

LEGACY IN

SPRING
2023

ACTION



A FRESH TAKE

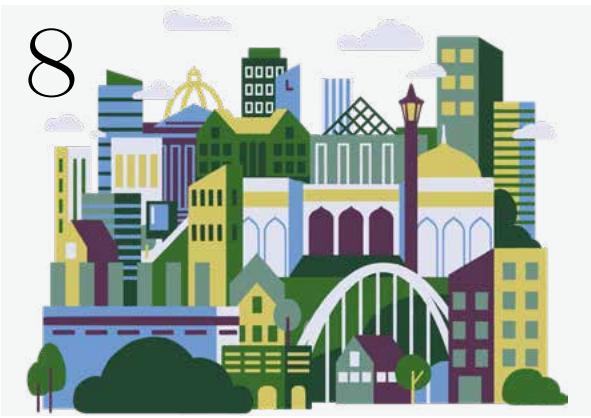
Tina Thomas brings a new perspective as
CEO of Edmonton Community Foundation

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SPRING
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Edmonton Community Foundation is partnering with a team of volunteer estate lawyers to present in-person and virtual sessions that provide valuable information for estate executors or those who are making estate plans.

The sessions will include topics such as:

- Estate Planning 101 and General Executor Duties
 - Estate Accounting & Tax Implications
 - Handling Disputes
 - What NOT To Do as an Executor
- And more!

For session details, webinar recordings, and to register, please visit ecfoundation.org/estate-administration-week

Session schedule and details are subject to change. See the ECF website for updates.



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Cover photo by Aaron Pedersen

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Serena is a Hong Kong-Canadian illustrator and is passionate about visual artwork to tell the stories of Edmontonians and their changing surroundings as the city evolves.



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Therese has no favourites in the Battle of Alberta. The born-and-raised Calgarian has spent her adult life in Edmonton where she has worked for the *Edmonton Journal*, University of Alberta and as a freelance writer/editor. For fun, she enjoys curling, golfing and exploring the river valley.





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Lisa is an Edmonton-based freelance writer and editor. Over the past decade, her writing has appeared in magazines like *Edify* magazine, *WHERE* and *The Tomato*. When she’s not feverishly clacking away at a keyboard, she can be found enjoying many of our city’s culinary gems.



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Tom is a freelance writer from Edmonton, Alberta. His work has appeared in *Edify* magazine, *The Gateway* and *Hungry Zine*. He is currently attending law school in Victoria, BC.



MONELLE STURKO

Chair, Edmonton Community Foundation
Board of Directors

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

AS WE WELCOME the spring season and begin to look forward to more hours of sunshine and the warmer days ahead, we also reflect on what this season has been like for the past three years: A time of great difficulty, uncertainty and strain in many different ways and in so many aspects of our lives.

The charitable sector has been one of the hardest hit by the tangential effects of COVID-19.

As we move forward, we also know that the effects of the past three years continue to unfold and impact our communities.

Charities and non-profits are playing key roles in addressing persistent and complex social problems faced by all Canadians.

The Community Services Recovery Fund (CSRF) is a \$400 million investment from the Government of Canada to support charities and non-profits across the country as they focus on how to adapt their organizations for pandemic recovery.

Last fall, Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) was selected to provide \$2.8 million of the CSRF to charities in the Edmonton area. Our area of focus is to provide grants to fund systems and processes that charities need to build stabilizing and long-term capacity building.

Our partners at Canadian Red Cross are providing funding to help organizations fill gaps in staffing and volunteer capacity. The United Way Centraide Canada is funding programs and initiatives. Together, we will be able to provide comprehensive opportunities for organizations to build resilience in the face of large-scale challenges like a global pandemic.

We would like to thank all the organizations that applied for the CSRF. We are always humbled to see the amazing work you are doing. The lessons we take away from hearing from you are invaluable and help guide us in our own strategies to best serve the sector.

The next step in the process is to review the applications we've received.

Though the CSRF is a new initiative, ECF will be adapting our long-term, ongoing review process that we use for our regular grant streams.

This includes a carefully selected adhoc committee of volunteers. These volunteers sit on ECF's existing granting committees and are experts from various sectors and have a diverse range of lived experiences.

ECF sincerely thanks the Government of Canada for providing the CSRF to communities across Canada. We are proud to work alongside our partners at Community Foundations of Canada, Canadian Red Cross and the United Way Centraide Canada to ensure this funding reaches our local communities.

We know that we can accomplish great things together. ■

GROUNDED IN FAITH

A youth-led Muslim collaborative is addressing anti-Black racism one conversation at a time

By **Tom Ndekezi**

Illustrations by **Serena Tang**



WHEN IT COMES to tough conversations, timing, substance and format are often the difference between a good-faith dialogue and a heated shouting match. It's a lesson that led to the creation of the Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative (MuslimARC), when a group of young people organized a virtual town hall to address anti-Black racism in Muslim spaces.

"We encouraged the board [of Al Rashid Mosque] to hop on a Zoom call with the community that ended up going downhill really quickly," says Noha Tarabain, who helped put the initial meeting together in the wake of the George Floyd protests and is a member of MuslimARC. "There was a lot of built-up emotion and hurt and trauma in the community that was shared on that call."

The roots of anti-Black racism in the Muslim and Arabic-speaking world crosses cultural and geographic lines, often running just as deep



"We had mental health therapists there who grounded us in the beginning, who regrounded us in the end and who were available if anybody needed to go to the side and interact with them."

— MUNA AHMED

as they do in the West. Centuries of slavery in the Middle East — a practice collectively referred to as the "Arab Slave Trade" — claimed the bodies of over 10 million Africans, and today, thousands of Black migrant workers find themselves literally trapped by the *kafala* system employed in the Gulf States, a system where migrant workers are often exploited by Middle Eastern governments and private companies.

On one hand, the very existence of anti-Black racism in Muslim-majority spaces seems antithetical to the tenets of the faith. Both the Qu'ran and Hadith espouse messages of cultural and racial unity, and Islam has served as a theological and ideological home for many prominent Black civil rights leaders. According to a 2017 study by the Pew Research Centre, no single racial or ethnic group makes up more than 30 per cent of the total Muslim population. But while that plurality should be — and often is — a source of strength, it can also double as >





a fault line in Muslim communities writ large, including here in Edmonton.

“Because these are micro-aggressive racisms, these people generally don’t realize what they’re doing is wrong,” says Muna Ahmed, a MuslimARC member who joined the collaborative after the initial town hall in June 2020. “They haven’t thought, ‘Why am I thinking like this? Why am I not offering the Friday prayer in different languages? Why are we not open to serving different types of food at our gatherings?’”

With the lessons of their initial effort still fresh in their minds, the members of MuslimARC decided to start a dialogue with an entirely different approach: small-scale, intimate conversations. The youth-led collaborative partnered with the John Humphrey Centre to organize three engagement sessions in summer 2021

to get first-hand perspectives on anti-Black racism in Edmonton’s Muslim communities. The sessions invited small groups of Black Muslims to discuss their experiences with each other and with Black and Muslim mental health therapists, whose presence was made possible by a \$10,000 grant from Edmonton Community Foundation.

“The engagement sessions were really done to create a safe space for Black Muslims to share their experiences,” says Ahmed. “We had mental health therapists there who grounded us in the beginning, who regrouped us in the end and who were available if anybody needed to go to the side and interact with them.”

In addition to demystifying anti-Black racism, even in largely non-white spaces, the sessions were also a launchpad for meaningful community action. Participants were encouraged to

volunteer at religious gatherings, push for more widespread bias training and apply for positions on the board of Al Rashid Mosque.

Four Black applicants — including Ahmed — were ultimately selected to sit on the board of Edmonton’s largest and Canada’s oldest mosque. For Ahmed, having more Black decisionmakers at the site of so much past pain, prayer and praise is a step towards building a truly inclusive Muslim community.

“These people who were harmed by their community still understood the importance of rooting everything in Islam,” says Ahmed. “The reason this harm was even possible is because it was not rooted in Islam. So it was very interesting to see things from the perspective of needing to come back to the roots of Islam and not just say that we’re doing it, but actively practise it.” ■

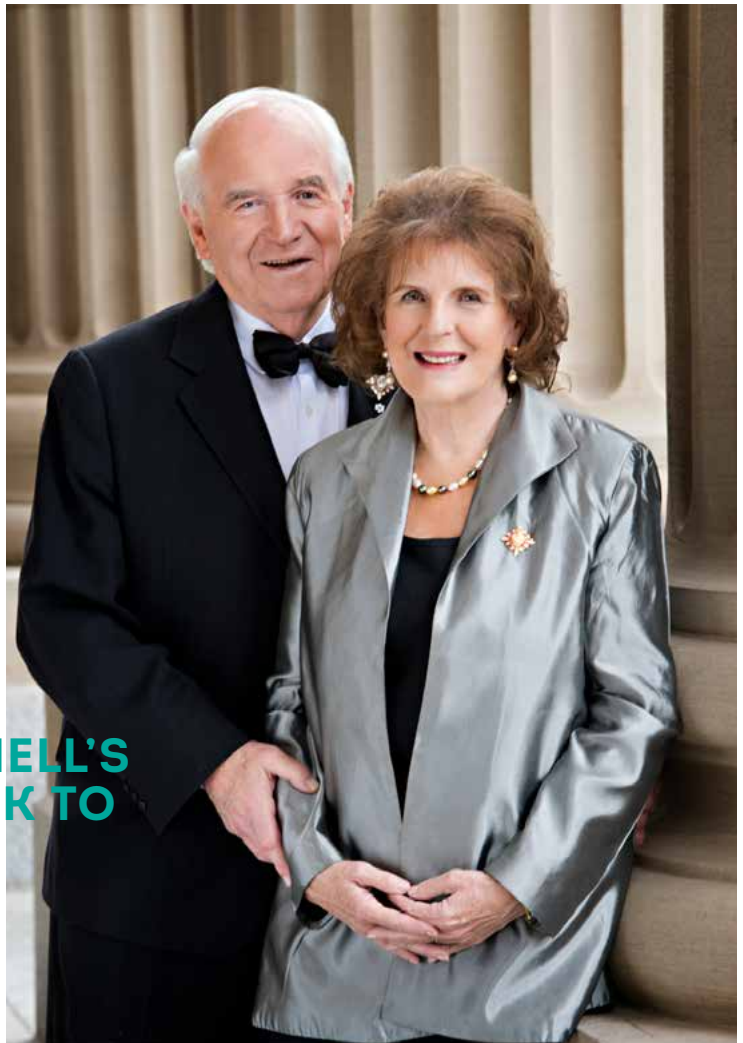


HAILING A HERO

THE LEGACY LIVES ON
FOR THE HISTORY &
HEROES FOUNDATION

BY **AUBRIANNA SNOW**
IMAGES SUPPLIED





“THIS IS OUR WAY OF HONOURING MR. MITCHELL’S LEGACY OF GIVING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY.”

– NOEL XAVIER, ECF’S DIRECTOR OF DONOR SERVICES

THE LATE DOUGLAS MITCHELL, OC AOE QC LLD, was a man of many titles — a leading professional in law, a football player for both the BC Lions and the Hamilton Tiger-Cats, an advisor to many groups and organizations and, most of all, a dedicated community member and family man.

An inductee into the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame, Canada’s Sports Hall of Fame, and the Canadian Football Hall of Fame, athletics were a significant part of his passion in life. He supported young people in these pursuits as a mentor, including Olympic gold medalist Hayley Wickenheiser. His support for young people extended beyond the field and the rink into the tremendous charitable work he engaged in with his wife and best friend, the Honourable Lois Mitchell, former Alberta lieutenant-governor. They met during his time in law school at the University of British Columbia, where Douglas Mitchell now has an

arena named after him, the Doug Mitchell Thunderbird Sports Centre.

In 2017, Lois and Douglas Mitchell worked together to create the History & Heroes Foundation with the assistance of the late Stanley Milner. The Mitchells established an endowment fund with Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) to help support Albertan students with an academic interest in the province’s history that has grown from \$50,000 to more than \$1.2 million in just five years.

“You always have time if you really want to give back to what’s needed,” says Lois Mitchell. “It doesn’t have to be money. Give your time. Give your talent. He was a big one about ideas; Doug always thought outside of the box... I never heard him say ever that he didn’t have time.”

Douglas Mitchell’s impact on the sports community, the legal community and the philanthropy community was

immeasurable. While his passing is a significant loss, the work he seeded continues to grow through the efforts of those left to carry on his memory. The Honourable Lois Mitchell is now Chair of the History & Heroes Foundation.

“Doug is tremendously missed,” says Alan Ross, regional managing partner of Borden Ladner Gervais, the law firm in Calgary where Douglas Mitchell spent his career. “He really, along with Her Honour Lois Mitchell, gave incredibly to the community. It’s appreciated, it’s recognized, but it is very much missed with his passing.”

ECF has committed up to \$20,000 to match donations made to the History & Heroes Foundation Fund.

Those interested in supporting Albertan learners in their pursuit of history can donate to the History & Heroes Endowment Fund in memory of Douglas Mitchell at ecfoundation.org. ■

A photograph of two women standing in a park, wrapped in large, quilted blankets with a prominent star pattern. The woman on the left is seen from the back, looking towards the right. The woman on the right is facing forward, smiling. The blankets are red, black, and white, with a large red star in the center. The background shows trees and a grassy area under a clear sky.

Star
bright.

Funding from Edmonton Community Foundation supports the Edmonton Artists' Trust Fund and provides the means for our city's creative community to grow its cultural roots. As gifts expressing respect and recognition, Andrea Bellegarde-Courchene's star blankets wrap the recipient in the rich past and bold promise of the Indigenous culture.

Donations to ECF inspire hope, create opportunity and enhance the Edmonton lifestyle. We work with our donors to give, grow and transform. ecfoundation.org helps Edmonton shine.

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Charity begins at Home.

FINDING YOUR PART TO PLAY

MARSHALL SHOCTOR'S COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY WAS GENERATIONS IN THE MAKING

BY THERESE KEHLER



MARSHALL SHOCTOR WAS barely into his new role with Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) when he made his directorial debut as an endowment fund matchmaker.

To the longtime lawyer and newly installed board secretary, it was a perfect pairing that would put the impressive organizational power of ECF to work for the Edmonton Jewish Community Charitable Foundation (EJCCF), an organization whose strengths and challenges were well-known to Shctor.

FUNDRAISING



“ECF COULD PROVIDE ALL OF THE INFRASTRUCTURE ... SO EJCCF COULD REALLY START TO FOCUS ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY ON RAISING MONEY AND DISTRIBUTING THE INCOME, ACCORDING TO DONORS’ NEEDS AND DONORS’ WISHES.”

– MARSHALL SHOCTOR

“I thought they should focus on playing to their strengths and primary interest, which is raising money and spending it,” he recalls. “So I recommended to them, very strongly ... that it would be a marriage of two great organizations.

The union was approved in 2019, and today the thriving EJCCF stands as an example to other foundations that want to increase their impact. ECF has played a similar role for sister community foundations in St. Albert and Fort McMurray.

Shoctor seems a bit rueful as he recalls being “maybe too aggressive” in the merger. But it is all in character for the 67-year-old, who has been seeking parts to play in the community since he was a shy teen growing up in west Edmonton.

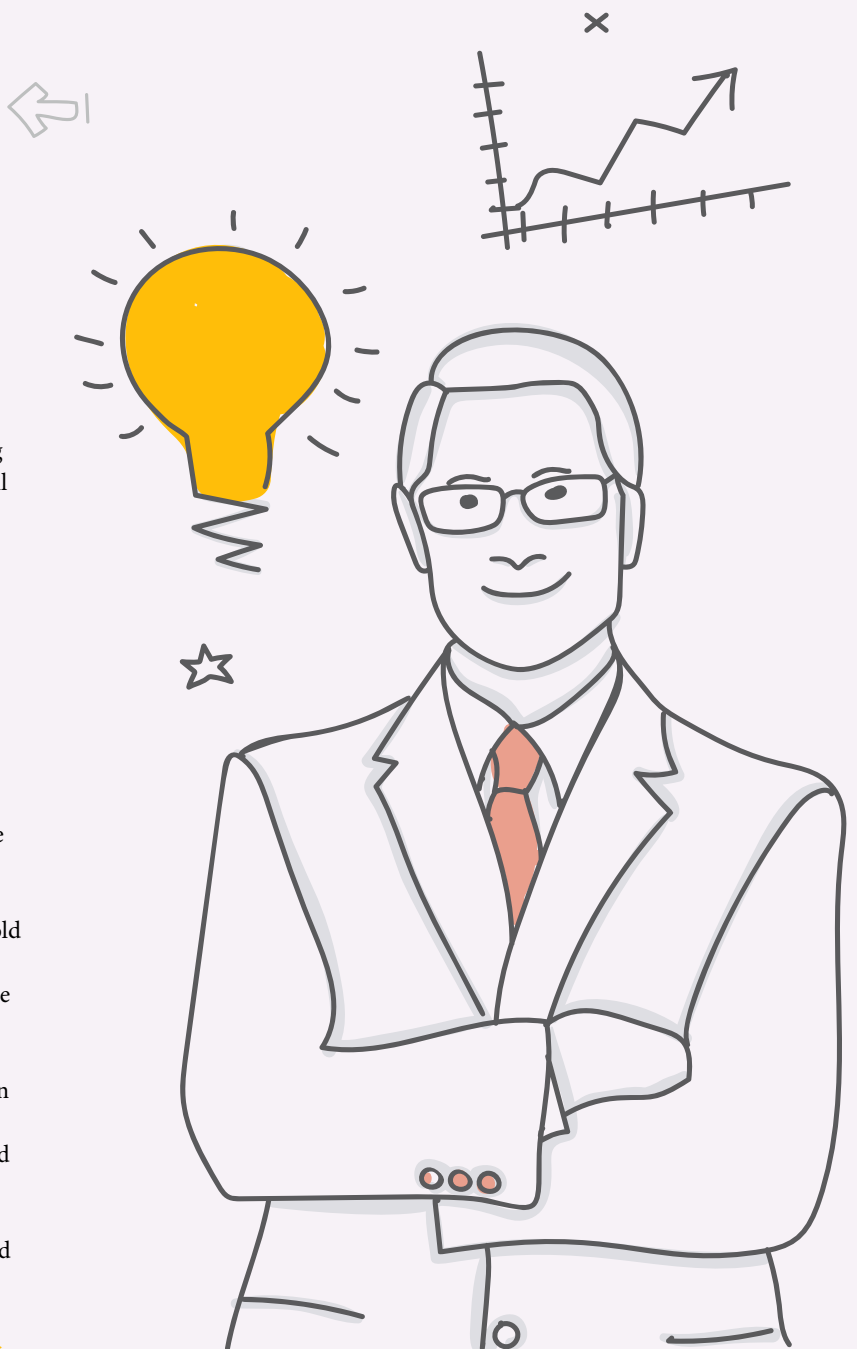
Shoctor’s first foray into community service was in Grade 9 when he joined the B’nai Brith Youth Organization and threw himself into its volunteer opportunities, taking on leadership roles with increasingly more responsibility, culminating in the position of international secretary. By Grade 12, he’d set his sights on becoming the next international president of the Jewish youth organization; in fact, he’d already deferred his university entrance in anticipation.

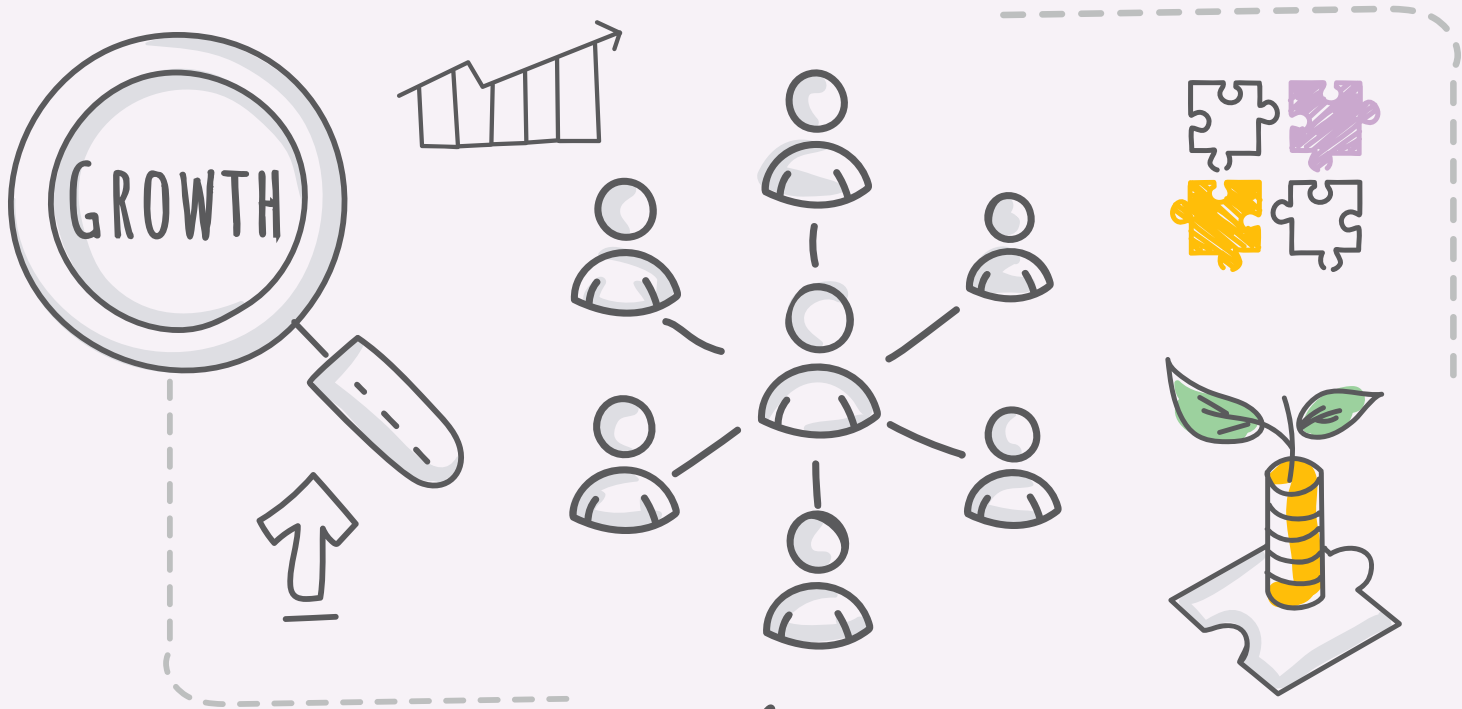
So it came as a surprise to learn he was too old for the job. By one day.

“My 19th birthday occurred on the day of the international elections so they wouldn’t let me run,” Shoctor recalls with a chuckle.

It didn’t deter him though and, for more than four decades, Shoctor has been a dependable, behind-the-scenes player for numerous local and national organizations. “It just became one of the themes in my life, in addition to family and profession and friends and travel and culture and art,” he says.

He’s a longtime volunteer with the city’s Jewish community, including serving a term as >





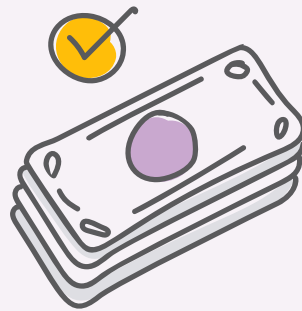
board president of the Jewish Federation of Edmonton. He has served on boards and committees at the Citadel Theatre since the mid-1980s when his late father, theatre founder Joe Shoctor, first encouraged him to join its board of directors. Ultimately, he chaired both the board of directors and the board of governors.

Shoctor credits the example set by his parents, Joe and Kayla Shoctor, who juggled three kids, community activities, and — in his father’s case — multiple careers as a theatre producer, real estate developer, hotelier and lawyer. Joe was following a path that had been blazed by his own parents, immigrants who came to Canada in the early 1900s and became active participants in Edmonton’s community life despite their own daily struggles.

“My father was a force of nature,” Shoctor says. “He was heavily engaged in all kinds of aspects of the community, not just theatre.

“The mentorship I got was more by watching them than being instructed by them about what I should do or how I should do it.”

In 2018, two years after he left his legal practice, Shoctor became the

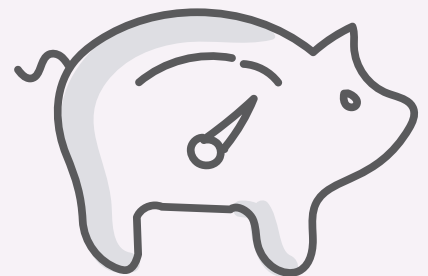
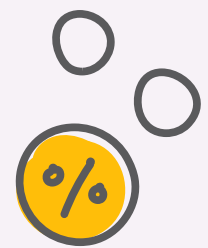


secretary of the ECF board of directors. He’d become familiar with the foundation in 2001 when he worked with ECF to establish an endowment to support operations at the Citadel Theatre which was set up in his father’s memory; then in 2010, he helped his mother establish a family fund that is used to support a wide variety of community organizations.

“ECF is a very major player in Edmonton in terms of charitable, not-for-profit and scholarship funding. It injects an awful lot of money annually into the greater community,” Shoctor says.

He would like to see more people finding the part they can play in their own communities.

“If you are part of a community and you want to see your community excel — not just operate at a base level ... you need a strong volunteer sector. Because it doesn’t happen on its own,” he says. ■



OVER 1 MILLION AND COUNTING

EDMONTON ARTISTS' TRUST FUND
SHINES THE LIGHT ON EDMONTON'S
ART STARS

BY CORY SCHACHTEL



Photography: *Brianne Jang of BB Collective*

Over the past 25 years, the Edmonton Artists' Trust Fund (EATF) has contributed more than \$1 million to Edmonton's arts economy, investing in more than 140 local artists across disciplines as diverse as multimedia, literary, music, dance, film, theatre and visual arts.

The EATF was established in 1997 by community supporters John and Barbara Poole, Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) and Clifford E. Lee Foundation. When the awards launched in 1998, a jury selected four artists to share in a prize of \$13,500. The Eldon and Anne Foote family fund began directly supporting the EATF in 2017, adding to the value and number of the awards given to artists.

In December 2022, 20 artists were awarded \$15,000 each for the 2022 EATF awards, for a total of \$300,000 provided to creative professionals, including Connor Yuzwenko-Martin and Madeline LeBlanc. The funds are intended to support financial stability for the artists to grow, create, renew or experiment in their chosen artistic endeavour.



CONNOR YUZWENKO-MARTIN

FROM A YOUNG age, Connor Yuzwenko-Martin had a strong passion for theatre. And as the playwright and producer of *After Faust* — the first Deaf-written, produced and directed play performed by a fully Deaf cast in recent Alberta history — he's found some success in a medium and business that historically hasn't welcomed people from his community. But his journey has been difficult, and he could never have gone this far without his parents.

Over 90 per cent of Deaf people are born to hearing parents, and a shockingly high number of those parents never learn to properly sign. But "I'm really lucky with the parents I have," Yuzwenko-Martin says, signing through an interpreter. "My parents are independent thinkers, they're doers. They researched and figured out the best way to approach language and communicating with [their] son is to learn sign language. So they did. And that was a major factor for me to be involved in drama, and advocate for my needs."

Being involved in drama and advocating for his needs has been a constant ever since grade school which, when Yuzwenko-Martin attended, was just starting to implement things like a properly trained ASL interpreter — never mind a team of them. "There was an improv group at my high school, and it was my first year, so I was just watching it. But the interpreter couldn't work with me during lunch. They needed a break, but there was no team. And the principal didn't understand that. They were like, 'Why can't you just continue for the



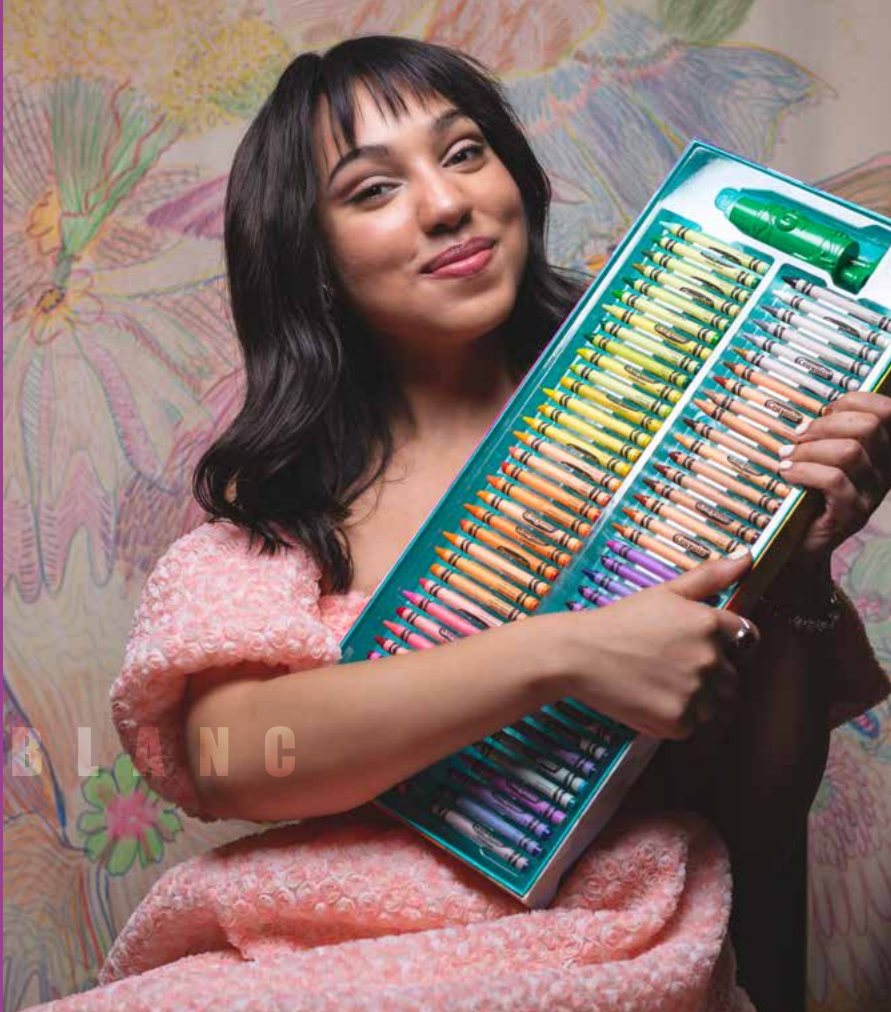
Photography: Brianne Jang of BB Collective

whole day? It's just improv — just make it up.' As a kid, how am I supposed to advocate for myself in that situation? It's like we hit a wall. And sometimes I just gave up."

But he never fully gave up. And today, he advocates for kids like him and makes space for Deaf artists at all levels, whether it's running a Deaf drama class at the Alberta School for the Deaf, helping grow the SOUND OFF Deaf Theatre Festival, or expressing himself and creating opportunities for other Deaf artists with *After Faust*. All of these are made easier by the Edmonton Artists' Trust Fund, which helps him find and create new opportunities for himself and his community.

"Most of Edmonton theatre isn't ready for becoming fully accessible — they're still in the learning process," he signs bluntly. "And Deaf access has bad PR right now. It tends to be labelled by the hearing community as expensive. So I'm putting money towards professional interpreters, and to develop captioning. But I'm not focusing on the attitude of it's expensive — it's a need, and should be in the budget line just like your wardrobe designer or your set designer."

The biggest need, besides opportunity, is for the hearing community to take part — without hesitation. "There aren't enough Deaf people to fill up the seats in the theatre — we need the hearing people to come out and see it, too!"



M A D E L I N E L E B L A N C

GROWING UP IN a family with limited resources meant that Madeline LeBlanc was focused on what her family could afford with their modest income. And despite the financial strain, her family showed her unconditional love and support throughout her childhood. When she turned 18, her family was forced to make the difficult decision of asking her to leave their home “in the hopes that I would find success and stability outside of the family’s means.”

Through the stress of living on her own, working late nights at an arena and upgrading high school, Madeline developed a psychosis which was later diagnosed as schizophrenia.

“I had a lot of interactions with the ER department for strange behaviour, but I was written off as being drug addicted. So it took about six months before I was admitted into hospital.”

After receiving help and medication, and living on her own again, the former arts-loving honours student began rebuilding her young life while on disability. “I would try to spend only \$100 on groceries a month so that I would still have \$100 to spend on art supplies,” LeBlanc says.

Art supplies, in this case, meant thrift store bed sheets and classic Crayola crayons, which LeBlanc purchased to save money and accelerate her career by creating multiple bodies of work in a short time. “The only solution was overcoming all

this through art. It was a way for me to make an income on my own schedule, so I could still experience the things I experience with my schizophrenia — my delusions and things like that — and that didn’t have to come to my place of work.”

She made her first body of work, *Unplanned*, in 2020, followed by *The Mother* in 2021 and three separate works in 2022. They consist of large pieces, many still on bedsheets, full of color and life that seems to express itself in spite of the unfair world that’s long pressured and misunderstood the artist who created it.

On top of her passion and productivity, receiving the Edmonton Artists’ Trust Fund award will bring LeBlanc into a life she’s never known. Now that groceries and art supplies will no longer break her budget, she can work on improving her craft and expanding her inspirational horizons. “This can really kick start my life in terms of education — I’m reapplying to different schools, and I’d really like to use some of the money to get proper counseling

that I haven’t been able to receive. I’ve even thought about talking to my bank about investment funds and things that I have no idea about,” she laughs. “This is a really big deal.”

“Our diverse arts community is one of the forces that brings our city together and makes the Edmonton region a vibrant and exciting place to live. The 2022 recipients demonstrate commitment and excellence in their respective disciplines, helping to foster an exciting ecology of creation and expression in Edmonton,” says Sanjay Shahani, executive director of the Edmonton Arts Council. The Edmonton Arts Council administers the fund.

“Congratulations to this year’s recipients of the EATF” said Tina Thomas, CEO of Edmonton Community Foundation. “We are thankful for the creative contributions this cohort of recipients have made to our city, and we look forward to the new works that they will produce with support from this important initiative.” ■

Photography: Martin Kwame

A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON *GROWTH*

WHEN TINA THOMAS stepped into the role of chief executive officer with the Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) in August 2022, she knew she had big shoes to fill. Her predecessor, Martin Garber-Conrad, had been in the role for 17 years. And although she'd been working in a high-profile position in Edmonton's public sector for nearly the same amount of time, she knew he would be a tough act to follow.

"I was nervous, of course. Martin knows people really, really well. He is the wise elder in the sector," she says. "And I'm the newbie in many ways."

But it's exactly that newness that she sees as a strength.

Thomas has an impressive breadth of experience backing her: Before joining ECF, she spent 14 years in the private sector, and 13 more in the public sphere. She has an MBA from Queen's University, a CPA-CMA and most recently earned a Masters in Library and Information Sciences from the University of Alabama. She's well-versed in everything from marketing and business development to strategy and innovation. So she knew she could bring some fresh perspectives to the role.

"When you have someone new come in, you just get different ideas," she says. "So I get to build on the great work that Martin has done >

**TINA THOMAS
TAPS INTO YEARS
OF COMMUNITY
LEADERSHIP TO
SHAPE THE FUTURE
OF THE EDMONTON
COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION**

BY LISA CATTERALL

PHOTOGRAPHY AARON PEDERSEN



from a different perspective, and different background. I mean, I'm very different from Martin in every way. And I think that can be a good thing."

Since 2009, Thomas had been working at the Edmonton Public Library (EPL), first in marketing and communications, then overseeing strategy and innovation and finally in customer experience. Over the years, she spearheaded several major initiatives, including the library's rebrand, which transformed public perceptions into what library services are in Edmonton, gaining international acclaim and awards along the way.

But after 13 years in leadership at one of Edmonton's favourite institutions, she was ready for a change.

"I'd been able to accomplish a lot of great things," she says. "So it did seem like a good time to change and to go to an organization that, like EPL, provides tremendous community value and does great things. But there were opportunities for me to see how I can help make a great organization even better leveraging my experience and ideas."

In her role at EPL, Thomas worked alongside ECF on several community projects including the Forward Thinking Speaker Series, Welcome Baby and the epl2go Literacy Vans. She knew that the Foundation supported many of the community groups that were also active in EPL's circles. But it was only once she started at ECF that she came to understand the full depth of community support the Foundation offered.

"My knowledge was pretty thin in comparison then," she says. "It's better than thin now, but it's still got a long way to go. It's been exciting and rewarding to see all the great work that we do powered by the many Edmontonians who have funds and ECF and the numerous charities doing amazing work in our city."

One similarity Thomas sees between the two organizations is that both serve all Edmontonians. At EPL, the focus was on enabling learning and unlocking possibilities for people from all walks of life. Similarly, ECF invests in the long-term growth and success of the community by working with groups who believe in Edmonton and want to see it grow.

"ECF isn't focused on just one issue or one community group. It's really for everyone, by everyone, in that the people that come to ECF



"So I get to build on the great work that Martin has done but from a different perspective, and different background. I mean, I'm very different from Martin in every way. And I think that can be a good thing."

— TINA THOMAS

to create endowments have that idea of a long-term investment in the community,” she says.

The difference, she says, is ECF’s role as a supporter, convener and initiator, bringing community organizations together. “We’re helping understand issues, finding the right organizations, working with organizations that are already doing this great work and amplifying it,” she says.

THINKING DIFFERENTLY

While at EPL, Thomas’ work focused largely on the services provided to customers. It was a hands-on role, centred on service delivery, development and execution. And she thinks she can leverage that experience to help ECF think differently about how it supports the community.

Over her first few months as CEO, Thomas has familiarized herself with the many ways that ECF supports Edmontonians by meeting with the people who know ECF best — charitable organizations, donors and other community leaders. And while she’s inspired by the work that ECF has accomplished, people have been open and honest about sharing where there are gaps and needs that can help guide ECF’s future growth. She has a few ideas of how she’d like to move forward and is staying open minded.

“ECF supports all areas of community need, and that’s a strength. So many people have told me that ECF is one of the few organizations that understands the needs of the entire non-profit and charitable sector because we work with everyone,” she says.

ECF can continue to serve the whole sector while also leveraging the strength of its knowledge and relationships by seeing where there are opportunities where the Foundation is uniquely positioned to have a more meaningful impact.

Thomas sees the opportunity to bring more people to the table. Edmonton

“I don’t like change for the sake of change, but I think that’s part of having someone new — fresh eyes and ideas.”

— TINA THOMAS

is filled with many first- and second-generation Canadians as well as small and medium business professionals building a life for themselves and their families in Edmonton.

“I think we can do more to broaden the profile of philanthropy in our city by meeting with business owners, entrepreneurs, cultural groups and others who are invested in seeing Edmonton and Edmontonians grow and thrive,” she says.

She also wants to help raise the profile of the Foundation.

“I was amazed to learn that ECF is the largest non-governmental funder in Edmonton, granting approximately \$30 million each year. But the most interesting part for me is how we do it,” Thomas says. “Investing money and granting a portion of the funds is a practical way to create sustainable funding for the organizations that are offering vital services in our communities. I want more people to understand ECF’s approach to philanthropy because I think it’s a smart investment that will make the charitable sector more self-reliant and effective.”

Finding new, better or more efficient ways to support the community is nothing new to Thomas. She’s not intimidated by change or innovation and wants to make every move forward an intentional one. It’s the same strategy she used as she built on EPL’s success, year after year.

“I like to try and think, ‘We’ve done this a certain way. Is it working for us? If it isn’t, how can we do it differently? If it is, how can we make it better?’” she says. “I don’t like change for the sake of change, but I think that’s part of having someone new — fresh eyes and ideas.”

Although the path forward is still being carved out, Thomas is confident ECF will continue to support Edmontonians when and how they need it. It’s just a matter of listening, learning and leading.

“I’m not coming in with a preconceived notion, I hope I’m coming in with open eyes and ears to hear what those opportunities are, and where those needs are, and how best we can help,” she says.

“I want our decisions to be informed by what the community needs.” ■



Photography: Aaron Pedersen
Photographed on location at Burger Baron, 12425 118 Avenue

SON OF A BARON

A DEEPLY PERSONAL CONNECTION TO THE BURGER BARON FRANCHISE LED FILMMAKER OMAR MOUALLEM ON A MEATY VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY

BY JENNIFER COCKRALL

IN MAY 2022, Omar Mouallem was weighing the pros and the cons of whether to hit send on a submission application for the Toronto International Film Festival. The stakes were high. This was a project almost a decade in the making. From the award-garnering magazine article he first wrote in 2013, titled “Will the Real Burger Baron Please Stand Up?” to his 45-minute television special, *The Last Baron*, that aired on CBC in Sept 2021, Mouallem has continued his journalistic dive into his own family’s Lebanese-Canadian connection with the restaurant chain that speckled Alberta’s roadmaps. Thanks to a successful crowdfunding campaign following the CBC television premiere, Mouallem had been expanding the story into a one hour, 40-minute feature documentary called *The Lebanese Burger Mafia*.

Mouallem was basically born into the subject matter. His parents opened their Burger Baron in 1987 in High Prairie, Alta., where they settled after immigrating. “The restaurant changed our lives forever. It moved us from the working class to the middle class,” explains Mouallem in the film, as he narrates over old family photos. “It made it possible for my parents to live out the immigrant dream in Canada.” Like any child and teen would, however, Mouallem resented the endless hours in the restaurant, sometimes washing dishes, while his friends had lives that included things like weekends and vacations. However, he admits to enjoying the ability to win favour with friends by being able to place a delivery order from anywhere in High Prairie, and have the order arrive promptly, no charge.

It wasn’t until he was in his teens, however, that Mouallem became aware that there were other Barons.



Photography: Aaron Pedersen
Photographed on location at Burger Baron, 12425 118 Avenue

The curious fact that there were other Barons, and that they were also Lebanese, stuck with Mouallem. But at that stage of his life, he was ready to leave High Prairie, and the family restaurant behind. Mouallem left High Prairie for Vancouver Film School to study screenwriting, and then attended Langara College for film production.

“That’s where I became a magazine writer,” says Mouallem. “One of my classmates was writing for *The Nerve*,” and Mouallem wanted in on the perks of free CDs and interviews with touring musicians for this Canadian music monthly.

Now based in Edmonton,

Mouallem is one of Canada’s premier investigative and longform narrative journalists. His work has appeared in *Maclean’s*, *The New Yorker*, *Rolling Stone* and *The Guardian* to name a few. He was also on the editorial team of *Avenue Edmonton* (now *Edify* magazine).

Not surprisingly, when he leaned into his personal history for *Swerve Magazine* in 2013, it was more than just a quirky overview of the interesting interpersonal dynamics of owners in a waning restaurant chain. It drew interesting connections between the character of these Lebanese immigrants and the reason that no two Burger Barons had the same look, menu, ▶

even branding font and cartoon knight logo.

Each location is a different take on this loosely controlled brand, which at its heyday, had over 50 locations in Canada and the United States. As he interviews the various barons of this declining empire, Mouallem highlights the chaotic deregulation of everything from the chain's menu selections to interiors. Many serve pizzas, steak, spaghetti, fried chicken and poutine as well; Lamont has a laundromat; Swan Hills has vegan options; Maskwacis has a bannock burger and a bannock taco.

"Lebanese are known for their independence," laughs Mouallem. But what emerges from these immigration and reinvention stories, surprised even Mouallem. "I knew this was an immigrant success story. But I didn't know that this was a [Lebanese] civil war story," says Mouallem.

"From the late '70s to the early '90s, those were the best times for the Burger Baron. It's not a coincidence that those dates line up perfectly with the dates for the Lebanese Civil War. And it makes sense: desperate people coming here and clinging onto their best chance for security and a decent life for themselves and their family." There were no franchise fees to pay, no rules to running a Burger Baron, only that it really should include the trade-secret mushroom sauce for the mushroom burger. Everything else was dealer's choice.

This much-wider geopolitical angle is something that Mouallem admits would not have come to him unless he'd spent so much time talking to his subjects through the filming and interview processes. Also, being Lebanese and with Arabic-speaking film crew, there was a certain candidness and trust that allowed some of the most emotionally impactful parts of the film.

As he edited what he thought was the final film cut in early May 2022, Mouallem had a growing need to close a few more loops. First there was an internal narrative issue that one of main protagonists, Rudy "The Godfather" Kemaldean, sort of disappeared halfway into the telling of the film's story. Mouallem needed one more day of shoots to get a final interview. And the crowdsourced funders gave Mouallem some feedback, saying the film needed further explanation of the Lebanese Civil War and ongoing current conflicts that was driving this emigration central to the Burger Baron story. The trouble was, Kemaldean and his wife had just left for Lebanon and would be away for several months. And stock footage of war-ridden Lebanon would generally cost about \$100 USD per second.

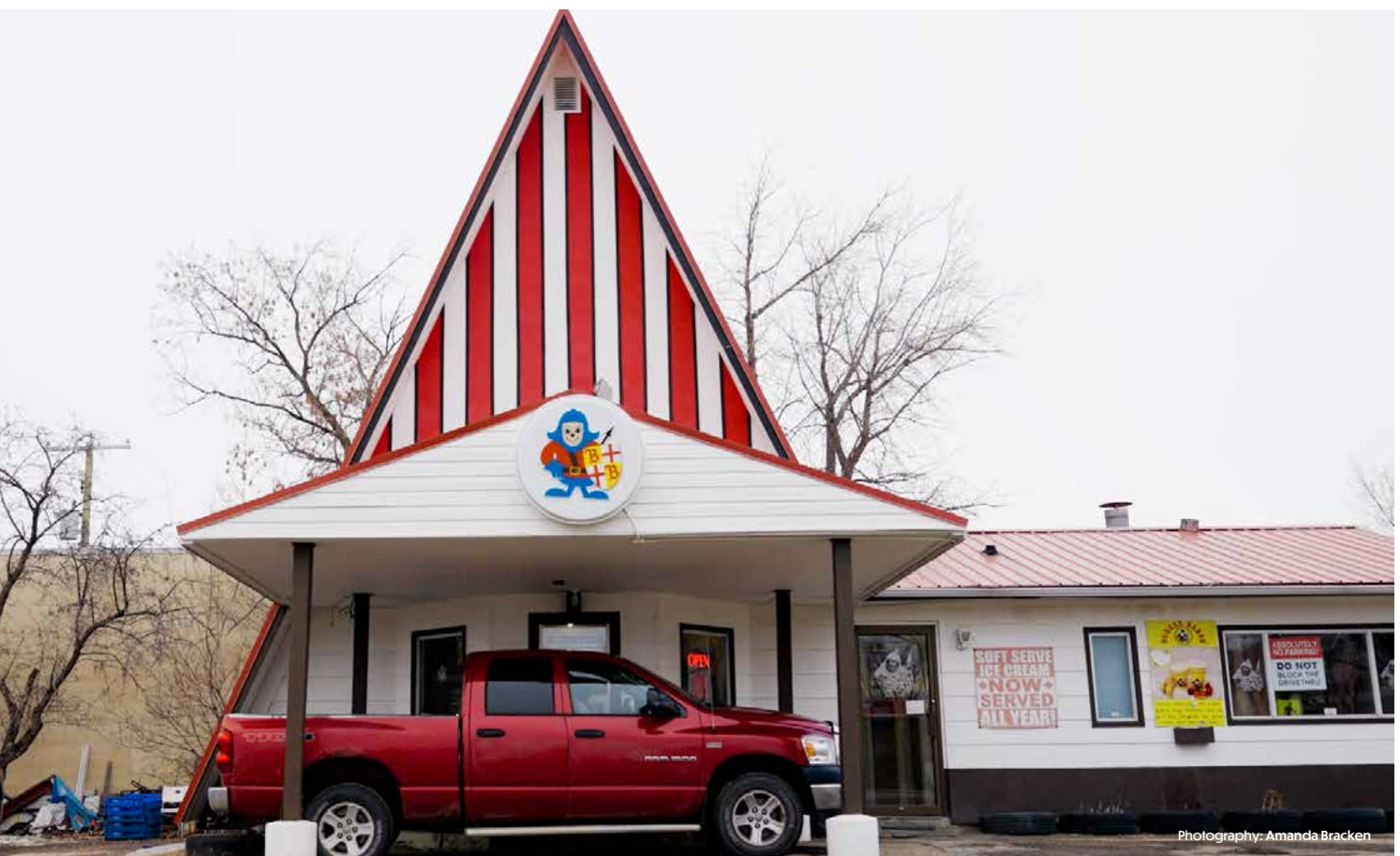
"At that point, I thought, OK, well, I know we can make a better film but we'll just submit now to TIFF with what we have, or we can give up on that little dream and focus instead on making the best film we can. But it's going to take months, and we're



Photography: Amanda Bracken

"FROM THE LATE '70S TO THE EARLY '90S, THOSE WERE THE BEST TIMES FOR THE BURGER BARON. IT'S NOT A COINCIDENCE THAT THOSE DATES LINE UP PERFECTLY WITH THE DATES FOR THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR."

— OMAR MOUALLEM



Photography: Amanda Bracken



going to need more funding.” Moullem chose the latter. “That’s when we went to Edmonton Community Foundation.”

The \$3,000 grant from Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) allowed Moullem to hire a Beirut cameraperson who had current street scenes of social unrest and could also capture the final interview with Rudy Kemaldeen. “It’s the best stuff in the film,” beams Moullem. And there is now substantially more archival footage to emphasize the civil war and the conditions that many of the barons and their families were fleeing when leaving Lebanon for Canada.

“We were able to go a lot deeper with our main subject and complete his story and we were able to get to the heart of Lebanon’s civil politics, and that was the final important piece of the story, in my opinion.”

His gamble is paying off already. Having resolved the story gaps and with the feature’s final cut in hand, Moullem has just inked a distribution deal for the film’s Middle Eastern release, a deal brokered ironically at TIFF. The long road to creating and completing *The Lebanese Burger Mafia* is over, but clearly, Moullem’s Burger Baron adventure is far from over. ■

BY THE NUMBERS:

EDMONTON'S FOOD BANK

The true power of an endowment is felt over time.

With files from *Aubrianna Snow*

Edmonton's Food Bank is a central warehouse that supplies food resources to more than 300 soup kitchens, shelters, schools and community programs. About 60 per cent of the contributions made to the Food Bank are from the food industry while the rest come from community donors in the form of non-perishable food and cash donations.

Edmonton's Food Bank also provides baby formula, diapers and tailored food baskets for those with medical or cultural dietary restrictions.

"The challenge we're having is that the gifts of food are being outstripped by demand," says Marjorie Bencz, executive director of Edmonton's Food Bank. "The growth that we've seen in requests for

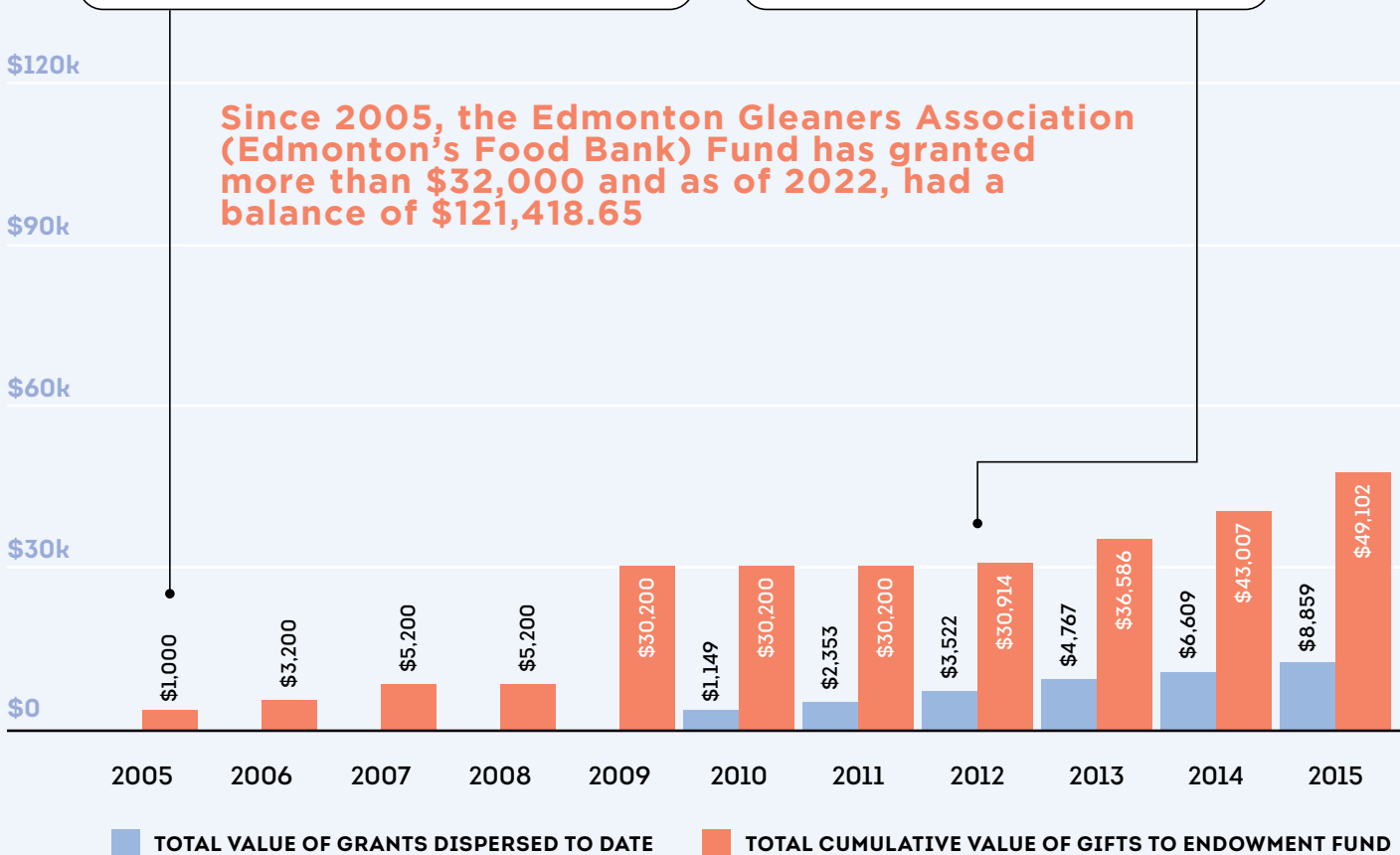
About 1 in 5 households in Alberta experienced food insecurity in 2021.

2005: FUND CREATION

Edmonton's Food Bank endowment fund (Edmonton Gleaners Association Fund) with Edmonton Community Foundation was started by dedicated staff at Edmonton's Food Bank, who recognized that long-term, stable funding is an important investment in the longevity of the organization.

2012: ADDING EGGS

Edmonton's Food Bank decided to add a dozen eggs to each of its hampers. The ability to add this protein-dense food item that is acceptable for many cultures created a more wholesome hamper. Funds from the endowment supported this pilot.



food, whether it be from individuals or agencies, is not sustainable at this time through our current donor base and supporters.”

“Moving into 2023, we’re concerned that this trend will continue. There are more conversations about even deeper recession or inflation. And those affect low-income people way harder than they hit anyone else.”

Global supply chain issues make locally

sourcing sustainable food more important than ever, according to Bencz.

“The more that we can make food a priority in our homes, in our community... the more food secure all of us will be over time,” she says. The endowment provides unrestricted funding which provides flexibility to its response to food insecurity.

“It’s about the individuals who are helping

us out,” says Bencz. “That’s who’s kept our door open.”

“Our endowment is a legacy started by staff. This perpetual fund is one of our tools that creates resiliency and sustainability for the organization,” says Bencz. “Our endowment is kept alive by our team, volunteers, and donors who continue to top up this fund. Allocating donations specifically to the endowment links donors’ passion to our mission which will continue far into the future because hunger never takes a holiday.”

Gifts to the Edmonton Gleaners Association Fund support Edmonton’s Food Bank in the execution of its vision of a community where all citizens have access to an adequate and nutritious food supply.

Donate to Edmonton’s Food Bank’s endowment fund through the Edmonton Community Foundation at ecfoundation.org. ■

2020: DECLARATION OF THE PANDEMIC

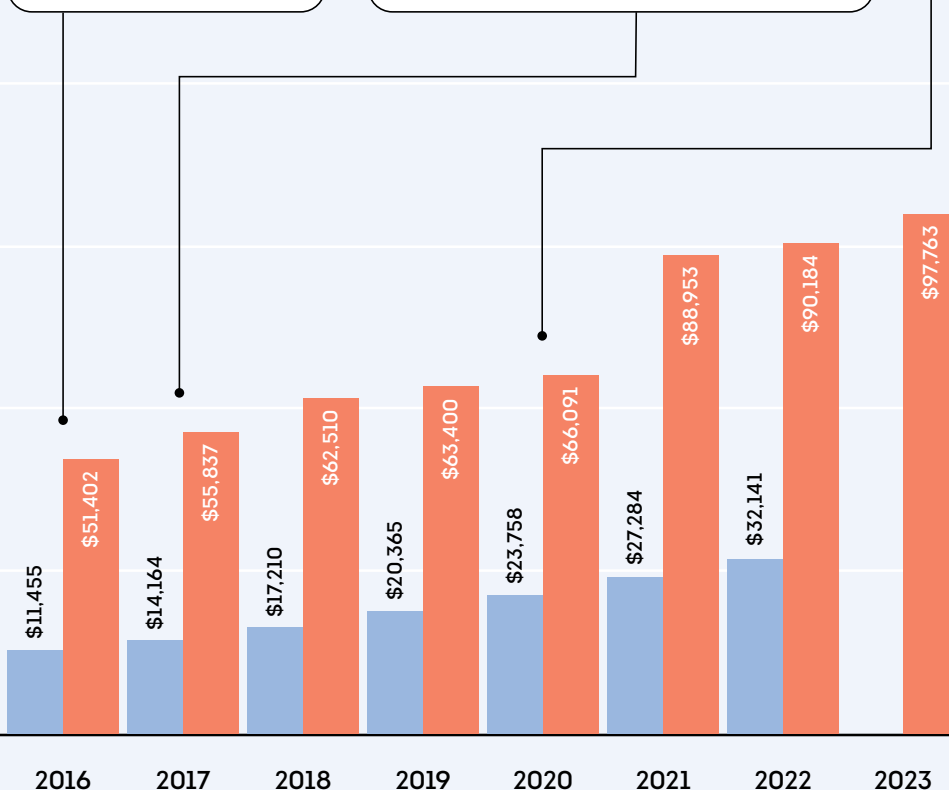
Since the declaration of the pandemic, Edmonton’s Food Bank has remained open and serving the community. Funds from the endowment helped the organization respond and adapt with contactless washing stations and additional cleaning.

2016: FORT MCMURRAY WILDFIRE

Edmonton’s Food Bank responded with semi-trailers full of food staples to evacuated communities. Funds from the endowment helped offset the cost of responding to this disaster.

2017: BEYOND FOOD PROGRAM

Edmonton’s Food Bank started a collaborative program to help people beyond their food needs. Aptly named the Beyond Food program, it offers literacy or education guidance, employment preparation/job readiness, financial or tax services, personal support and practical resources. Funds from the endowment paid for safety tickets like first aid, confined space, ProServe or even forklift certificates.



BEYOND FOOD

Edmonton’s Food Bank’s Beyond Food Program helps people to seek employment and access additional comprehensive services in the community. “Because of generous support from Edmonton Community Foundation, we’re able to pay for safety tickets when the cost is a barrier to participants’ success,” explains Bencz. “We are able to help someone get a free WHMIS ticket and/or we can pay for forklift certification which ultimately will help them secure employment — if somebody is employed, then the likelihood that they need the Food Bank drops substantially moving forward.”

YOU CAN START A FUND, TOO!

Work with Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) to ensure your charitable giving is set up for long-term growth.

ENDOWMENT FUNDS offer permanent investment of charitable gifts to provide ongoing support to organizations in the community.

When you're thinking about donating, consider what you'd like to accomplish.

Here are a few questions to get you started:

- ♦ What would you like to do to make your community a better place?
- ♦ Would you like to name your fund in memory of a loved one or in honour of someone you admire?
- ♦ How will you define your legacy and who in your family will be able to make decisions about your fund?



STEP ONE

Our Donor Advisors will help you answer these questions and more. We specialize in matching your interests with organizations whose goals mirror your own. Grants can be made to any registered Canadian charity, which means you're not limited to local causes. You can provide ongoing support for your favourite causes in Edmonton, across Canada, and around the world. We'll be happy to work with you to realize your vision for a better community.

STEP TWO

Once you've defined the objective of your fund, we'll create an agreement that captures your intentions. This is a straightforward document that explains, in writing, the goal of your fund, how involved you would like to be in allocating grants, and other relevant details. There is no obligation for you as the donor — we simply want to ensure we've documented your wishes correctly.

STEP THREE

After the agreement is in place, it's time to make your gift. People tend to equate endowment funds with millions of dollars. With ECF, you can create your endowment with \$10,000. You can donate it all at once or take up to 10 years to reach the total amount. This flexibility allows people from a variety of financial backgrounds to create endowment funds. The money in a fund is not immediately granted. Instead, your gift is invested, and a percentage is disbursed according to your charitable intentions.

STEP FOUR

Once your fund is ready to grant, your level of involvement going forward is your choice. You can add to your fund during your lifetime or make a gift in your estate documents, like your will or life insurance — or a combination of both. You can stay active in the annual granting process or allow ECF to use its expertise of grants within the community. ■

To learn more, visit ecfoundation.org.





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