

Celebrating inclusive communities



Célébrons nos communautés inclusives

Chef Tigretón shares the tastes of Spain at Galileo Adult Education Centre



Chef Tigretón enjoys teaching the Social Integration Services students at Galileo Adult Education Centre about healthy food and cooking, and sharing typical Spanish cuisine with them. Read the full story on page 4 of this edition. (Photo, Galileo Adult Education Centre)

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ARTS FEATURE

TV star Grimaldi dedicates sensory room at Edward Murphy Elementary School

By Mike Cohen

Reality TV show star Vanessa Grimaldi was at Edward Murphy Elementary School in Hochelaga-Maisonneuve on December 18 to dedicate the English Montreal School Board (EMSB)'s fourth sensory room. It was in partnership with the Di Teodoro family - Dan, Elvie and Enrico - who named the room in memory of their late daughter/sister Giuliana, who had an intellectual disability and would have loved such a room in her school.

"A sensory room provides new ways of learning while using all their senses. It's a therapeutic space for students," Grimaldi explained. "It can help stimulate or calm students down. It heightens awareness, provides security and promotes mental and physical relaxation, which helps individuals realize that they don't have to feel like they have to be on guard all of the time."

This important financial support came from Grimaldi's No Better You Foundation. As a special education teacher for the EMSB's Galileo Adult Education Centre in Montreal North before starring on ABC's *The Bachelor*, Grimaldi launched her non-profit efforts in the summer of 2017 in order to advance education by providing specialized tools and programs for exceptional learners across Canada. Proceeds from her fundraising efforts have been directed to the construction, maintenance and operations of sensory rooms at Edward Murphy, Galileo and Coronation School in Côte des Neiges, and Pierre Elliott Trudeau Elementary in Rosemount.



A dedication ceremony marked the opening of a sensory room at Edward Murphy Elementary School on December 18, 2018. Front row: Jeremy, Erik and Trina. Back row: Alessio, Vanessa Grimaldi, Cristina Celzi, Elvie, Dan, and Enrico Di Teodoro, and Joe Ortona.

Edward Murphy principal Cristina Celzi gave special thanks to occupational therapist Claudia De Luca and caretakers Tony Orsini and Johnny Matteo for all their hard work. Grade 6 teacher Amanda Yannelli baked cookies with the No Better You logo inscribed.

In an EMSB news video at the dedication ceremony, Elvie Di Teodoro was grateful to Grimaldi for pursuing her No Better You mission and giving a voice to children who cannot be heard or express themselves. Grade 6 Edward Murphy student Jeremy recounted his struggle with anxiety as a young boy. "When I was younger, I had a lot of anxiety. I used to run around

the school all the time. If the sensory room would have been here, I would have been a lot better. If people are stressed, they can go in this room, they can relax and calm down, let out their stress," he said.

Celzi said that the room is now being used by many Edward Murphy students, and is making a difference. "Our students are learning to advocate for themselves and ask for time in the room before their emotions get the best of them. We are very grateful to Vanessa and The No Better You Foundation," she said.

Last summer Grimaldi competed in MTV's *Fear Factor* and won, directing all proceeds to her

foundation. She also co-hosts her own iHeartRadio podcast called *Help I Suck at Dating* with Dean Unglert and Jared Haibon.

Watch the EMSB's video of the dedication ceremony here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nMGLiCViigk>
For information about Grimaldi's foundation, visit <http://www.nobetteryou.org/>



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Geordie Theatre offers its first ‘relaxed performance’

By Cindy Davis



The actors as seen at the “relaxed performance” of *The In-Between* at Geordie Theatre. (Photo, Andrée Lanthier)

This has been a learning experience for the staff, explains Charron, who says that although Geordie Theatre productions have always been “relaxed” in a sense, they are eager to learn more about the needs of the neurodiverse community by working with other local partners. They are looking forward to presenting more relaxed performances next season.

“What we’ve all learned from this is that everyone is different,” he says. “We all need to change our thinking about how we receive people at the theatre and how to be ready for whatever anyone might need in order to make their experience with us a comfortable one - and that can include so many things. We are ready to accept anyone for who they are.”

For information, visit www.Geordie.ca

This past February marked a momentous occasion for Geordie Theatre. The Montreal-based English theatre company is known for pushing boundaries and for showcasing talent to young Montreal audiences. On February 9, it partnered with Giant Steps School and Resource Centre to present its first ever “relaxed performance” of a play called *The In-Between* by Canadian playwright Marcus Youssef.

Already a champion of diversity and inclusivity, Geordie Theatre began presenting American Sign Language (ASL)-interpreted performances of its shows in 2015 and won the first Montreal English Theatre Award for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion that same year. But even with that award, the team at Geordie Theatre felt that they had only scratched the surface in learning the culture of diversity, and made a commitment to do more.

“We went into this season with some objectives in mind,” says Patrick Charron,

marketing and communications manager at Geordie Theatre. “One was to add to our website an accessibility page, where we would feature information about relaxed performances as well as visual stories for the two theatres where we present our work every season. The other was to partner up with organizations of interest, in this particular case, Giant Steps School and Resource Centre, to train our staff so that we can also train our volunteers at the theatre to better receive our clientele, and to prepare ourselves as a first contact at the theatre to deal with any particular needs that may occur.”

With its first offering of a relaxed performance, the theatre company adjusted the production by leaving the house lights on at a slightly dimmed level, levelling sound cues so there were no overbearing noises during the performance, eliminating any strobe lights or sudden and visually shocking lighting on stage, and by allowing the audience to walk around freely and to eat snacks.

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Wacky Olympics 2.0 wheel into Westmount High School

By Alessandra Nardolillo



The Westmount High School (WHS) Student Council hosted the accessible Wacky Olympics 2.0 for the Mackay Centre School's satellite class at Westmount High School with the support of volunteers from the leadership program and Best Buddies (Secondary 5). (Photo, Rosemarie Sondola)

Every fall, Westmount High School (WHS) holds the Wacky Olympics. For the first time in history, the school organized a special Wacky Olympics 2.0! This event was held for the Leaders on Wheels, the Mackay Centre School's satellite class at WHS for students in wheelchairs on January 18, 2019.

Jana Lawlor, a Secondary IV student at WHS, was the brains behind this operation. When she herself participated in the Wacky Olympics, she noticed that the Mackay satellite class wasn't physically able to be involved. They were simply bystanders. She felt that they should also have the chance to participate in this school activity. "They deserve to be noticed too," she stated.

Lawlor presented the idea to the administration with the help of C.J. Turner, head of student council, and student council members (comprised of Secondary II to V students). After years of commitment and perseverance, the Wacky Olympics 2.0 was finally approved. WHS Student Council went to great lengths getting approval so that they could take two classes off to devote to this event. Alongside teacher Rosemarie Sondola and child care workers, Turner and some 20 members of student council and the leadership program

(Secondary V students), Lawlor's dream came true.

The theme of the Wacky Olympics 2.0 was vehicles. During art class, the Mackay group constructed cars which could be fitted over their wheelchairs. Their creations included a Canada Post truck and an ice cream truck. They started making plans in November 2018 and worked extremely hard after returning from the holidays.

On event day, student council members dressed as construction workers, referees, truckers and police officers to enhance the experience on the road. Seven rotating activities were prepared for the seven students in the Mackay class. All activities were adapted to the various needs of the students, ensuring that they experienced the fun of performing on their own. Activities included charades, racing, balloon passing and more.

Close at hand was the "Best Buddies" chapter, who cheered on the Mackay students and were present in case assistance was needed. This event was inspirational and a surprise to everyone, and a great endeavor for all. The hard work and effort put in by everyone, and seeing the students filled with joy, brought tears to the eyes of many.

Chef Tigretón shares Spanish cuisine with Galileo SIS students

By Wendy Singer

From Spain to London, to New York City and Galileo Adult Education Centre, Chef Tigretón is sharing his culinary expertise around the globe. Originally from Betlán, Cataluna, Spain, 'Tigre' now calls Montreal home. He is well-known for his Spanish comfort food, specializing in rice and paellas. You may have seen him on Gusto TV co-hosting his cooking show *The Latin Kitchen*.

Tigretón approached *Inspirations* last year, wanting to share his knowledge about healthy food and cooking with students with special needs. We introduced him to Martina Schiavone, principal of Galileo, and a match was made! Chef Tigretón has now visited the Social Integration Services (SIS) students in their kitchen at Galileo on two occasions.

On Tigretón's first visit, students prepared *gambas al ajillo*, a typical Spanish dish that includes shrimp and garlic. He brought a four-pound case of shrimps, (with the head and skin on), which students peeled and cleaned. They cooked the tails *al ajillo*, which means in garlic, cayenne and parsley sauce. To promote zero-waste practices in the kitchen, students used the head and skin to make a delicious shrimp soup. "The students absolutely loved the soup and the protein. There

were lots of hugs and high fives," said Tigretón. "I can't erase the image of Alphonso (one of the students,) eating the shrimps with both hands, happy as a kid in a candy store."

On his second visit, Tigre taught the students how to make breakfast boats, a panini bread scored lengthwise and emptied to look like a boat, and filled up with tomato sauce, mushrooms, spinach, cherry tomatoes and one egg. Covered with cheese and baked in the oven, the result is a delicious, belly-warming meal. Students left with a whole new breakfast concept to take home.

Tigretón was inspired by both of his visits and says he hopes to continue sharing his knowledge with students at Galileo and other schools. "It was a great experience, and I think more programs like this should be created so students have more opportunities to learn how to cook, embrace a healthier lifestyle and become more independent," said Tigretón.

¡Buen provecho!

To learn more about Chef Tigretón, or to invite him to your school, visit www.cheftigretón.com or email him at cheftigretón@gmail.com



Chef Tigretón teaches Galileo SIS students how to make breakfast boats. (Photo, Galileo Adult Education Centre)



Training to work with elementary school students with autism to come soon

Courtesy of the Lester B. Pearson School Board

The Centre of Excellence for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is pleased to announce that a training week will take place from April 1 to 5. This training focuses on structured and individualized interventions for students with autism. The training will take place in an elementary school situated in the Lester B. Pearson School Board territory, and is open to all English school boards in Quebec.

This five-day training course provides both a theoretical foundation and hands-on experience for working with elementary school students with autism in a classroom setting. The main purpose of the training is to help create a better understanding of the learning styles and needs of individuals with autism. Participants will learn new ways to create an environment that capitalizes on student strengths and helps to support the development of independent work skills.

Areas of emphasis include assessing needs, creating learning objectives for the student, developing communication, leisure and social skills, as well as learning behaviour management strategies. Throughout the week, participants will attend sessions and

work directly with students with autism in a school setting.

The Centre of Excellence for ASD is based at the Lester B. Pearson School Board. Its mandate is to assist schools in the implementation of best practices for the inclusion of students with autism, and serve as a resource to the other English school boards in the province of Quebec. It has offered similar training sessions in the past, which have been very well received by participants. Professionals with expertise in ASD offer modeling, coaching, and hands-on opportunities for participants. There is a solid link between theory and practice in the areas of needs assessment, goal setting, program creation and adaptation of environment.

Because of the intensive and hands-on nature of this training, spots are very limited. One place per school board or specialized school is offered to ensure a highly interactive experience for all participants.

For information, contact Patricia Assouad at passouad@lbpsb.qc.ca

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I am a Wonder Woman!

By Harpreet (Happy) Randhawa



Harpreet Randhawa. (Photo, Lola Bourget)

One day during a LIFE Program activity, my integration aide Lola and I were driving to bowling. The weather was very rainy and windy.

I saw an old woman. She was small and was carrying an umbrella and a cane. She was leaning on the post of a streetlight. She was facing down and was almost slipping as she held onto the post.

She was tired and wet. I yelled, "Lola, we need to help this woman!"

We quickly parked the car and jumped out into the rain.

We ran to the woman, and I asked her if she needed help. She nodded her head gratefully. I took her umbrella and we took her by the arms. We brought her to her salon, where she was going to get her hair done.

I was proud and excited! It feels really good when you help someone.

The LIFE Program began in 2012 as a special project under the direction of the Student Services Department of the Lester B. Pearson School Board (LBPSB). It is now under the umbrella of the LBPSB's Horizon High School. Students who meet the criteria are given the opportunity to come to the LIFE Program from the ages of 18 to 21 to learn skills that will foster independence, including work, life and social skills. Its small group setting allows for individualized teaching which takes into account the interests and skills of each student. Staff are always thrilled to see students thrive and mature as they explore opportunities to broaden their knowledge of the world around them.

Harpreet (Happy) Randhawa is a student in the LIFE Program, Horizon School, at the Lester B Pearson School Board.



JDAIM FEATURE

Montreal's JDAIM – providing opportunities to build a culture of inclusion

Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance and Inclusion Month (JDAIM) takes place every February. It began 10 years ago in the United States and is now celebrated across North America. This year, Montrealers had a multitude of JDAIM events to choose from, with community leaders like Federation CJA, the Segal Centre for Performing Arts and Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom offering programming that created dialogue and learning opportunities about the inclusion of people living with disabilities (and their families) in all aspects of society. Inspirations attended several JDAIM events this past February. Read our reports on pages 6 to 9.

Summit School actors shine in *Letter to My Disability*

By Cindy Davis



Actors from Summit School performing Letter to My Disability at the Segal Centre for Performing Arts. (Photo, Jesse Heffring)

This February, Summit School students and staff took to the stage to perform the play *Letter to My Disability* at the Segal Centre for Performing Arts. Written and directed by Summit School media teacher Jesse Heffring, the piece was mounted for a third time since its debut last year, in honour of Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance and Inclusion Month (JDAIM). JDAIM is designed to celebrate and champion the rights of those with special needs and to foster a culture of inclusivity.

In this iteration, *Letter to My Disability* was performed for the general public three times over one weekend in the intimate roundhouse setting of the studio at the Segal Centre, followed by another performance for students attending Bialik and Herzliah high schools.

The story centres on a class of students with special needs at a specialized high school. It opens with a new teacher preparing for her first day on the job after having only taught at “regular” high schools in the

past. The audience is quickly made aware of how many additional factors teachers of students with special needs must face each school day. The actors playing the students are Summit School students, and they draw the audience right in with their impressive acting chops and genuine depictions of their characters.

The teacher quickly realizes that many of her students had either never been told of their disabilities or are having trouble coming to grips with them. She tries to tackle the issue head-on by having the students write letters to their disabilities, as if the disabilities are individuals living outside of themselves. The reaction is mixed as some students delve right in, while others have trouble with it and revolt altogether – and that is before the parents even catch wind of the project. When they do, all hell breaks loose, but the results amaze everyone as the letters are eventually read out loud.

What is most compelling about this play is that the letters read are real ones written by former Summit School students who write about their own experiences. Some are heartbreaking, some are funny, but all give incredible insight into what it feels like to live with a disability.

The playwriting is at a professional level, with complicated relationships, emotions and some side-splitting hilarious moments woven into it. But what is most impressive is the high-caliber of acting by the students and adults (who are staff of Summit School). Perhaps their own experiences with special needs is what makes *Letter to My Disability* genuine, relatable and educational – truly, a must-see!



Display at Letter to My Disability. (Photo, Jesse Heffring)



JDAIM FEATURE

Far From the Tree...but never far from the heart

By Randy Pinsky



Karen Soussan (president, Women's Philanthropy), Lori Abramowitz, Lisa Farber and Ilana Dray (co-chairs, Movie Night), Barry Morgan (Q&A moderator), Sheri Spunt (Q&A panelist), Joy Gornitsky and Heidi Sklar (co-chairs, Women's Philanthropy West Island), Lydia Hazan (co-chair, Connections, Women's Philanthropy), and in front: Michael Lifshitz (Q&A panelist) at Federation CJA's Movie Night during JDAIM. (Photo, PBL Photography)

Society tends to expect families to conform to a certain mold, but what happens to those who diverge? On February 7, Federation CJA launched Jewish Disabilities Awareness, Acceptance and Inclusion Month (JDAIM) with the screening of the documentary film *Far From the Tree: Parents, Children and the Search for Identity* at Cinémas Guzzo Méga-Plex Sphèretex. The theatre was packed with a who's who of representatives from organizations united in their commitment to inclusive communities.

The movie is based on Andrew Solomon's book of the same title. Growing up gay, Solomon became intrigued with the family unit and what happens when a child does not meet their parents' expectations of who they should be. Solomon said he was driven to write the book as a way of understanding family dynamics and coming to terms with his relationship with his parents.

The movie showcases five families, with all the challenges, successes, heartbreaks and breakthroughs that come with having children who are differently-abled. Each demonstrated astonishing resilience and strength of spirit to contest society's limited expectations and empower their child to become the person they could become.

The movie starts with Jason, a boy with Down syndrome who, as a child, progressed beyond expectations. Known for his regular appearances on Sesame Street, Jason was able to teach people about his abilities, and break through the presumed limitations that people placed on him and others with Down syndrome, stating, "I may be slow, but I'm smart in my own way."

The family of non-verbal Jake shared their heartbreaking hopelessness at not being able to communicate with

their son. His parents desperately tried every form of therapy possible to somehow reach him through his constant frustration and lashing out due to being locked in his own world with autism.

It was in Texas that a breakthrough happened when they tried an innovative therapy called Rapid Prompting Method. Through a series of intensive questioning and alphabet boards, a crack in the impenetrable wall of silence started to form.

As noted by Jake's father, "That was the moment when I realized, my G-d; he's there." Jake's emotionally overwhelmed mother continued, "It was like meeting him for the first time."

The first sentence that Jake relayed to his family through the alphabet board floored the audience: "I am trying... and I am smart." Jake also described how being non-verbal made him feel like a tiger in a cage.

Whereas difference comes with its inevitable challenges, the movie celebrates diversity. Leah and Joe, a couple with dwarfism, expressed frustration at society's myopic vision

on what passes for normal. Leah says during the movie: "I don't think I need to be fixed." This couple was content with who they are, and did not want to live any other way.

Regardless of how far from the tree a child may appear, labels that limit merely obscure the unlimited possibilities, reinforcing the Chinese proverb "People who say it cannot be done, should not interrupt those who are doing it."

Randy Pinsky is the office manager and communications assistant at TrueSelf Psychology.



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VisAbility artists share their message of inclusion

By Wendy Singer



Jessica Marshall, Shira Avni, Rabbi Lisa Grushcow, Remrov, Rabbi Ellen Greenspan, Jordanna Vamos, and (front) Adam Hollinger celebrate JDAIM at VisAbility: An inclusive art show and film screening at Temple Emanu-el Beth Sholom on February 9.



Matthew Brotherhood and Shira Avni celebrate their collaboration.



Jessica Marshall shows her glitch art.



Natalie Constantine and Adam Hollinger show Hollinger's painting of a menorah.

Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom has been a leader in celebrating Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance and Inclusion Month (JDAIM), having brought thought-provoking programming to the public every February for several years now. On February 9, they hosted VisAbility: An inclusive art show and film screening.

The Temple runs an inclusive art hive year-round, and are clear about their stand: inclusion for all. "A community is better and more beautiful when everyone is included," said Rabbi Lisa Grushcow of Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom during her opening remarks at VisAbility.

The event got off to an upbeat start with live music by the Penguin Street Big Band, featuring artistic director Sarah Sinacore. While the band played tunes from the 1920s to 1950s, guests meandered through a stunning exhibition that showcased the work of nine artists with disabilities. Creations included glitch art (intentionally corrupting digital data to create unusual visual effects) by Jessica Marshall, a painting by Adam Hollinger and realistic pencil drawings by Remrov. Many of the artists were on hand to chat about their creative processes, and to speak about how art gives them an outlet to communicate their thoughts and feelings of living with illness or disability.

Hollinger lives at the Donald Berman Maimonides Geriatric Centre. Attending VisAbility was an exciting adventure for him as he rarely leaves the centre for anything other than medical appointments. Wheelchair-bound and Deaf, Hollinger painted a beautiful Chanukah menorah, a symbol of his favourite Jewish holiday. Hollinger drew attention to his world by adding a

hearing aid in the middle of his painting. Guests were treated to a screening of Shira Avni's short films *Tying Your Own Shoes* and *Petra's Poem*. Avni is an award-winning animation filmmaker and professor of animation at Concordia University. She uses animation as a medium for self-advocacy for people with Down syndrome (DS).

Tying Your Own Shoes offers an intimate glimpse into the mindsets and emotional lives of four adult artists with DS. What sets this film apart is that 80 percent of the animation was done by these four individuals. One of these adults, Matthew Brotherhood, was present at the event to answer questions about the film. He and Avni share a 15-year professional relationship which began with the creation of *Tying Your Own Shoes*. Through the making of the film, these individuals learned the skill of animation (Avni said Brotherhood took to animation like a fish to water), and were given a platform to share their thoughts. Some were funny, all were insightful.

"Their families and caregivers got to know the film subjects better through the film," said Avni. "The process took a great deal of consultation and collaboration. I learnt so much from the individuals I worked with. They are the best teachers I ever had."

Chair of the Temple's Inclusion Committee, Jordanna Vamos, was pleased with the results of her committee's JDAIM programming. "This year we focused on celebration and not just teaching," she said. "We have accomplished this by bringing artists with special needs to centre stage so they and their work can be seen."



JDAIM FEATURE

Good vibes radiate at Glee Club JDAIM concert plus news of more harmony to come with Shira Choir

By Elaine Cohen

Quebecers are accustomed to inclement winter weather but February 14 proved so trying that grimaces replaced grins except at the Cummings Centre, where smiles prevailed as the Glee Club celebrated Jewish Disabilities Awareness, Acceptance and Inclusion Month (JDAIM). The event was aptly titled “Singing With Heart Choir Performance.”

The Glee Club members are clients of the mental health support services department of Agence Ometz and Cummings Centre, constituent agencies of Federation CJA. Victoria McNeil, a certified music therapist, who holds weekly rehearsals with the Glee Club, accompanied the singers on the keyboard. The performers showed exceptional stage presence. They had everyone in the audience tapping toes and grooving to the beat. A sampling of their upbeat tunes included Louis Armstrong’s “What a Wonderful World,” Neil Diamond’s “Song Song Blue,” “Oh what a beautiful mornin’” from Oklahoma, and the Beatles’ hit “With a little help from my friends.”

At the event, Cantor Daniel Benlolo of Shaare Zedek Congregation shared news about the upcoming Shira Choir. The initiative will offer adults with developmental disabilities opportunities to shine through song. As a special surprise, Cantor Benlolo’s nephew Joshua Benlolo, alongside the Cantor, spread more joy, when the 29-year-old showed disability is no match for super talent as he sang Leonard Cohen’s “Hallelujah” in Hebrew and English. “Everybody has something to bring to the table,” said Cantor Benlolo.

McNeil, along with Cantor Benlolo, praised the therapeutic and enjoyable aspects of singing in a choir or group. The activity boosts self-esteem, positive thinking, community inclusion, increases interaction and reduces loneliness. It emphasizes the importance of breathing and voice exercises. A proponent of choirs for enhancing quality of life for adults with special needs, Cantor Benlolo founded Ottawa’s Tamir Neshama Choir and directed it until he returned to Montreal in 2017 to assume the role of cantor and director of ritual services at Shaare Zedek Congregation.

“Inclusion is on Federation’s agenda all year long, and Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance and Inclusion Month is a fantastic opportunity to highlight all the progress that’s being made, and we want to go forward,” said Carly Goodman, Federation CJA Inclusion Coordinator, noting “Singing With Heart Choir Performance” was among several events in February.

Now Cantor Benlolo is reaching out to the Montreal community with the Shira Choir for adults (18 and over) which will perform at community events and engagements with schools, senior groups and other cultural centres. “We already have nine participants interested and others want to join,” said Cantor Benlolo. “We plan to have a meet-and-greet toward the end of March. I still have a strong affinity with the Tamir Foundation in Ottawa, and we want to build bridges between the two communities.”

Shira Choir is free and open to adults in the community with developmental



Cantor Daniel Benlolo (second to the left kneeling), Joshua Benlolo (first on the left, back row), Victoria McNeil (back row, second to right) and the Glee Club at the “Singing With Heart Choir Performance” on February 14.
(Photo, Muriel Suissa Benlolo)

disabilities who want to sing and perform in a choir, are able to attend and have transportation to weekly rehearsals at the Shaare Zedek in NDG.

“We are grateful to Federation CJA, who facilitated the mission on behalf of myself and Shaare Zedek,” Cantor Benlolo said. “Mark Palmer (Executive Director of Tamir Foundation in Ottawa), wrote up the proposal. Mark and the Tamir Foundation are instrumental in facilitating the creation of the Shira Choir. The grant itself came from Jewish Federations of Canada UIA. I also applied for another grant, and we’ll see if it comes in. We want to show what our choristers with special abilities can do.”

The eclectic repertoire will include popular tunes, selections from Broadway and Disney, the Prince of Egypt musical and much more. Choristers will sing in English, French, Yiddish and Hebrew. “We’ll provide folders with lyrics and mp3 recordings for those with iPhones and computers. We encourage memorization in order to look at the audience.”

Cantor Benlolo envisions a city-wide festival, where all choirs will perform and prove the power of music in spreading inclusion.

For further details, contact Cantor Daniel Benlolo at 514-484-1122, ext. 108 or email cantor@shaarezedek.ca

TRAVEL

Caesars Palace in Las Vegas: A magical place to stay, gamble, shop and dine

By Alexandra Cohen

LAS VEGAS - What would a visit to Las Vegas be like without spending some time at the famed Caesars Palace? As famous as the city itself, this luxury hotel and casino is perhaps the best-known casino resort in the world. What began as a grand casino honouring the indulgent luxuries of ancient Rome has somehow evolved into something even more spectacular.

Casino game tables are both at standard and accessible heights. Slot machines have removable seats, and the lounge areas around the casino have easy ramp access. You may use a small WC hydraulic lift from the casino to access one of the main shopping corridors. Common area restrooms are wheelchair accessible.

Access to this gigantic facility is good, and wheelchair-accessible rooms have roll-in showers, a grab rail and oversized spa tubs. Commode shower chairs, hoists, scooters, wheelchairs and other mobility equipment are available for rental. Accessible rooms should be requested at the time of booking for best availability.

For more, log on to <https://www.caesars.com/about/accessibility>

Caesars Palace spans 85 acres at the heart of the Las Vegas Strip, just 10 minutes from McCarran International Airport. In 2017, Caesars completed the renovation of its Palace Tower, the resort's largest tower, featuring 1,181 stylishly designed guest rooms and suites with a price tag topping \$100 million. Considered the crown jewel of the tower, the coveted 29th floor features 10 luxurious new villas ranging



The Bacchanal Buffet.

in size from 2,750 to 4,085 square feet and featuring exquisite finishes, bespoke furnishings and a curated art program. The Palace Tower's elegant new guest rooms and suites feature cool grey tones accented by royal blue and champagne gold. Centrally located, the Palace Tower is a short walk to the resort's convention center, Appian Way shops and Garden of the Gods Pool Oasis.

During the resort's 50th anniversary celebration in 2016, the evolution of Caesars Palace continued with the reimagining of the hotel's original and iconic tower, the Roman Tower, which was completely reborn as the new Julius Tower. Never resting on its laurels, the \$75-million Las Vegas hotel tower renovation is part of a \$1-billion investment, cementing Caesars Palace as the premier resort at the center of the Las Vegas Strip that has welcomed millions of visitors beginning on August 5, 1966. The new 587-room Julius Tower welcomed its first guests in January

2016, featuring design-savvy, modern rooms and suites.

Refurbished in 2016, the 948-room Augustus Tower features a classic Caesars theme but with a contemporary update. Similar to the Palace Tower, we see again cool grey tones accented by infusions of royal blue and champagne gold. These luxurious rooms are located on the southern end of the property near the Garden of the Gods Pool Oasis and hotel lobby. The Augustus Tower initially opened in August 2005, with an additional valet entrance for VIP guests. Caesars Palace and Nobu Hospitality developed the world's first Nobu Hotel, a boutique hotel within the larger destination resort that opened in February 2013. The innovative concept integrates an exclusive hotel tower with the first Nobu Restaurant & Lounge on the Las Vegas Strip. The 182-room Nobu Hotel offers 18 suites and a rooftop villa with stylish interiors, showcasing natural materials fused with Nobu's signature

Japanese elegance, designed to convey an extension of the fun and energetic Nobu lifestyle. Nobu Hotel guests enjoy a bevy of perks, including private check-in, Natura Bisse luxury bath amenities and 24-hour access to the exclusive in-room dining menu curated by Nobu's acclaimed culinary team.

While we did not have the good fortune of staying at Caesars during this trip, we enjoyed a fantastic dinner at their Bacchanal Buffet - voted the Best Buffet in Las Vegas by USA Today two years in a row. I was not surprised to hear that they were given this title when I realized that their buffet presents nine distinct restaurants, all in one location! One member of our party had mobility issues. Fortunately, all of this vast space was at one level so she was able to navigate the area, requiring some help from us when we made our way through the buffet line. But let me say that Las Vegas is an extraordinarily accessible city for those in wheelchairs, from dining establishments to taxi services.

The modern setting of the buffet is inspired by the elements of glass, wood and steel. With nearly 500 dishes to choose from, every guest is sure to satisfy their cravings, whether they are in the mood for prime rib, chilled king crab legs or freshly made sushi. A team of seven specialized chefs oversee the preparation of the majority of the food in front of the guests, creating an interactive environment.

...continued on page 11



...continued from page 10



Bacchanal Buffet's delectable desserts.

The cuisines offered include: Mexican - featuring freshly made enchiladas, tortillas and more; Italian - pastas, baked lasagna, antipasto display; Chinese - Made-to-order assorted soups, wok-fried dishes and dim sum, Japanese - Fresh sushi, sashimi, cooked fish; American - BBQ house-smoked meats from a wood-burning smoker and wood-burning grill; numerous carving stations including prime rib, brisket, rotisserie chicken and more; seafood - Fresh East and West Coast oysters, king crab, snow crab, stone crab, mussels and prawns; pizza - a variety served fresh from a wood-burning oven; deli - soups, cheeses, seven charcuterie selections including house specialties and individual, prepared, and make-your-own salads; dessert - Chocolate, vanilla and pistachio soufflés baked-to-order, selection of gelato, sorbets and crème brûlée.

The weekday brunch is \$39.99 (Monday to Friday from 7:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.); The weekend brunch is \$54.99 (Saturday and Sunday from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.); weekday dinner is \$54.99 (Monday to Thursday from 3 p.m. to 10 p.m.); and weekend dinner is \$64.99 (Friday

to Sunday from 3 p.m. to 10 p.m.). For an additional \$15 per person, add the "All You Can Drink" option and receive unlimited draft beer, house wine, mimosas or champagne.

There is also line pass option available for \$20 per person during select hours of operation. See the manager for details.

For information, call 702-731-7928. For large party reservations and private dining, call group dining at Caesars Palace at 702-731-7778 or toll-free at 866-733-5827. Log on to www.caesarspalace.com



Bacchanal Buffet roast.

If you feel the need to 'escape' in Vegas, visit Trapped

By Alexandra Cohen

LAS VEGAS- Last year in Montreal, I experienced my first ever "escape room." Having really enjoyed the experience, I wanted to try one in Las Vegas, so we visited Trapped: A Real Life Room Escape Adventure. This location was launched in 2015 and is centrally located at 4760 Polaris Ave., a quick drive from the Las Vegas Strip.

The facility is completely wheelchair accessible, and notes manager Renton Wilson: "We can even make special accommodations as needed."

For those who have never experienced a game of this nature, it involves a group of people placed in a room where they must use all elements present to solve a series of puzzles, find clues, and complete the objective within a set time limit. It is a great bonding activity, as it requires a lot of teamwork in order to succeed. The recommended minimum age to participate is 12 years old. All rooms cost \$35 per person for regularly scheduled times.

There are currently two rooms, with a third one on its way, at this location. We chose The Lair of the Puzzle master. What is the scenario? You and your teammates are federal agents tracking down an international criminal known as "The Puzzle master." You have found his hidden lair and are moving in to take him down, but you also have to avoid falling into one of his many traps. This game is good for three to eight participants.

The game is very well constructed - my favourite escape room experience thus far. It thoroughly challenged us, but as three individuals, we were able to escape in the nick of time.

"We as a company have been open since 2015," said Wilson. "We began with one location in Upland, California in 2015 and have since expanded to include a location in San Dimas, California, as well as Las Vegas. We opened in Las Vegas in July of 2018, and our mission is, and always has been, to provide a high quality and fun experience for our customers."

Check out this clever video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vvH4xQitunU> For information, visit www.trappedescaperoomvegas.com or call 702-907-8078.



Accessible and incredible Kruger National Park

By Daniel Smajovits



A giraffe spotting in Kruger National Park.

Since 2004, Ezrom Mathumbu's office has been the 20,000 square kilometers that comprises South Africa's Kruger National Park.

While Mathumbu is very friendly to the thousands of guests that pass through on a daily basis, he has an electric fence keeping his pesky neighbours away. However, when prides of lions, coalitions of cheetahs and leopards live around your office, we can't quite blame him for not being overly friendly.

Evident from the onset of our visit to Kruger was the hospitality displayed by Mathumbu and his coworkers. Their main goal, other than ensuring everyone's safety, is guaranteeing that visitors from around the world experience the best of what South Africa has to offer, on what is often a once-in-a-lifetime trip.

Larger than Israel and home to the "big five" – elephants, buffalos, rhinoceroses, leopards and lions – Kruger National Park welcomes over one million visitors per year. It is for those one million reasons that the South African government and the National Parks Service (SANParks) ensure that the park remains accessible to all budgets and abilities.

As a first-time visitor to Kruger, and on a strict budget, it was refreshing to see that the national park was home to both five-star private lodges (minimum \$1,000/night) to the most pedestrian of tents (minimum \$50/night). As sleeping within the confines of the park is critical to maximize game viewing, we opted to stay in the park's rest camps. Each camp offers a variety of accommodations, from the aforementioned tents to clean, private bungalows with en suite bathrooms (minimum \$150/night). Furthermore, most camps have a full-service restaurant and an on-site convenience store. As the majority of guests opt to braai (barbeque) their own meals, stores are stocked with a variety of fresh and frozen foods as well as fruits and vegetables. All major campsites provide accessible accommodations, with the largest campsite, Skukuza, offering 12 fully accessible bungalows. As the park is busy throughout the year, it is recommended to book a minimum of six months in advance to ensure availability (www.sanparks.org).

To truly experience the majesty of the park, inquire about a bush *braai* upon arrival. These special excursions only take place if a minimum of six guests are interested. We were lucky enough to have the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to eat a five-star meal under the South African stars. With only torches lighting the way, guests dine in the dark while listening to the sounds of wildlife. With an armed ranger standing guard to prevent any unwanted dinner guests, the experience, which can be completely accessible, was the highlight of our trip – and will be yours as well.

The majority of guests opt to self-drive through Kruger, and for guests with limited abilities, this option will guarantee your comfort. Most major

rental car companies have offices in one of the two surrounding airports (Kruger Mpumalanga International Airport and Skukuza Airport), ensuring that you can rent a vehicle that fits your needs.

Despite spending the days on game drives of your own, guests occasionally overlook the drives conducted by the park rangers. In traditional open-air vehicles, most major camp sites offer drives at sunrise, sunset and in the evening, in addition to bush walks. Rangers undergo two years of training and often have many more years of experience, evident by their ability to spot and track wildlife as well as answer any and all questions. Furthermore, these drives ensure a complete sensory experience, as rangers shut down their vehicles to allow guests to appreciate the sounds of the wildlife.

As animals are most active in the early morning and evening, park-run vehicles are the only way to experience the environment during these time periods, as the gates are closed to the general public. Vehicles have yet to be equipped with access lifts or fold-up seats for wheelchairs, so wheelchair users will need assistance to be lifted out of their seats. Seating is also available in the front of the vehicle alongside the ranger, making it easier to access for those with limited abilities.

While the occasional elephant or buffalo traffic jam during our self-drives were thrilling and definitely highlights, we opted to participate in two ranger-led activities per day to ensure we received the full Kruger experience.

As with most wildlife-centered trips, luck plays a role in your experience. Whether on your own or with rangers, it is impossible to predict the type of

game you will see, if any. Technology, such as the Latest Sightings app (www.latestsightings.com) allows users to enhance the safari experiences of others by posting sightings, and each rest camp has a board where guests can mark sightings as well.

After four full days in Kruger National Park, it became abundantly clear how guests return year after year and staff like Mathumbu has yet to experience a dull moment at the office. Whether you're spending an hour on the side of the road gazing at a herd of elephants or you're on the prowl for that elusive leopard, the freedom and unpredictability of the park is unmatched on earth.

With accommodations that meet all budgets and needs, fully stocked stores, restaurants and the abundance of wildlife, Kruger National Park offers an accessible and life-changing experience for individuals, couples and families. Courtesy of the South African government, a safari has never been more accessible and affordable.

All accommodations and ranger-led activities can be booked online at www.sanparks.org. Contact SANParks staff online for any questions you have about accessibility.



An elephant crossing in Kruger National Park.



TRAVEL

Four perfect days in Victoria Falls

By Daniel Smajovits

Serenity eludes visitors in Victoria Falls as, from the moment you step off the plane, the Zambezi river can be heard thundering in the background. There's no mistaking the fact that you're only a handful of kilometers away from one of the greatest natural wonders on earth – a sight so spectacular that, annually, over one million people descend to this remote part of Africa to marvel in its beauty.

For the majority of travelers, a trip to Victoria Falls, which is on the border of Zambia and Zimbabwe, is often paired with a larger trek in sub-Saharan Africa. From the surrounding region getting there is simple, with daily direct flights to Livingstone, Zambia from Cape Town, Johannesburg or Nelspruit (Kruger National Park). Once in the area, there are plenty of accommodations to suit all budgets: from five-star lodges to hostels.

Due to the unique location of the Falls, one has to make the choice of whether to stay in Zambia or Zimbabwe. The Town of Victoria Falls (Zimbabwe) is a bit pricier and more developed, with restaurants and hotels within walking distance of the town centre, allowing for a more traditional tourist setting. Livingstone (Zambia) has all



Vic Falls as seen from the edge - Livingstone Island.



Vic Falls as seen from Zimbabwe.

the amenities a tourist would need, but if your hotel is not full-service, transportation is required to most attractions or restaurants.

Canadians must have a visa to enter either country, and since you will visit both countries during your trip, it is advisable to purchase the KAZA Visa (\$80 USD) upon arrival, which will allow for unlimited entry and exit to Zambia and Zimbabwe for 30 days.

Day 1:

After a casual breakfast, your first day in Victoria Falls must be spent visiting the Falls themselves. Both Zambia and Zimbabwe offer both impressive and different views, so ensure to take the time (minimum 90 minutes) on each side to enjoy the spectacular scenery. When planning your day, allocate at least 45 minutes to travel from one country to the other, taking into account customs and immigration on both sides, as well as unexpected delays. After leaving customs, most tourists walk across the Victoria Falls Bridge (200 meters), but you can also take a special taxi that is authorized to drive between both countries. Should you not return to your hotel immediately, pack a poncho and towel as you will get wet. Both parks close at 6 pm, but the border remains open until 10 pm.

Day 2:

It's one thing to see the Falls from afar, but why not dive right in? From bungee jumping to hang gliding (known locally as the "Flight of Angels), as well as white-water rafting, the region is famous for its wide range of adventure activities. The most reliable tour provider in the area is Shockwave Adventures (www.shockwavevictoriafalls.com). Offering all the above and more, Shockwave has a friendly and experienced staff who will ensure that your excursions are both fun and safe. If you're traveling with children (ages 5 and older), the adrenaline-pumping white-water rafting on the Zambezi River should be your trip of choice. Whatever adventure you choose, reserve one full day for it.

Day 3:

While most visitors to the region have just ended or are about to begin a safari, your final day should include a visit to Chobe National Park in Botswana. Less than a two-hour drive from the Falls, the park is home to the "Big Five," as well as a host of other animals. Unique to Chobe, guests experience both a water and land safari: on the water, you weave in and out of Botswana and Namibia with your boat inches away from hippopotami, alligators and elephants. On land, your 4x4 will take you on a traditional

safari. From lions to leopards, you try to spot as many animals as possible. A buffet lunch is included on every day-trip to Chobe. Contact Shockwave Adventures to book this unforgettable excursion.

Day 4:

Before you catch your flight home, on your final morning, make sure to squeeze in a trip to Livingstone Island. On the island, guests experience the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to stand and swim at the edge of Victoria Falls. Following the both death-defying and awe-inspiring experience, a five-star meal is served only meters away from the thundering Falls. Access to the island is restricted to five tours a day (7:30 am to 3:30 pm), and spots fill up very quickly. Each tour leaves from the Royal Livingstone Hotel in Zambia. To book, visit: <https://livingstoneisland.com>.

While some guests opt to eat in their hotels while in Victoria Falls, the town of Livingstone has a number of delicious restaurants, featuring cuisine inspired both locally and from the melting pot of cultures that make up the region. Café Zambezi is the most well-known local restaurant, where you can sample a variety of Zambian food or, for the less adventurous, more traditional options. Down the street is the Golden Leaf whose food is inspired by the owners of Zambian and Indian heritage, providing a unique and delicious take on traditional Indian fare.

Whether you choose to soar over Victoria Falls on the "Flight of Angels," swim at its edge in the Devil's Pool or simply take in the Falls from afar, your experience at this wonder of the world will be one you'll never forget.



TRAVEL

9/11 museum remembers and honours lives lost

By Daniel Smajovits

There are only a handful of museums in North America that can truly alter one's perception on life. Since it opened in 2014, the National September 11 Memorial & Museum in New York City undoubtedly makes the list. And it is easily accessed by public transportation and completely accessible.

From personal artifacts found in the rubble to massive steel beams, the museum ensures that visitors feel the gravity that was September 11, 2001, while remembering the incredible loss of life.

For the overwhelming majority of visitors, September 11 represents a

defining moment in their lives, and visiting the museum takes individuals back to that fateful day, allowing them to both remember the tragedy and honour the lives lost. Visitors begin the experience by being brought back to the ordinary end-of-summer day on September 11. As you move through the methodically-built exhibit, the mood changes, panic sets in and within moments you are in the midst of what was the worst terrorist attack in American history.

While artifacts, mementos and videos tell the story within the museum, the memorial outside speaks for itself. Consisting of two symmetrical reflecting pools, set in the footprints of

the Twin Towers, the names of each of the 2,983 victims from both the September 11, 2001 attack and the 1993 World Trade Center bombing are etched into the steel.

Visitors should expect to spend two hours touring the grounds. Tickets to the museum cost \$24. To save time, purchase them online and in advance. Entrance to the memorial is free.

For information, visit <https://www.911memorial.org>



The new Freedom Tower seen from the bottom at the 9/11 Memorial & Museum in New York City.

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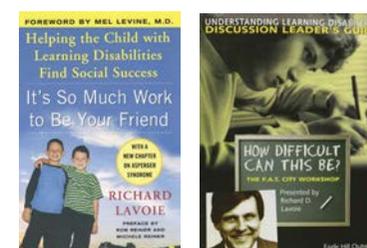
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Netflix Review

The Lighthouse of the Orcas – A story of connection and hope

By Ishini Fernando

Gerardo Olivares' 2016 Argentinean movie *The Lighthouse of the Orcas* is based on a true story by Roberto "Beto" Bubas, a park ranger who feels profoundly at peace in close proximity to killer whales. The emotive tale takes place in Patagonia, where park ranger Beto, played by Joaquín Furriel, lives in his cabin. His peaceful and solitary life near the waters and the orcas is disrupted when Lola (Maribel Verdú) and her autistic son Tristán turn up on his doorstep.

Through Lola's dialogues, we learn that she was compelled to travel with her son from Spain to meet Beto, after seeing him on a nature documentary interacting with orcas. The movie strives to explain Tristán's behaviour and his unique characteristics, and his mother's hopes of helping him find an emotional connection.

Young Tristán, splendidly played by Joaquín Rapalini, is said to have grown increasingly emotionally distant from the world ever since his father left him and his mother. The movie takes care to show the challenges of autism through Tristán and his interactions with others. He is often seen carefully organizing objects around him, sitting quietly or standing on his own away from other children, staring off into the distance. Lola, always very protective of him, skillfully reads his unique ways of expressing himself and knows how to calm him down when he is distressed.

Seeing Tristán, who does not usually react much to anything, being drawn to the orcas in Beto's documentary, she knew she had to find a way to get her son near the creatures. Although Beto seems reluctant to help them and is unaware about autism at first,

he eventually agrees to help despite warnings to cease his interactions with orcas. He soon finds himself growing fond of the child and his mother.

The film's main focus is on how Tristán reconnects with the world emotionally during his time in Patagonia, all the while highlighting the obstacles caused by autism. It depicts how, thanks to Beto's expertise and friendship with orcas, the child undergoes a kind of healing in nature as breathtaking as this. Although some developments in the story may feel rushed – particularly the relationship between Beto and Lola – *The Lighthouse of the Orcas* is overall a lovely story about how hope can be found in the most unexpected places and creatures.

The movie also features breathtaking and colourful scenery that will leave viewers mesmerized with Patagonia and possibly just as fascinated with orcas as Beto is.

The Lighthouse of the Orcas is available on Netflix in Spanish with English subtitles.



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The business of inclusive hiring
moves forward on March 28



The cast of Included. (Photo, Cindy Davis)

In the Fall 2018 / Winter 2019 edition of *Inspirations*, Cindy Davis wrote about Sam Benamron, owner Physio Verdun and Physio-Expert's inclusion of people with special needs in his workforce (see the article "Montreal clinics offer employment opportunities for people with special needs" on page 18 of our Fall 2018 / Winter 2019 edition). Since we featured this article, filmmaker Merrill Matthews has released a short documentary film titled *Included*, which shares the success story of three individuals with special needs who have become fully included, integral members of Benamron's workforce.

Join Matthews and Benamron along with key partners in the field of special needs for *The Business of Inclusive Hiring: An evening of sharing, learning and making change*, on Thursday, March 28, 2019 at 7:00 p.m. at Wagar Adult Education Centre (5785 Parkhaven in Côte Saint-Luc). A panel discussion on inclusive hiring practices and how you can make it happen will follow a screening of *Included*.

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