

BEST EDUCATION STORY

There were some very strong education entries this year, though some left the reader without context for the issue at hand. The winner stood high above the rest in terms of execution and style.

PACK YOUR BAGS
And the survey says...
Best of the Hills
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TOMMY EARNS WORLD CUP SPOT
45-minute drive for water
Orleans brewer treks to W'field Spring
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THE LOW DOWN
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'St. Mike's forever'

Low community rallies to save last English high school in region

By Trevor Greenway

The threat of St. Michael's High School closing is all too familiar for Mike Francis. The former mayor of Low

Francis's speech, before a crowd of 300 area residents March 28, was emotional, raw and sincere, delivered as he looked into the eyes of school commissioners, executives and young students who can't fathom what their world would be like without St. Mike's.

"It has been said that it takes a village to raise a child, com-

missioners, education is a big part of raising a child and the board is more than just a partner in the future of our youth, it is an enabler," said Francis, addressing the crowd packed into the Low Heritage Hall for the WQSB public consultation on the school's recommended shut-down.

Francis said his presentation

was the fourth closure threat. He worries at cations closing have on the still need to be busse Philémon Wright Hull, approximatres away.

Trevor Greenway photo

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TREVOR GREENWAY *The Low Down to Hull & Back News*

Great story about an issue facing many Canadian communities - school closures. Extremely well-written, illustrated parent and community concerns really well. Felt like I was at the meeting. Well done.

DANIEL ROWE *The Eastern Door*

This was a great proactive piece of journalism, where the reporter went out of the way to find the story. I felt it would have been stronger, though, by interviewing students who are using this loophole.

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TRUTH & RECONCILIATION Students get crash course on dark history

DANIEL J. ROWE
THE EASTERN DOOR

It is a part of Canadian history that can now be ignored only by the ignorant and ill informed. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) began Wednesday and will run until tomorrow at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel in downtown Montreal.

During the day on Wednesday, students from the greater Montreal area filed through a series of workshops before joining a panel discussion.

A survivor's walk procession down Rene Levesque Boulevard followed in the afternoon, capped by welcome to the territory delivered by Kanehsatake elder John Cree.

Cree burned tobacco before fighting tears and laughter as he welcomed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to Montreal.

"I had family who went to residential schools, who've been waiting a long time and been praying that maybe one time our people can come together and look at ourselves in the mirror and say 'we know who we are,'" said Cree. "It's funny, eh? All these years we knew who we were."

Cree referenced how the Canadian government's education policy that affected an estimated 6,000 Onkwehón:we people in Quebec ran for over 100 years caused untold numbers of physical, emotional, mental and sexual abuses. The multi-generational trauma resulting from the policy many say has led to addictions, abuse, suicide and other issues facing many First Nations communities.

Students, including those from Kahnawake Survival School and Karonhianonhna,

learned about that trauma and history earlier in the day. The students took part in four separate workshops in the morning followed by a discussion panel featuring truth and reconciliation commissioner Marie Wilson, and former Canadian governor general Michaëlle Jean.

Jean expressed her excitement at what the youth are doing to address Canada's shameful history.

"Everything is political, but what is more important than anything else is this time of awareness where you have young Aboriginals, the youth, who want to be part of the agenda," said Jean.

"It's the end of a time of apathy, silence. It's a time for action, and I'm very encouraged to see these young people coming forward with a lot of confidence saying, 'These are the realities, this is the situation, this is what needs to change, and we have ideas.'"

Many of the students admitted to not having heard of residential schools until recently. One young student from Lindsay Place High School expressed her thanks to the panel for educating those present about residential schools.

Her school, she said, taught much of international issues such as the Taliban in Afghanistan and the slavery of African Americans, but it was the first time that she had learned about Canada's residential school policy.

For the KSS students, it was encouraging that other students got the chance to learn about what the students in Kahnawake have known for years.

"They're finally recognizing what happened," said KSS student Kavennaiahstha Kirby.

"I learned a lot, more than I did before," said student Raven Beauvais. "I think it's a good thing that they'll be more interested in how we are, how our history was."

The residential school system is no easy history to address for students, and the panel challenged the students to take action.

"When we look at all the sufferings we see that we have failed," said Jean. "It's a matter of courage to confront history together as we are doing."

Former KSS teacher Nancy Deer took the opportunity to inform those gathered on the history of Survival School, and its place in resistance to the province's language laws.

She also mentioned the Great Law's contribution to the constitution of the United States.

"We have many, many contributions that have never been recognized by our own people," said Deer, whose father's (Mike Tarbell) family was broken apart by residential schools. "That history was also taken away from us. I can understand for the Canadian people here, the shock of residential schools."

Jean said later in the day that she had not heard KSS's unique story and praised community-based efforts such as this.

Deer lamented the loss of her language. Her father, she said, did not want her speaking the language because he didn't want his daughter getting beaten up.

"It's mind boggling," said Deer, who learned more about residential schools and her family's trauma as a result of the policy in the 1990s.

"When my mother told me that, I was a little bit older maybe I was a teenager, I didn't connect nothing, it's just the fact, but I

Continued on page 12

CAMPS AND EDUCATION **The big leap** *From gymnast to Canada's National Ballet School, in three short years*

Anthony Bonaparte

Three years ago, West Island resident Annabel Mallais-De Luca had never given ballet a thought, nor had she even seen a performance. Yet just recently, for the second consecutive year, she was dancing on the stage of the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts in Toronto with more than 250 students from both Canada's National Ballet School (NBS) and Toronto-area performing arts high schools, joining prima ballerinas and principal dancers in The National Ballet of Canada's annual holiday season production of *The Nutcracker*.

The journey from novice ballerina to becoming a student at one of the country's top ballet schools was a rapid one, and after some 20 performances over a two-week period, the 13-year-old dancer spent some down time at her parent's Kirkland home, before returning to Toronto to continue her Grade 7 studies at the NBS — an utterly unforeseen path for the former competitive gymnast.

In fact, from age five until the age of 10, the Beacon Hill Elementary student lived and breathed gymnastics, travelling from her school in Beaconsfield to Dorval for 15 hours of weekly training with Wimgym, which she truly enjoyed. "I guess it was all the activity and the physical strength that I thought I could keep up with," said Mallais-De Luca during her visit, adding, "And I needed to do something with my free time."

But her goal of following in the footsteps of her gymnastics hero, 2008 Olympic champion Nastia Liukin, hit a bump when Mallais-De Luca began to experience persistent back pain. When a local osteopath recommended that she temporarily forego gymnastics and take up ballet as a way to strengthen her core in a different way, she and her parents took the advice — warily.

"I wasn't crazy about it, but it was the closest thing we could find to gymnastics," she said. "So I gave it a try."

Her first pointed steps were taken at Pointe Claire's Ballet Ouest Centre de

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ANTHONY BONAPARTE *The Suburban West Island*

Really interesting profile on a National Ballet School student and the academic program the school runs. Not something you ever really hear about.

Judge: Emma Graney, Reporter, Leader-Post, Regina, SK • Number of entries in the Best Education Story category: 29

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Thank you for keeping our communities informed

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