 and 16 hours, the time in the air might pose an issue for travelers with special needs, however, with advanced notice, the staff from both airlines – both on the ground and in-flight – provide excellent service and care.

Getting around: Once on the ground in Hong Kong, the airport is billed as one of the most accessible in the world. Staff is on-hand to help passengers with special needs secure their baggage and transportation to the city. Travelers could opt to take a taxi (45 minutes; ~\$50) to the Central district, however, the Airport Express railway line offers efficient and completely accessible transport in 24 minutes for under \$20, per person. With a completely accessible and incredibly efficient Mass Transit Railway (MTR) system, visitors can reach all parts of Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, the New Territories and Lantau Island in minutes. For travelers with visual impairments, tactile paving is in place throughout the city, both indoors and outside.

Where to stay: As one of the world's business and tourism centres, Hong Kong has no shortage



*View from Victoria Peak
(Photo credit: Hong Kong Tourism Board)*

of options. Due to the quick MTR, choose your accommodations based upon amenities; especially if you're traveling with someone with special needs. While the wide selection through Airbnb will undoubtedly come in cheaper than a traditional hotel, these properties are often in high-rises and non-ADA compliant. Conversely, the wide array of first-class hotels will have compliant rooms with staff on hand to assist.

What to do: From getting lost in the hustle and bustle of the Temple Street Night Market to spending the day basking in the views from Victoria Peak, there are endless things to do and see; all of which are accessible for all visitors.

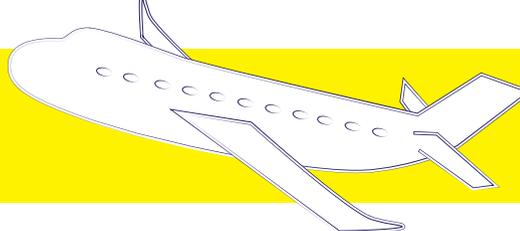
Perhaps the most popular, and cheapest, activity is the Star Ferry. For locals, this is merely a method of transportation between Hong Kong Island and Kowloon, but for travelers, the 15-minute ride across Victoria Harbour offers stunning views of the city. The ferry runs all day, from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. as well as their special Harbour Tours. A glittering laser light show, The Symphony of Lights, featuring the Hong Kong skyscrapers takes place every evening at 8 p.m. The show lasts 13 minutes and is best viewed from the promenade adjacent to the ferry pier in Kowloon.

Victoria Peak offers stunning views of Hong Kong and Kowloon; while some travelers might be able to opt for the hour hike, those with mobility issues can take the historic tram to the top. In operation since 1888, the tram operates from

7 a.m. to midnight, daily. If stunning vistas are your cup of tea, an additional stop must be made across the Harbour at the OZONE bar at the Ritz Carlton Hong-Kong. Located on the 118th floor, in addition to creative cocktails, the bar offers mesmerizing views of Hong Kong, both day and night.

A visit to Hong Kong is not complete without some form of shopping. Whether you're gawking through windows or you've secured an increase in your credit limit to make a few purchases, the city offers perhaps the highest concentration of high-end stores in the world, with the who's who of luxury headquartered at IFC and Landmark in Central as well as in Times Square in Causeway Bay. If shopping like the locals is more your thing, a visit to Mong Kok in Kowloon and the Temple Street Night Market will do the trick. Between the clothing, souvenirs, and street food, the area serves as a perfect evening destination. Despite being one of the most densely populated neighborhoods in the world, the Mong Kok area is nonetheless very special needs friendly and a must-visit. Travelers also use their visit to Hong Kong to visit the city's famous bespoke tailors. Within 24 hours, a custom-made suit or dress shirts can be yours at a very reasonable price. While there are arguably more tailors than people in Hong Kong, Andover Tailors at the CKE Shopping Centre in Kowloon is one of the best in the city. Make sure to book a time in advance.

What to eat: There are not enough meals in the day to truly enjoy the diverse cuisine of Hong Kong. From traditional Cantonese to some of the world's finest international restaurants, the city is a food lover's paradise. Equivalent to Yelp, a must have for all travelers is the free OpenRice app, whereas local suggestions and reviews will guide your palate. However, ask any local or tourist and they will agree that a visit to the city is not complete without sampling dim sum at the world's cheapest Michelin star restaurant: Tim Ho Wan. While a lineup will undoubtedly greet you, the pork dumplings are worth every minute of the wait. As in all Asian cities, sampling the various street foods is a must. Ensure you save room for the seafood and freshly pulled noodles which are abundant in Mong Kok or the waffles and fish balls in Wan Chai.



Singapore: Completely accessible to travellers with special needs

By Daniel Smajovits

From high atop the serene Faber Peak, Singapore appears to have two unique personalities. In your immediate vicinity: hiking trails and luscious forests, culminating with one of the country's most spectacular views. Yet, by taking a ride on Faber Peak's cable car, which travels through an office building no less, the country's modern and fast-paced lifestyle made famous is on full display.

About half the size of the City of Los Angeles, Singapore is ripe with intrigue. While arguably most famous for its ban on chewing gum, the city-state was granted independence from Malaysia in 1965. Over the past half-century, it quickly established itself as a banking and commercial shipping centre, blending the wealth of London with the culture of South-East Asia.

Getting there: Whether you want to visit or not, odds are high that your travels to Asia will include Singapore as a short or long layover. Embracing the fact that the country serves as both a destination and

transit hub, Changi Airport was built and has regularly been named the best airport in the world. Home to a movie theatre, rooftop pool, a 12 metre high slide, gardens, sleeping areas and high-end shopping rivaling Rodeo Drive, the airport is an attraction in itself. Fret not, if your layover is six plus hours, you can enjoy both its amenities and a city tour, all free, courtesy of Changi.

Getting around: Singapore's efficient Mass Rapid Transit system will bring you to all corners of the city as well as to and from Changi Airport. Once in a specific part of town, the city is very pedestrian and special needs friendly, with large sidewalks and tactile paving. Otherwise, Ubers are cheap and abundant.

Where to stay: If there's room in your budget, the luxurious five star Marina Bay Sands is arguably the most famous hotel in the world and worth the splurge. With an infinity pool on its roof – overlooking the Central Business District of Singapore – the hotel is as iconic to Singapore as the Bellagio is to Las Vegas. If the Marina Bay Sands is a bit out of your price range, scattered around the Marina Bay district are a host of other four and five star hotels as well as basic options. If you're traveling with children, Sentosa Island is ideal with a number of hotels to choose from and a bevy of fun and games. For the shopper at heart, Orchard Road should be your home base. Hotels are mixed in between the malls and high end stores on Asia's Rodeo Drive.

What to do: Singapore can be easily experienced in two full days. From its highest point to bustling outdoor food courts, the city is completely accessible for travelers with special needs. A trip to Singapore would not be complete without a visit to Faber Peak. A natural oasis on the southern edge of the city, from a picnic on the mountain to hiking its trails, a number of outdoor activities await you on the Mountain of Happiness. Early risers should make the peak their first stop, especially if they're staying at Sentosa Island, which is connected to the Peak via cable car. Offering a stunning view by day or by night, the cable car is also a must-do while in Singapore. If time allows, try to experience the cable car by Dining on Cloud 9: where guests can enjoy a four-course meal while traveling high above Singapore.

Sentosa Island can constitute a day or more by itself: home to Universal Studios as well as an 18-hole golf course, a water park, beaches and other attractions

only rivaled by Orlando, the island provides an exciting break from the action of Singapore, especially for children. With a number of hotels on the island and a quick 20-minute drive into the heart of the city, it also serves as a perfect compromise for parents and children.

Perhaps the most stunning aspect about Singapore is the city's green spaces. From the major roadways to the shopping hub of Orchard Road, vegetation is abundant. The highlight of Singapore's greenery is Gardens by the Bay: a 250-acre man-made park dedicated to the world's flora and fauna. Towering over the lush forest are its supertrees: vertical gardens ranging from 25 to 50 metres in height. Access to certain areas of the gardens is free, but the two premiere attractions: the Flower Dome and Cloud Forest require tickets. All areas of the gardens are wheelchair accessible and a minimum of three to four hours is required to take in the natural beauty of Gardens by the Bay.

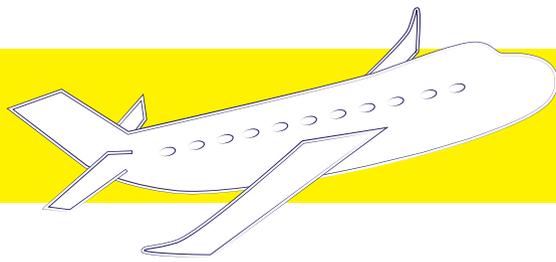
Following the Gardens by the Bay, guests should take a stroll along the beautiful waterfront promenade surrounding Marina Bay. Directly across from the Marina Bay Sands is Singapore's famous Merlion, the iconic symbol of the country. A short drive from Marina Bay is the National Orchid Garden, another oasis in this bustling metropolis. Located in the Botanical Gardens, the complex is home to thousands of different Orchid species.

Unique in many aspects, Singapore is also home to what is known as the most authentic Indian community outside of India. Dubbed Little India, reserve a few hours to soak in this vibrant neighborhood.

What to eat: Staying true to its dual personality, some of the world's finest restaurants can be found in the Marina Bay and Central Business Districts. If sipping on a Singapore Sling while dining in a five-star restaurant is not your cup of tea, the locals descend upon the city's famous Hawker Centres for their meals. Located throughout the city, Hawker Centres are outdoor food courts with stalls serving local and Western cuisine. World-renowned chefs and tourists agreed that the city's best food options, from Chicken Rice to Satay are found here, at very reasonable prices. All Hawker Centres are open for lunch, but it's best to arrive before noon, to avoid the rush. For night owls, the Chomp Chomp Food Centre also stays open well into the wee hours of the morning.



(Photo credit: Gardens by the Bay)



A look at Tampa Bay's Straz Center, Bern's Steak House and Fox Rent A Car

By Mike Cohen

Tampa: While on holiday in St. Petersburg, Florida, we regularly made the easy 30 minute drive to Tampa to do some shopping, see a show and enjoy some fine dining,

Tampa is the home of The Straz Center (<http://www.strazcenter.org>) where we purchased tickets to the hit musical *An American in Paris*. Built on an abandoned gravel lot in a city that was lacking cultural offerings, the Straz Center began as the dream of a community. Today it is the largest performing arts center in the Southeast and the only one with an on-site performing arts conservatory. The Straz Center was incorporated in 1980 and opened in 1987.

In the early 1990s, the Straz Center (then known as Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center) established arts education as a community priority, working closely with area public, private and home school programs to enhance arts education for children throughout the seven-county

Tampa Bay area. Outreach programs included curriculum connectors to Florida education standards and teacher study guides in print and online. The Straz Center's extended in-school artistic residencies, summer programs and after school offerings helped to fill the increasing gaps in arts education left by budget cuts.

The Straz Center is committed to making the performing arts available and accessible through a variety of services, including sign language interpretation, audio descriptions of shows and open captioning. It encourages patrons needing these services to call ahead (813.229.STAR). The Straz Center has an "Open Doors" Accessibility Policy. Wheelchair accessible seating may be purchased online or over the phone with a Customer Service Representative. Infrared listening system wireless headphones are available for Morsani Hall, Ferguson Hall and the Jaeb Theater. There is no charge for this service, but a driver's license, major credit card or \$10 refundable deposit is required. The Straz Center is committed to making the performing arts available and accessible through a variety of services, including American Sign Language interpretation and open captioning. Patrons needing these service are encouraged to call ahead at (813) 229-7827. Telephones, water fountains and ticket counters are placed at an appropriate height for those in wheelchairs. Companion restrooms for those needing assistance are on all levels of Morsani Hall and on the Orchestra level of Ferguson Hall. All other restrooms are equipped with special stalls. Patrons who experience mobility issues should call the Ticket Office for specific information on stairs and level changes in each theater. When ordering tickets, be sure to tell the Ticket Office of your seating needs. Transport wheelchairs are available at the Arrival Plaza. No reservation is necessary.

Headsets are available for patrons with hearing impairments to assist with amplification and clarity. They are lightweight and can be used in all sections of Carol Morsani Hall, Ferguson Hall and the Jaeb Theater. Companion restrooms are on every level of Carol Morsani Hall and on the orchestra levels of Ferguson Hall. Accessible restrooms are on the orchestra level in the Jaeb Theater and in the Shimberg Playhouse. Accessible water fountains and phones also are available in the facility on all seating levels. Just see an usher for directions. Passenger elevators are equipped with braille for access by persons with visual impairments.

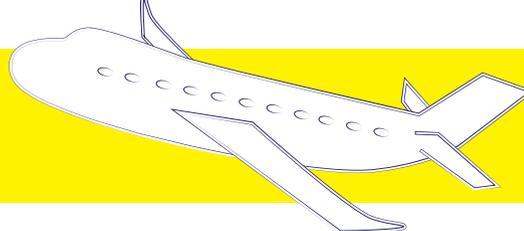
Fine Dining at Bern's Steak House

Prior to our trip I began to hear many excellent stories about Bern's Steak House (www.bernsteakhouse.com) in Tampa. This is the spot known for perfectly aged steaks, one of the largest wine collections in the world and an internationally famous dessert room. These elements have combined since 1956 to provide guests with a unique culinary experience. I must say I cannot recall a dining experience quite like this. The prime steaks are cut to order, vegetables are grown locally on the Bern's farm and sourced from the finest purveyors, and the menu includes 21 choices of caviar.

Bern's waiters train for approximately one year, working at every station in the restaurant. Our server Curt reviewed the extensive menu and made some recommendations. We started off with a delicious order of 12 oysters on the half shell for two of us and some lump crab cakes with avocado green tomato salad and Bern's blend mustard butter sauce for the third member of our party. The former was accompanied by classic cocktail sauce, horseradish sorbet, green Tobasco granita and truffled mignonette. From there, it was pretty straight forward. The three of us shared a 22 ounce cut of Chateaubriand, perfectly cooked at medium. It cut like butter. All entrées include French onion soup au gratin with garlic and spelt toasts, steak house salad,



*Some of the delicious food items from Bern's Steak House.
(Photo credit: Mike Cohen)*



baked potato, steak house crispy fried onion rings and a vegetable tasting of the evening. The menu, which you can download from their website, is most comprehensive in describing the food and how it is prepared.

After dinner, we went on the restaurant's famous kitchen and wine cellar tour. Then it was time to step inside the world famous Harry Waugh Dessert Room, built in 1985 using redwood wine casks to create 48 private rooms where guests to this day enjoy nearly 50 desserts, wines, ports, sherries, and madeiras. This represents a separate sitting. All desserts - ice creams, sherbets, pies, pastries, hot fudge, whipped cream, breads and crackers - are made by Bern's with the freshest and best ingredients available. Wow, it was difficult to choose. In the end we opted for two specialty drinks, a dreamsicle (vanilla ice cream, orange juice, orange schnapps and Hangar One mandarin) and a Butterscotch Bern's (vanilla ice cream with butterscotch liqueur and other special liqueurs) as well as the chocolate-chocolate-chocolate, classic (layers of chocolate cheese pie, chocolate cheese cake and milk chocolate mousse on a dense chocolate crust and served with whipped cream and milk chocolate shavings) and the capacino creme (their signature version of the classic American dessert Tiramisu). What a truly amazing dining experience. If you are in the area of 1208 S. Howard Street then make a reservation by calling 813-251-2421. You can valet park for \$5. Bern's is fully wheelchair accessible. There are elevators which bring you to each level of the restaurant.

Booking Your Rental Car

Booking a rental car from a good agency represents an important component to any holiday. For our recent trip we had our first experience with Fox Rent A Car (<https://www.foxrentacar.com/en/faqs.html>). Our Air Canada flight landed at the airport in Tampa. A free shuttle brought us to their area headquarters where we drove away with a Chrysler 300. I really liked this vehicle. It even came with

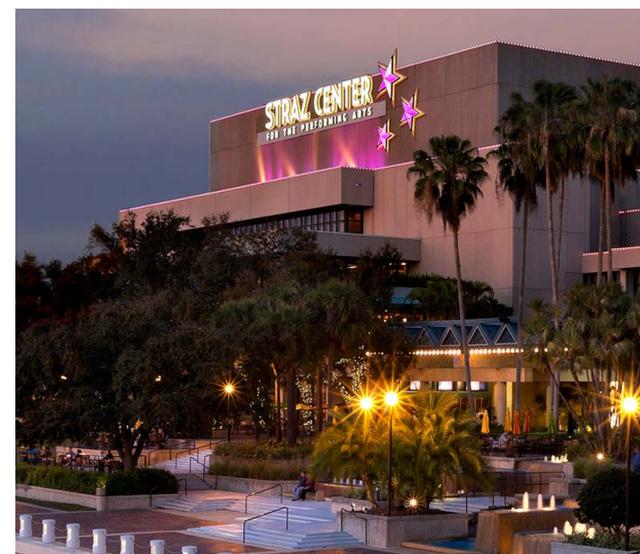
Sirius XM Satellite Radio. At Fox you'll find economy cars, family-size cars, SUVs, minivans and luxury or sport vehicles available for your discount rental. The shuttle pickup was very smooth. Our driver Robert was a real gentleman, loading and unloading all of our luggage. It is a pleasant 10 minute drive from the airport, where a friendly staff awaits and checks you in promptly. The gentleman at the desk signed me in and then walked me to the Chrysler, loading our luggage and giving me an overview of the car's features. We brought our own GPS, but Fox will provide you with one.

Fox is the fifth largest car rental company in the US and it continues expanding globally with new locations now open for reservations in the popular tourist markets of Belfast, Northern Ireland, Merida, Mexico, Auckland, New Zealand, Fort McMurray, Alberta, Canada and Istanbul, Turkey.

I was very impressed with the Tampa operation, managed by Johnny Hubner. The airport is currently undergoing major renovations. When completed in early 2018, there will be a new rental car facility at which point Fox will relocate.

Fox has been in Florida for five years now, with locations in Tampa, Orlando, Fort Myers, Miami and Fort Lauderdale. Their prices are significantly better than the competition. "Pricing is obviously a big factor when renting a car," says Hubner. "That and of course the reputation of the company. I believe we stand out on both counts."

The Tampa location is open 24 hours a day. For customer service call toll free (800) 225-4369 Ext. 9 Fox does assist with reserving vehicles with hand controls. Fox cannot provide hand controls on every make or model of vehicle, and cannot confirm a reservation for a particular make or model of vehicle on any rental. For assistance with a wheelchair-accessible shuttle, you can call (800) 225-4369 or email Reservations@foxrentacar.com. The Fox facilities and shuttles are ADA accessible.



The Straz Center

Mike Cohen is the editor of Inspirations. He can be reached at mcohen@inspirationsnews.com. Follow him on Twitter @mikecohencsl.



Johnny Hubner manages the Fox Rent A Car location in Tampa.

Where Inspirations will be this winter and spring!

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Sunday, April 23, 2017
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WHY AND HOW TO BEGIN TRANSITION PLANNING

What comes after high school for children with special needs?
Now is the time to start planning.

Wednesday, March 1st, 2017
EMSB, Laurence Patterson Room
6000 Fielding Ave, Montreal, H3X 1T4



NATHAN LEIBOWITZ

Senior Investment Advisor, Manulife Securities



LINDA MASTROIANNI

Special Education Consultant/
Parent Coach

Topics Include:

- Transition assessment, planning and services
- Community resources for parents and their children
- Turning 18-financial, legal matters and government benefits
- Hear from a mother of an adult son with autism
- Vocational training, employment and day services

6:00 PM
Browse local
resources
7:00 pm
Program
begins



LENORE VOSBERG

Director of Clinical Services
and Public Outreach,
Centre for the Arts in Human
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