

IN THE NEWS

Roncey gets Canada's first location of Vinegar Syndrome, an American operation that rescues old films

In early November, across the street from the Revue Cinema, Roncesvalles became the first neighbourhood in Canada to house an outpost of Vinegar Syndrome, a shop that sells cult-classic films the company has digitally restored and re-released.

Formed in Bridgeport, Conn., in 2012, Vinegar Syndrome got its start restoring vintage adult films from the 1970s and '80s, on which film directors like Wes Craven, Abel Ferrara, and William Lustig cut their teeth before moving on to genre fiction like sci-fi, horror and action movies. Vinegar Syndrome took a similar path, from adult films to vintage classics and forgotten cult hits, by scanning, digitizing and restoring original film prints, then re-releasing them on Blu-Ray, packaged with special features.

The shelves at Vinegar Syndrome are stocked with films released through their own label or one of the partner labels they work with, and include everything from documentaries and Canadian films to thrillers and cult slasher movies. Posters line the walls, one from a killer-snake movie called *Stanley* from 1972, another from the late-'70s horror film *The Incredible Melting Man*.

Director of Canadian operations Andrew Williams, who runs the Toronto location, grew up in this world, working in a video store when he was still young enough to have to be paid under the table. As an adult, he helped a friend working at DVD conventions before becoming the Canadian distributor for Vinegar Syndrome's bustling mail-order business. It was the perfect opportunity for Williams, who was born and raised in the West End of Toronto, to move back home after living for a spell in Ottawa. After a few years and steady growth, Vinegar Syndrome opted to move its shipping centre back to the States, but asked Williams if he would open the company's first Canadian retail store.

Setting up shop in Roncesvalles provided an opportunity to bring a video store back to a neighbourhood that had lost shops like The Film Buff in recent years. It also helps to be right across the street from the

Revue Cinema, which Williams is a fan of. "I purposely made the hours for the shop so that I could see the latest show, if possible," he says.

In addition to its own catalogue of movies, Vinegar Syndrome stocks movies from other companies, alongside used vinyl records and cassette tapes of all genres. "It's something I just love," Williams says of the job, "sharing cinema with people in any way that I can."

— Niko Stratis

Group raising funds to save Christie Pits skate park from ramp rot

At the community-built skate park in Christie Pits, skaters can ride a bevy of wooden ramps and other obstacles.

These are, however, expensive to maintain, and they're currently rotting.

That's why Pits DIY (@pitsdiy on Instagram), the DIY community that stewards the park, wants to build more concrete ones.

To do so, Pits DIY is asking the community to pitch in. As of Nov. 6, the group's fundraising campaign, Concrete for Christie Pits, had raised \$2,750 on GoFundMe.

The skate park became a permanent fixture in Christie Pits in 2021, when the city poured a concrete surface onto the east side of the park, near Christie Street. A pop-up skate park was previously located in the park's outdoor skating rink off-season. A March 2021 article in the *Annex Gleaner* cited resident complaints about noise from the skatepark as the reason for its relocation.

Nicky Young, one of the group's organizers, says that the project has raised a total of \$4,000, some of that coming from cash donations and a campaign prior to the GoFundMe. One concrete obstacle has already been built. Cinder blocks from outside the *West End Phoenix*'s office on Bartlett Street were used as its foundation.

Young says building a flat section of a ramp obstacle with concrete would cost around \$400. Replacing the wood on the ramp would cost around \$1,000. Dew collects on that wood, causing it to rot.

Young wants to replace every obstacle eventually, and build more difficult obstacles as the skill levels of the skaters in the community mature. He views the project as a continuous effort.

"I never want this project to be finished, because it's the act of building and it's the act of caring for the space that creates the community that's needed to keep this park safe," he says. — Luciano Cesta

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Study to revitalize Exhibition Place shared with public

At a November meeting, community consultations were held to discuss how to improve what's become a "walled city"

STORY BY KUNAL CHAUDHARY

ILLUSTRATION BY FRANK FIORENTINO

ON NOV. 7, THE ENGINEERING firm WSP held a public consultation to gather feedback on its ongoing study of Exhibition Place, part of an initiative by the City of Toronto to revitalize the 192-acre expanse before the Ontario Line, and its increased foot traffic, arrives.

"There's an opportunity here for really unique and creative solutions to reimagine what Exhibition Place looks like in the future," said Lachlan Fraser, Senior Transportation Planner for WSP, at the community consultation. "Particularly for pedestrians, but also people who roll through the site."

The areas currently prioritized for "pedestrianization" begin at the Exhibition GO Station on Manitoba Drive, trailing south to circle BMO Field with corridors to the east and west stretching down to Lake Shore Boulevard, as well as Manitoba Drive to the north of the site, running east from the GO station to Strachan Avenue.

"These are places where pedestrians can walk freely and not typically expect to see vehicles," said Fraser.

To bring vehicles to the three central parking lots south and east of BMO Field, a large entrance and exit will be installed on Lake Shore Boulevard. According to the city, its final plan will "include direction on public realm enhancements, parks and open spaces, transportation upgrades, built form, heritage conservation, and connectivity to surrounding neighbourhoods."

In response to these plans, community members recommended a series of considerations at the meeting, including prioritizing connections to the site from the east and west, adding foliage to help with hard surfaces, and adding green features throughout the site.

The Bentway, which provides year-round programming in a shared space underneath the Gardiner Expressway, is a stakeholder in the redevelopment of the site, and has proposed its own plan for a pedestrian corridor running along Manitoba Drive from the Ontario Line's Exhibition Station to Strachan Avenue.

Billed as the "Manitoba-Gardiner Promenade," the stretch could be "reimagined as a multi-use urban promenade that preserves important functionality for operators, while creating inviting, accessible and safe experiences for visitors." They see the Strachan Gateway as a key point of connectivity between civic destinations such as Exhibition Place, Fort York and the Bentway.

According to Robert McKaye, The Bentway's senior manager of planning and design, over the past few decades Exhibition Place has been "a walled city with an interior heart. The investment and studies that are currently being done need to consider inverting that idea, so that the boundary conditions are as important as the central conditions," he says. "That applies to Manitoba Drive as well, and that's something we'd continue to push for."

The Bentway's plan would be to create a green canopy along Manitoba Drive alongside a "cultural canopy" in the interior space beneath the Gardiner, which could "capitalize on raw interior space for short-term activations, while eyeing future, more ambitious transformations to house civic cultural exhibitions and animations."

The Bentway's plan was developed in partnership with Two Row Architect, an Indigenous-owned architectural firm, as well as climate engineers from Transsolar and the consulting group Frontier.

"If we could turn eyes back toward the north side of Exhibition Place as an arrival point, it could really enhance Toronto's civic identity. We could make good on these commitments and investments around enhanced connectivity and transportation," McKaye says. "It's a unicorn of an opportunity that doesn't come along that often."

TALES OF SURVIVAL IN A TOUGH TORONTO

Seven artists show us how they make it work

FEATURING

Althea Balmes

Michael Winter

Jenelle Lewis

Elicser Elliott

Jenn Woodall

Megan Kinch

AND

Donna Linklater
WITH
Dominic Bugatto





YOU PARTIED HERE IN THE 90s

The Great Lakes Brewpub opened in 2022 and stands proudly on the grounds where a Toronto-famous nightclub complex once existed. Any Torontonian who partook in music venue culture in the two decades leading up to the turn of the millennium will have fond memories of late night revelry at Kool Haus (formerly The Warehouse), and The Government (formerly RPM).

More than just a place to enjoy quality beer and good eats from a sustainably sourced menu, Great Lakes Brewpub is a community cornerstone in the newly built East Bayfront neighbourhood where residents and visitors alike come together to sample from the 20 taps, snack on some pizza and smash burgers, and to relive the fun and carefree spirit of years past.

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