

Page 6: Asses abscond
Edelweiss donkeys escape pen

Page 8: Refugee fundraiser underway
Syrian family close to reunion

Page 13: Canine culinary creations
Rutherford's going to the dogs

THE Low Down

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TO HULL & BACK NEWS

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Teacher banned from class over hijab

By Trevor Greenway
Local Journalism Initiative

A teacher from Chelsea Elementary School has been removed from her Grade 3 classroom for wearing a hijab and instead has been shuffled into an

inclusion and diversity literacy role within the school.

Grade 3 English and home-room teacher Fetemeh Anvari told the Low Down that the last week has been an emotional rollercoaster for both her and her students after she was told

she would no longer be able to teach the class for wearing a religious symbol at work.

"I am at the school today and my students are asking me why I have stopped being their teacher," Anvari said on the morning of Dec. 7. "This gets me

very emotional."

In a Dec. 3 letter obtained by the Low Down, parents were told by Chelsea Elementary School principal Andrea Gage that Anvari was moved into an "alternate role" at the school. The shuffle came after Anvari

was told she would no longer be able to teach in a classroom because she was wearing her hijab at work. Gage gave no reason to parents for Anvari's role change.

"Ms. Fatemeh will be
Continued page 2

Push to preserve forest persists

By Hunter Cresswell

The fight to save a forest isn't over.

So far about \$877,000 – out of a goal of \$1.5 million – has been raised or pledged to purchase and preserve undeveloped forest land in Wakefield known as Hundred Acre Wood.

When news broke in March about the project, the Low Down reported that the sale of the land had a deadline of Dec. 15,

Continued page 19

WORST JOKE OF THE WEEK

A forester is walking through the forest and a tree yells, "Stop! You can't cut me down, I'm a talking tree!"
The forester responds, "Yeah, and you'll dialogue."



Looking toward the next 20

Over 20 years ago, Khewa's owner Nathalie Coutou opened the boutique with just 13 of her own paintings amid protests against a tourist trap "Indian store" and a grand opening two days before 9/11. Today her store is a Wakefield institution, with every inch of the 100-year-old building's interior covered in Indigenous, Métis, and Inuit arts, craftsmanship and fashion. See story page 3. Stuart Benson photo

NCC spent \$332K on Chelsea dispute

By Hunter Cresswell

The National Capital Commission is racking up legal fees.

Between March 2020 and October 2021, the NCC spent \$332,958 on legal fees for its Gatineau Park property payments in lieu of taxes – PILT – dispute with the municipality of

Chelsea. That's 23 per cent, or over one-fifth, of the disputed amount of \$1.4 million since 2018.

This information was revealed through an access to information request that Chelsea resident Marcel Chartrand filed in early-November on behalf of a group of 150 Chelsea

residents concerned about the dispute.

"We weren't surprised," he said about the amount the NCC has spent so far.

The municipality and the NCC have been locked in an expensive, ongoing dispute over PILT owed to Chelsea for Gatineau Park lands within the

municipality. Chelsea says the NCC hasn't been making full payments since 2018. The NCC says the parklands in Chelsea were priced too high – at the same price as development lands instead of lands for conservation – during the MRC des Collines' 2018 lands evaluation.

Continued page 6



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Continued from page 1

\$700K left to raise by March 2022

but last week Action Chelsea for the Respect of the Environment (ACRE) board member and land trust operations director Olaf Jensen said that date was more of a self-imposed goal for fundraiser organizers rather than a hard deadline.

He said that fundraisers have until March 2022 to close the deal.

“Originally, we told ourselves, optimistically, that we’d have this done by December,” Jensen said.

But the goal remains the same, he said: purchase the 100 acres of land east of Chemin Rockhurst in Wakefield from Christopher Minnes and preserve it for light, motorless, recreational use, with ACRE acting as the land trust.

“We are 100 per cent committed to making this happen. It’s just not happening as fast as we would like,” Jensen said.

So far about \$501,182 in pledges and donations have come in from 175 different people. Minnes pledged to donate 20 per cent of the land’s value – about \$300,000 in total – through a federal ecological gift program. Organizers successfully applied for \$16,080 from the La Pêche municipal Green Fund, and the National Capital Commission has pledged \$40,237 as well. An anonymous donor gave \$20,000, Jensen said.

“For this to be successful we need the support from the provincial and federal government and we have not heard back [from them],” he said.

Despite this project fitting with the federal government’s purported goal of protecting 25 per cent of its lands by 2025, Jensen said an application for a federal grant was denied earlier this year.

Jensen said he’s also waiting to hear if an application for a provincial grant was successful.

“It would get us pretty close,” he said when asked how far the Quebec grant would go to

bridging the fundraising gap.

“We asked for \$350,000. Then of course with the Low Down’s contribution of \$250,000 we’ll be there,” Jensen said, laughing.

To date, there’s about \$650,000 to raise. ACRE welcomes partnerships and donations, which can be organized through its website acrechelsea.qc.ca, or the Hundred Acre Wood Facebook page.

Hundred Acre Wood – formerly known as the Minnes Lands – is home to at-risk species, including western chorus frogs, monarch butterflies, and bobolink blackbirds, as well as eastern white cedars – rare in this area due to centuries of logging. The land is also identified by the NCC as an important ecological corridor for wildlife moving throughout Gatineau Park.

The land has been in Minnes family hands since they purchased it in 1973 from the Trowsse family. In the past, Minnes sought to develop the land but couldn’t find a residential development partner that shared his values. In total his property is 160 acres. Following the Hundred Acre Wood sale, the 60 remaining acres will continue to be used by Minnes’s business, Eco Echo, which provides environmental education programs.

In 2013, then-La Pêche mayor, now-Gatineau MNA Robert Bussière, wanted to expropriate 20 to 45 acres of Minnes’ land for development.

The Hundred Acre Wood fundraiser started on the heels of a successful \$850,000 community fundraiser in February, which purchased 57 acres of undeveloped forest – now called Forêt aux étangs – in Chelsea near the Musée Loop neighbourhood for conservation purposes, with ACRE also acting as the land trust.



A community and Action Chelsea for the Respect of the Environment fundraiser to purchase and protect 100 acres of undeveloped forest land in Chelsea has reached the halfway point of its fundraising goal, but the purchase deadline of March 2022 still looms. Photo courtesy Olaf Jensen

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Just quench it!

A BIT OF SCOTCH WITH THAT BEER?

Did you know that Scotch Ales are originally coming from Belgium? It’s true! A Scottish importer decided to pay tribute to the Belgian people by making a beer that merges Scottish and Belgian beer traditions.

The result: a sweet brown beer with notes of cereal, caramel, and a hint of molasses.

We sometimes see interpretations of Scotch Ales that are barrel aged in bourbon, whisky, or for the one we present today, Scotch.

Scotch and beer have a lot in common, the most fundamental aspect being that a whisky (Scotch is a Scottish whisky) starts by distilling a beer. No wonder they go so well together!

The Vrooden Scotch Ale aged in Scotch barrels has complexity. Discover the subtle flavours of caramel and malt in this interesting brew. According to some, the best pairing is with oysters (wow!) but I often go with a French onion soup ... such a comforting combo.

Cheers!
Martin Gravel
Beer Sommelier