

WE ARE NEIGHBOURS



WE ARE NEIGHBOURS

A campaign to showcase and celebrate the diverse stories of
Leeds and Grenville residents.

What makes a community welcoming and inclusive?

This was a question posed at a St. Lawrence-Rideau Immigrant Partnership community event hosted in the fall of 2016. An engaged group of immigrants, local residents, service providers, students, local elected officials, and business owners attended the event to discuss the current and future state of welcoming and inclusive communities in Leeds Grenville. A common theme emerged from these discussions — that to enhance the sense of belonging for residents of all backgrounds, local communities should be doing more to recognize and celebrate the diversity of individuals living in Leeds Grenville.

This suggestion spurred the St. Lawrence-Rideau Immigration Partnership to launch the community-driven campaign 'We Are Neighbours'.

As part of this campaign that was launched on July 5 2017, long-time residents, new and established immigrants, business owners and students have contributed their stories to this initiative. Immigration Partnership staff led interviews that provided participants with the opportunity to share their stories and experiences of living in Leeds Grenville, in addition to providing friendly advice to people new to the area. Participants who arrived to Leeds Grenville from elsewhere in Canada, or elsewhere around the globe, were encouraged to share their settlement story or what brought them to their current destination.

The campaign extended its reach into Leeds Grenville communities in the fall of 2017, when a community engagement display filled with stories and photos gathered during initial campaign stages was hosted at public spaces across the region. Local residents had the chance to read the stories and were prompted with the question, 'what makes a good neighbour'?

It is hoped that by showcasing stories of different people across Leeds Grenville that residents will find pride and excitement in the diversity of people, experiences, skills and lifestyles that exist locally. Diversity has long been a Canadian strength—culturally, socially, politically and economically. It is also a Leeds Grenville strength.

Learn more about the campaign here:

www.weareneighbours.weebly.com

About us

The St. Lawrence-Rideau Immigration Partnership is a coalition of organizations committed to building local capacity to attract, settle, and integrate immigrants throughout Leeds Grenville. The Immigration Partnership also encourages organizations, individuals, and communities to recognize and welcome cultural diversity. The Immigration Partnership is funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

Meet Your Neighbours

| Name | Country of Origin | Municipality | Page |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-------|
| Natasha Boudreau | Canada | Brockville | 4 |
| Fae MacKay | USA/Canada | Merrickville-Wolfrod | 5 |
| Frank Onasanya | Nigeria | North Grenville | 6-7 |
| Hal MacKay | Canada | Merrickville-Wolford | 7 |
| Bushra Khadra | Canada | Brockville | 8 |
| Ben Mukherjee | India | Gananoque | 9 |
| Cecilia Clapson | USA/Scotland | Augusta | 10 |
| Amy Isaikina & Dima Isaikin | Canada & Ukraine | Elizabethtown-Kitley | 11 |
| Rene Schoemaker | The Netherlands | Prescott | 12-13 |
| Takouhi Dimirdjian-Petro | Lebanon | Rideau Lakes | 14-15 |
| Norah McLaurin-Hogg | Canada | Merrickville-Wolford | 15 |
| Harold Hess | Canada | Brockville | 18 |
| Alice Wang | China | Brockville | 19 |
| Sarah & Bill Gibbons | Canada | Elizabethtown-Kitley | 20-21 |
| Neil MacKay | USA/Canada | Merrickville-Wolford | 21 |
| Ciony Ljungar | Philippines | North Grenville | 22 |
| Howaida Sorour & Gary Roberts | Egypt & Canada | Merrickville-Wolford | 23 |
| Shannon Morrison | Canada | Front of Yonge | 24 |
| Emmanuel Dizwani | Zimbabwe | Brockville | 26-27 |
| Emma Thorne | Canada | Elizabethtown-Kitley | 27 |
| Lee Sample | Canada | Brockville | 28-29 |
| Andressa Costa | Brazil | Brockville | 30-31 |

Meet Natasha

Where did you grow up?

My family was raised in a tiny Acadian fishing village called Petit de Grat, on Isle Madame in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. My mother was a teacher and my father was a lobster fisherman and the ocean was our playground growing up.

Do you have any personal/family traditions that you love to celebrate?

Every Christmas, my children and I fill a shopping cart of everything we would love to eat over the holidays, then we go drop it off at the Food Bank for another family to enjoy! The school where I teach, Ange-Gabriel, is focused on making a difference one action at a time, so we help out with local and global projects that they are often involved in.

What advice would you give to somebody moving to Leeds Grenville from another country?

Embrace the diversity of the flora and fauna of our region by exploring our trails and waterways; shop at our farmer's markets and support our local merchants. Experience the variety of cultural concerts at the Brockville Arts Centre and participate in



- **TEACHER AT ACADÉMIE CATHOLIQUE ANGE-GABRIEL**
- **MOTHER OF THREE KIDS**
- **RAISED IN AN ACADIAN FISHING VILLAGE IN NOVA SCOTIA**



Natasha and her mother on the Government Wharf after singing in the choir at the Blessing of the Fleet of the Acadian Festival. "This is one of my favourite photos of Mom and I. Singing with her is one of my most treasured childhood memories."

our Multicultural Festival! Find your place in our spiritual community - we have great energy here! Have fun! Explore our region and your new Country! Share your talents! Welcome HOME!

What do you wish other people knew about you?

I am an energy worker and I truly believe that everyone can heal themselves from the inside out and that the transformation begins with an attitude of gratitude. I truly believe that every single act of kindness is worth posing and that everyone can make a difference in this world!

"Embrace the diversity of the flora and fauna of our region by exploring our trails and waterways; shop at our farmer's markets and support local merchants."

Did you know?

Leeds and Grenville is home to three French schools, one in Kemptonville, Brockville and Merrickville.

Meet Fae

Fae MacKay, 16 years old, was born in Virginia in the United States, but has always called Merrickville her home. Although Fae grew up in a small town, from a young age she has been exposed to diverse cultures. The MacKay family welcomes travelers and exchange students in their home through an organization called, WWOOF Canada. For those of you unfamiliar with the program, WWOOF is an acronym for "worldwide workers on organic farms" or "willing workers on organic farms". The worldwide movement links visitors with organic farmers and growers to promote cultural and education experiences based on trust and non-monetary exchange. The MacKay family has a hobby farm on their property where the 'wwoofers' work, they also help out with the kids. "I think it's great because it introduces us to new cultures and lifestyles," says Fae.

Fae, going into grade 11 at North Grenville District High School, is among the many youth volunteers who have dedicated their time to help fundraise money to bring a Syrian refugee family to Merrickville. She first got involved with Rideau Bridge to Canada through her mother, Diana MacKay, who is actively involved in the group. Soon after she began volunteering, Fae was asked to be the Chair of the youth committee – her role will be to help the Syrian children integrate into their new school and community. When asked what advice she would give to someone moving to Merrickville from another country, Fae responded simply; "Merrickville is a small town and everyone knows each other in the community. Don't be shy. People are open." After a wait of about 17 months, the fundraising and hard work of the Rideau Bridge to Canada group has paid off – the group welcomed a Syrian family to their town on June 22nd.

Fae also talked about her experience participating in a student exchange in France last year, which she says, "gave me a better global perspective", and wishes that other people knew that



- OLDER SISTER OF THREE BROTHERS
- VOLUNTEERS WITH THE RIDEAU BRIDGE TO CANADA REFUGEE GROUP
- HAS DUAL-CITIZENSHIP IN CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES

small towns are open to welcoming newcomers. "Merrickville is not that diverse yet, but people here are ready to welcome newcomers," she says. Her exchange abroad also sparked her desire to explore the world. "just because I am from a small town people expect I'll stay here... that's not the case for me".

"Merrickville is a small town and everyone knows each other in the community. Don't be shy. People are open."



From left to right: Fae MacKay, Neil MacKay, and Hal MacKay volunteering at a Rideau Bridge to Canada fundraiser event..

Did you know?

Rideau Bridge to Canada (formerly Merrickville Bridge to Canada) is a group of people from the Merrickville and Smiths Falls Ontario region who have come together to help a refugee family settle in their community. For more information visit, www.merrickville-bridge.ca.

Meet Frank



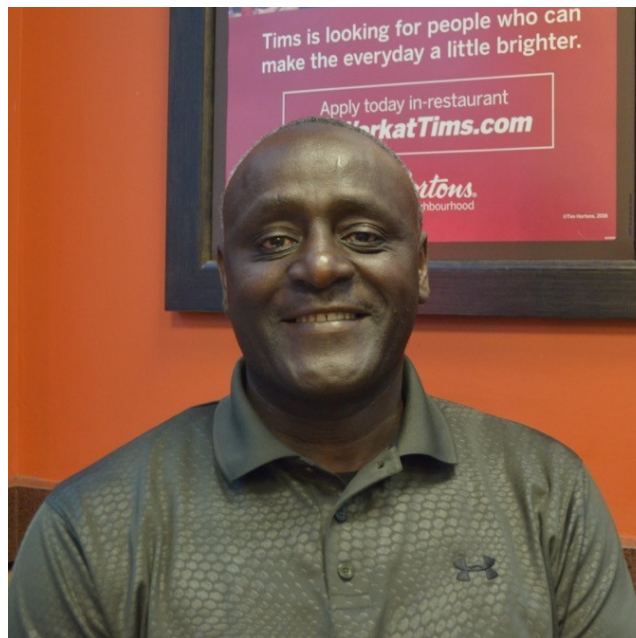
Frank Onasanya, originally from Nigeria, sat down with the Immigration Partnership staff and shared with us his story of how he came to live in North Grenville. Frank spoke openly about his childhood, the challenges he faced and overcame as an immigrant, and how these experiences have shaped him into the person he is today.

Tell us about your childhood growing up in Nigeria.

Growing up in western Nigeria, Frank learned the value of money at a young age. He remembers 'street trading', "I was allowed to go 6 or 8 streets in my neighbourhood and sell whatever my parents had," he said. Frank shared that it is not uncommon for young children in Nigeria even at the age of five or six, to know how to manage money, prepare food, and even how to take care of their younger siblings. "Here (or even in England) that's called child abuse, over there [Nigeria] that's the way it is. Once you get to that age you need to know how to take care of yourself, what happens if mom and dad don't come home? You have to know how to survive," he said. Frank said he is glad to have had lived those experiences.



Frank (bottom left) and his family, as a young boy in Nigeria.



- BORN IN NIGERIA
- HAS A PASSION FOR SOCCER
- IS A NORTH GRENVILLE MUNICIPAL COUNCILLOR

"The way people expressed themselves, their tone and body language was different than what I was used to."

How did you come to live in North Grenville?

Frank left Nigeria in his mid-twenties and immigrated to England, where he pursued his post-secondary studies. These studies eventually led him to play semi-professional soccer in Cambridge. Thirteen years later Frank moved to Toronto, through a transfer with the company he worked for in England. As a District Manager of a chain of restaurants, Frank travelled and moved a lot within the Greater Toronto Area.

In 2000, Frank was transferred again through his employment to Ottawa. After living the fast-paced city lifestyle for many years, Frank and his wife, having young children at the time, decided they wanted to live a more rural life and made the move to North Grenville. "I wanted to be able to go to work and come home and hear the birds sing," said Frank.

Today, Frank works for the federal Department of National Defense and commutes to Ottawa for work. Frank continues to be involved in his community through coaching soccer, volunteering, and in 2014, he made history when he was elected the first black councillor of North Grenville.

MEET FRANK CONTINUED

What is one of the most challenging things about moving to a new country?

"So much of the unknown is challenging," said Frank. When Frank first moved to England, he didn't know much about the country. "What I learned in school was the history [of the country], how people lived and how people did things was different, you can't learn that from a textbook," said Frank. "The way people expressed themselves, their tone and body language was different than what I was used to," he said. Frank had to learn to adapt and not take things as insulting or demeaning, "I just had to understand that people express themselves differently," he said.

Did you know?

Did you know that Frank's home country of Nigeria has the largest population of all 54 African countries—186 million. It also has one of the largest youth population in the world.

WE ARE NEIGHBOURS

What advice would you give to other newcomers moving to Leeds Grenville from another country?

"Perseverance and determination are important as is really listening to people to understand where they are coming from," said Frank. He said to be respectful, listen to others and acknowledge what they are saying. Often, disagreements and even racism and prejudice come from a lack of understanding.



Frank (left) coaching a soccer team. In 2002, he founded Frank's Soccer Training Academy (FSTA).

MERRICKVILLE-WOLFORD



- LIVED ABOVE A BAKERY WHEN HE WAS A BABY
- LOVES TO PLAY SOCCER

Meet Hal

Hal is nine years old and lives in Merrickville-Wolford with his family. Like his sister, Fae, he has helped out with the village's local refugee settlement group, Rideau Bridge to Canada. When asked what advice he would give to a newcomer moving to Merrickville he said "they should live on or just outside of Main Street, that way if they don't have a car they can walk to all of the restaurants and stores". That is some good advice Hal!

Did you know?

The village of Merrickville-Wolford was dubbed Canada's Most Beautiful Village by Communities in Bloom.

Meet Bushra

Tell us a little about yourself. Where were you born and raised?

I was born in Brockville at the Brockville General Hospital. I was raised in a neighbourhood close to Westminster school and then my family moved down to King Street. I live in a very Syrian and multicultural household that is rich in culture. My parents love to share their culture and help others better understand their Syrian roots by sharing their food and language.

This summer you are selling Syrian baked goods and food at the Brockville Farmers Market through the Summer Company program delivered locally by the Leeds Grenville Small Enterprise Centre. Tell us, why did you decide to participate in the program and start your own business?

It was kind of shock factor, I realized going into grade 11 and I still didn't know much about business, or much about my parents culture and their food, because my mom mostly made the food when I was growing up. I wanted to pass on my culture to other people I know and I also wanted to experience Summer Company. It's a really good program for an individual to grow, meet new people and learn about business.

Do you have any personal or cultural traditions that you love to celebrate?

We have a celebration called Eid al-Fitr. I call it the "big Eid", because we have two Eids, the "big" and the "small" Eid. The "big Eid" is right after the month of Ramadan, we all get dressed up, we get presents, we have a big party, and it's a huge celebration. If I have school that day I get to miss school and I get to hang out with friends from the Muslim community. My mom and I make desserts, Syrian cookies and baklava. It's a great day and you feel so embodied in your culture that it makes you feel at home, but you are at home – if that makes sense.

Why is it important for you to celebrate Eid?

I feel like in my day to day life I get so caught up in community events, going to school, homework, sports, extracurriculars, my part time job. Celebrating Eid helps me remember where my parents came from, who I am, and it also helps me remember how lucky I am to live in an amazing place like Canada. Canada



- GRADE 11 STUDENT AT BCI
- SPEAKS ENGLISH, FRENCH AND ARABIC
- BROUGHT UP IN A SYRIAN HOME

"Celebrating Eid helps me remember where my parents came from, who I am, and it also helps me remember how lucky I am to live in an amazing place like Canada."

is a blessing and everyday I'm thankful for living here, because my life could have turned out very differently if I had not lived here..

What advice would you give to a newcomer moving to Brockville/ Canada?

It will be a learning experience, but you will have an amazing support system to help you and answer your questions. Be ready to work hard but also enjoy the culture and the amazing kindness and respect that Canadians show to newcomers and to visitors.

What do you love about Brockville?

Everything! The waterfront in particular is spectacular and beautiful. I also love all of the small businesses downtown. Now having participated in the Summer Company program, I can truly appreciate how hard they have to work to keep their businesses open and to make them as amazing as they are.

How do you like to spend your free time?

I like to read or bring my younger sister to Hardy Park, she is practicing to ride her bike right now. Hardy Park is great because there is so much to do, the volleyball nets, the gazebo, the play structure, and all by the water, so if my sister wants to go swimming we can do that too!



Photo by: Danielle Murphy Studios

Meet Ben



When Ben Mukherjee was in 3rd grade he knew he wanted to be a chef. Originally from Varanasi, India, Ben went to high school in Delhi, where he graduated with a specialization in Hotel Management.

In 1994, at the age of 18, Ben moved to the United States to further his culinary education. "I definitely experienced culture shock – at that time, people in the US were not that open-minded," said Ben. Ben shared with us one of his first memories, "I was asked by a teacher to stand up and introduce myself in front of a room of 2000 students. I said my first legal and traditional name... there was 13 seconds of silence afterwards. I think people had a hard time digesting it. It was quite embarrassing," said Ben. Ben's legal and traditional name is Shouben-dou, pronounced, Shou-ben-dou. After that experience, Ben decided to keep the name Ben and drop the rest to make it easier for others. "I believe in not getting caught up in the small details of pronouncing my name".

With over 25 years of experience in the hotel and restaurant industry, and having lived in numerous cities across the United States, Ben has many stories to tell. He was a regional manager for various corporations in the United States and Canada including India's Best "Taj" Group of Hotels, Hyatt hotels, Ritz Carlton Hotel, Yum! Brands and many more elite institutions including the White House in Washington, DC.

In 2013, Ben moved from Virginia to Kingston when he took a new job. "The first 3 months I absolutely hated it – it was the snow! People told me that Kingston had one of the worst winters that year," said Ben. When asked what he had heard about Canadians before moving to Kingston, Ben responded, "I had heard that Canadians were a lot more reasonable, and that their



- BORN IN VARANASI, INDIA
- PRACTICES MEDITATION
- CHEF AND OWNER OF 1000 ISLANDS CATERING IN GANANOQUE

"If you live in the moment you'll be a happy person. If you live in the past you will never be happy."

level of tolerance was much higher. For example, in Kingston you never hear a honk – in NYC there is no tolerance towards traffic or people. That is a strength of Canadians, they have tolerance towards everything – traffic, humans, and even ignorant people. Life can wait for three seconds to let someone cross the street."

Not long after he started his new position in Kingston, he was asked by his employer to transfer to Alber-

ta. After declining this relocation opportunity, Ben left the firm and decided to go out on his own. In 2014, Ben established himself in Gananoque when he opened his own take out and catering business specializing in fine Indian cuisine, called 1000 Island Take-Out & Catering.

Today Ben lives in Kingston with his wife and daughter, but continues to operate his business in Gananoque 6 days a week. Ben currently acts as a mentor to a Syrian refugee who would like to start his own catering business. "The language barrier is quite challenging, but I do my best by communicating through sign language and drawing sketches. My wife and I try to give them rides whenever we can," said Ben.

Ben's advice to an immigrant moving to a new country? "If you live in the moment you'll be a happy person. If you live in the past you will never be happy."



Ben (right) and his wife, Bobby at their restaurant, 1000 Island Take-Out & Catering in Gananoque.

Meet Cecilia

Tell us a little about yourself. Where were you born and raised?

I was born in California, USA but my family moved to the Highlands of Scotland when I was 2. I grew up in the North of Scotland in a small town called Invergordon – it played an important

role in WW1 and WW2 because of the naturally deep harbor area. I have deep ties to Scotland, its history, landscape and culture however, I have always had an overwhelming sense of being home since the first step on Canadian soil over 12 years ago now.



How did you come to live in Leeds Grenville?

I moved to Brockville 8 years ago after I graduated from St. Andrews University in Scotland. A week after I gradu-

ated, I moved to Brockville and began my journey in this beautiful part of the world. Originally I came to Brockville because my husband – a recent Kingston St. Lawrence College graduate – gained his first career job with a local employer. While he has since moved on from that employer, I have made deep roots here with the Employment + Education Centre and do not plan on going anywhere soon!

Do you have any personal/cultural traditions that you love to celebrate?

I love Scottish music – a band called the Red Hot Chili Pipers can often be heard blaring from my car as I find the music really energizing. I have also been known to enjoy a good Scottish Whiskey from time to time. Yes, we do eat Haggis and yes, it is actually really good!!



Haggis is a traditional Scottish sausage made from a sheep's stomach stuffed with diced sheep's liver, lungs and heart, oatmeal, onion, suet and seasoning. Haggis is traditionally served with 'neeps 'n' tatties' – mashed swede and potatoes – and whisky.



- BORN IN CALIFORNIA, UNITED STATES
- GREW UP IN THE NORTH OF SCOTLAND IN A SMALL TOWN CALLED INVERGORDON
- MOVED TO CANADA 8 YEARS AGO

"Get involved with community organizations, groups etc. There are some really amazing people in this community – you just have to look for them."

What advice would you give to somebody moving to Leeds Grenville from another country?

Get involved with community organizations, groups etc. There are some really amazing people in this community – you just have to look for them. Volunteering and getting connected with community organizations allows you maximum exposure to so many different people – it's a fantastic way to meet people and grow your networks.

How do you like to spend your spare time?

I like to spend time with family and friends – I am very much a homebody and like to spend time at home in the house or yard. Because all of my family live in Scotland, we spend a lot of time on Skype over the weekends – thank goodness for technology! We also love to take our daughter down to the water front to play in the parks – there is nothing better than watching the joy in a toddler's face when they go down a slide!

Meet Amy & Dima



Tell us a little about yourselves. Where were you born and raised? How did the two of you meet?

Amy was born and raised in Frankville Ontario on an off grid self sustainable family farm. The mentality of growing and doing it yourself is best. Dima was born and raised in Zhytomyr Ukraine with deep roots to

his grandfather's traditional farm. We met in Hana Hawaii doing volunteering and working stints abroad. We then continued to travel around the world together.

What brought you to Frankville in Leeds Grenville?

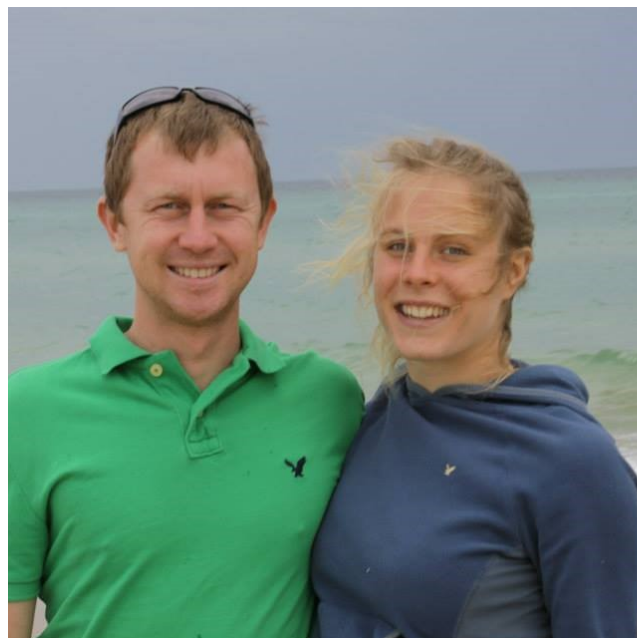
Amy's family is still in Frankville and we recently bought our own off grid farm in the town.

Not many Canadians can say that they've visited Canada's arctic, but the two of you used to run a remote lodge in the arctic of Canada, can you tell us a bit more about that experience?

Living and working in the north of Canada is an iconic, satisfactory and extraordinary experience. The pristine nature, wilderness conditions and need of a survivalist work ethic are not easy to describe, nor are for the faint of heart. We lived in a canvas tent frame with a wood stove, and endured conditions ranging from -48 Celsius with meters of snow and the winter darkness to 25 Celsius on the arctic tundra and the 24 hour daylight. We ran all aspects of living in the wilderness, working with crews and conditions, and running a tourism establishment. It is a huge scope that includes everything from ordering masses of food that are dropped in occasionally, to fixing machinery, to cutting wood, to fishing, to looking after guests and giving them a glimpse of life in Canada's north. It is hard work, but Dima and I take pleasure in the reward of living in raw nature, snowmobiling, fishing, the aurora borealis, and the amenities of tourism, especially the bush saunas where you can cut a hole through up to a meter of ice for a dip in the water!

Your family currently lives off grid and is self-sufficient. What led you both to want to live this lifestyle? What have been the biggest challenges / most rewarding aspects of this lifestyle?

Off grid and self sufficiency lifestyles require a lot of attention and planning, but is very simple to carry out. You need to be aware and carry out tasks such as monitoring water and power consumption, pumping water when needed, maintaining a battery bank, cleaning and tilting solar panels, performing energy saving habits, gardening, root cellar-ing, etc. The combination of small jobs allows us to produce our own power, pump our own water, and we try to produce or locally source as much of our food as we can. The rewards, numerous basically are sustainability, better food, no power bills etc. Its a wholesome concept.



- MET IN HAWAII WHILE VOLUNTEERING
- LIVE OFF GRID IN FRANKVILLE
- ARE PARENTS TO SON DAMIEN

"We met in Hana Hawaii doing volunteer and working stints abroad. We then continued travelling the world together."

Do you have any personal or cultural traditions you love to celebrate?

We try to celebrate holidays and traditions of both Ukrainian and Canadian origin. Now that we have our son Damien we will try to do more of this so he can learn both cultures.

What advice would you give a newcomer moving to Leeds Grenville?

Our advice to any newcomers would be to get out and meet people. In rural areas it can be difficult, but joining clubs, groups or organizations is a great way to get involved in the community.



Meet Rene

After the Second World War, a large number of Dutch citizens immigrated to Canada through Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in search of work, asylum and a better life. From 1928 – 1971 the Dutch were the fifth largest ethnic group to come to Canadian shores. Prescott resident and a Dutch native, Rene Schoemaker, shared with the Immigration Partnership staff his own experience coming to Canada in 1952.



"I was born in The Hague (Den Haag), the Netherlands. My father was Dutch and my mother was a German. She became a Dutch citizen in the 1930s, and married my father in 1945. My family immigrated to Canada mainly due to the aftermath of the Second World War and the German occupation in Holland.

During the war, my father and uncle had been collected by the Nazi's – they were sent off to a work camp in Germany for one year. They worked on a machine gun line. There were many different people at these camps, Polish, Austrians etc. My father did not like to talk about the one year he spent there. After his return back to Holland my father joined the Dutch Underground, they would do nightly raids, steal gas... disrupting everything. My mother would hide my father under the floor boards in their home.

After the war, my parents wanted to start a new life elsewhere. They had experienced so much trauma – everyone was so hungry. They were deciding between Australia and Canada, but ultimately chose Canada, because they had heard of an airplane crash on route to Australia, so they decided to go by boat (to Canada).

My family arrived to Canada in July 1952 – I was 7 years old at the time. We travelled by boat, it took 8 days. I remember the main hallway had paper bags taped up with band aids, in case the passengers got seasick. I also remember them serving us potatoes, lots and lots of potatoes! We arrived in Halifax at Pier 21, and then transported to Brockville. My parents came over with a small fortune of \$130 CAN, and we had 3 or 4 wooden crates with our belongings, that would arrive by rail a few months later. The first few months we lived out of our suitcases in an assigned cottage with many other Dutch immigrants across from what is now 'Green Things Landscaping' near Sharp's Lane. Our sponsor was our family neighbour from Holland who had immigrated to Canada the year before. He was a barber in Brockville and we lived with him and his family for 3 months during the winter of 1953.



- BORN IN THE HAGUE, THE NETHERLANDS
- RAISED IN PRESCOTT
- ENJOYS FISHING, HUNTING, AND READING HISTORY BOOKS

"In the spring of 1953, we moved to the Barbara Heck House, located near the Blue Church in Maitland, where we lived until 1959. We were four families living in the house at the time. There was one bathroom/tub, and each family had their own day to use it – ours was Tuesday."

In the spring of 1953, we moved to the Barbara Heck House, located near the Blue Church in Maitland, where we lived until 1959. We were 4 families living in the house at the time. There was one bathroom/tub, and each family had their own day to use it – ours was Tuesday.

We had a garden outside of the house where we grew root vegetables. In the basement my mother would bury the vegetables in bins with sand to keep them dry. I remember my mother would paint the turnips with candle wax to preserve them. On Sundays we would take the bus for 25 cents to attend the Dutch-Reform Church in Brockville. When the DuPont Company bought the property on which the Heck house was sitting, we moved and lived above the Blue Lantern restaurant until the 70s.

MEET RENE CONTINUED

"My parents were brave. They gave everything up to come to the unknown to start fresh. That's what war does to people."

Today, I live in Prescott with my wife, who was born and raised in here. We have been married for 45 years, have two daughters, and three beautiful grand-children. I have always had many hobbies, including doing taxidermy for 14 years. I was also on the national skeet shooting team for 20 years. I enjoy fishing, deer and moose hunting, as well as reading history books. I love to travel, we often go back to Holland to visit cousins, aunts and uncles, but also love to discover other destinations such as Spain, Portugal and North Africa."



Pier 21 was designated a national historic site of Canada in 1996 to commemorate its role as a major ocean port-of-entry immigration facility in the post First World War period, and in particular during the years following the Second World War.

Did you know?

Did you know former Brockville Mayor, Ben TeKamp, was also an immigrant from the Netherlands. He arrived to Canada on March 22, 1948 on the Kata Intern, and then travelled to Brockville by train, where he lived until his death in 2014.

WE ARE NEIGHBOURS



Rene (left) and his sister Yvonne, as young children in the Netherlands before immigrating in 1952.

Did you know?

Did you know that almost one million immigrants passed through Pier 21 between 1928 and 1971? A total of 500,000 Dutch nationals left their homeland from the late 1940s to the 1970s. Approximately 185,000 individuals, or 37 percent of the movement, chose to resettle in Canada.



Dutch Immigrants in the Hall at Pier 21 Circa 1928.

Meet Takouhi



Takouhi Dimirdjian-Petro was born and raised in Beirut, Lebanon in an Armenian Family. She found her way into Canada via the Vermont-Quebec border on August 21, 1986. The Canadian Government had given permission to Lebanese citizens to enter Canada to find refuge and call it home..

When you left Beirut, what possessions did you take with you? What important things, if any, did you leave behind?

When I left Lebanon, at the end of August 1983; I took nothing but a suitcase full of personal items; my poetry notebook (which I still have to this day), and my Bible, which was a gift from my mother, and I left behind many family members.

Where did you live before you immigrated to Canada?

My parents sent me to Los Angeles, as Canada was never in the plans. The Airport in Beirut, Lebanon was closed, as the fighting was intense around that area. My mother hired a cab with two other travelers and took me to Damascus, Syria, and sent me to Los Angeles, via Paris, France so that I could live with my eldest sister in L.A. and finish my high school. Our family was not rich and we were not even considered middle-class, but individuals from a small church in the Los Angeles area helped my eldest sister to get us flights and get us out of Lebanon one by one. After the U.S. Embassy refused to issue visa for six or seven times, I obtained a tourist visa to enter the U.S. in 1983. Therefore, I arrived and lived in L.A. from September 1983 to August 1986. My three-month visa turned into a three-year stay, illegally. I attended an Armenian private school by the grace of scholarships that individuals helped me with. So, Los Angeles became the hub before arriving Canada.

What had you heard about Canada before you came? What stereotypes/expectations did you have?

I do not recall knowing much about Canada. In June of 1986 my two sisters who were still in Beirut, and attempting to get to L.A. to join us, heard that the Canadian Government had opened its doors for Lebanese citizens to come and call Canada, home – "Projet du Liban", but they needed paperwork to get on the plane to cross the ocean. These papers came at a whopping cost of \$5,000.00 U.S. which someone provided for them to be able to get out of Lebanon. They arrived at Mirabel Airport and obtained a Minister's Permit, which was the beginning of calling Canada home. After which, Ruth, one of the sisters who had arrived here, asked me if I would like to come to Canada and live a "legal life" and belong to a country that took care of its people. Next thing I know, by August 21, 1986, my mother, my two sisters, and I had completed our entrance to Canada and



- BORN IN BEIRUT, LABANON
- FIRST ARMENIAN WOMAN ORDAINED MINISTER INTO THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA
- LOVES SCRAPBOOKING AND JIGSAW PUZZLES

"When I left Lebanon, at the end of August 1983; I took nothing but a suitcase full of personal items; my poetry notebook (which I still have to this day), and my bible."

started to call Canada home – The place where we belonged and beloved.

Can you share a memorable experience with us about what it was like, how you were feeling when you first arrived to Canada?

When I first arrived in Canada, I felt sad and lonely at times. Our first Winter was the hardest thing to handle. We lived in a one bedroom apartment in "Park Extension" of Montreal (Boulevard de l'Acadie & Rue Saint Roch), where the closest bus route was five blocks away. In

the winter those five block walks seemed like an eternity.

I had worked as a cashier, under the table, in L.A. and never knew the life of a 9-5 manufacturing employment. Everywhere we went to look for a job we were asked if we had the Canadian experience (I wanted to tell the people, give me the job so that I can get the Canadian Experience – but I did not). Other times we were asked if we were bilingual. Yes, we spoke other languages besides English, but they were not the right ones. We needed to learn French, English, Armenian and Arabic were not enough.

Therefore, my advice to newcomers would be, "Be patient, this too shall pass and all the hard work you put in to settling in this country is worthwhile". I have lived in Los Angeles for three years, with all its glamour and glory but I still prefer this little town of Portland, where I live now - Canada is truly the Promised Land for me, for us, for all.

What do you love about Leeds Grenville?

The beauty of nature that surrounds us and the small communities that embrace one another - There is a presence of Peace beyond my understanding. When someone is in need, the entire community stands up to offer love and care.

My mother called Canada, "The Promised Land" - the land of milk and honey - she enjoyed this land for eight short years before she passed away at the age of 64 - August 22, 1994.



Takouhi's mother Nevart (sitting), her sister Choughik (sitting next to her in red), her sister Ruth (left side standing) and Takouhi (right side standing). This was the families 2nd Christmas in Canada, at their home on Louise-Payette Street in Laval, Quebec.

MERRICKVILLE-WOLFORD

Meet Norah

Seven year old Norah MacLaurin-Hogg lives in the Village of Merrickville-Wolford with her parents, 4 brothers, and her dog named Summer. Her favourite traditions include celebrating her birthday and Christmas. Like many other young children in Merrickville, Norah has been involved with the Rideau Bridge to Canada refugee group. She has already met and played soccer with the refugee children who arrived in late June, "they beat us", she says. When asked what she wishes other people knew about her she responded without hesitation, "that I'm smart!"

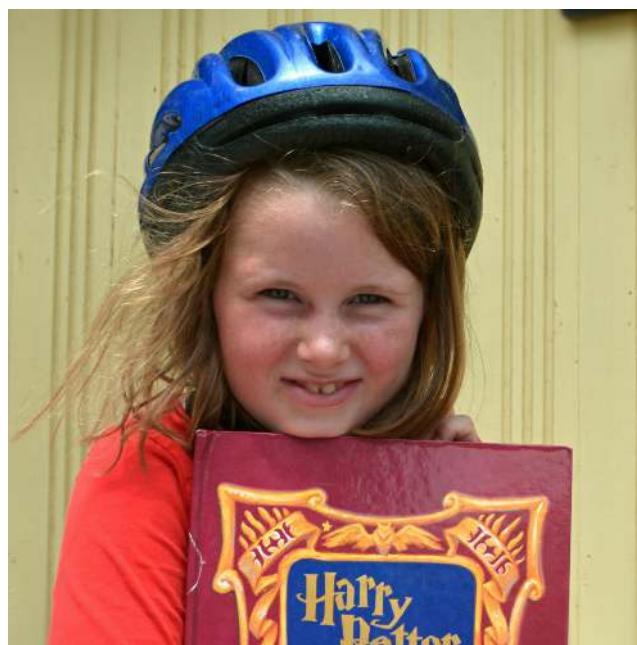
Today, I recognize and understand what she meant beyond what words can explain. Where I live in the Rideau Lakes Townships I am literally surrounded with milk and honey, indeed. So many bee keepers, so many dairy farms, that reminds me of my mother's words daily and make me grateful for this land called Canada.

How do you like to spend your spare time?

There are many things I like to do in my spare time. When I am truly exhausted, I just watch television and rest - watch mindless television shows, as my vocation is demanding and draining at times. From weddings to baptisms and funerals, a minister has a big balancing act to carry on. However, there are a few things that I love to do whenever I am able to create time to do them: Scrapbooking, jigsaw puzzles, reading, writing, go for walks outdoors and indoors on a treadmill, take pictures. In August of 2016, my very first book of poetry, prayers and photography was published, it is titled: "The True Gift Lives on: Christmas Poetry, Prayers and Blessings". All the photos in the book are taken in the Provinces of Quebec and Ontario.

I am grateful to my husband's help and support in every way and by God's grace I am looking forward to the publication of my memoirs, in the Spring of 2019.

As John Lennon sang, "Life is what happens to you, while you are busy making other plans". My Journey to Canada was a big surprise - but it is a gift that I will ALWAYS be grateful for.



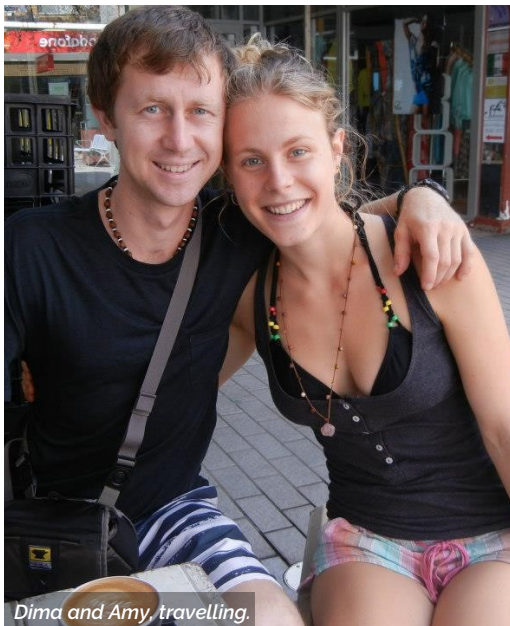
- SISTER OF FOUR BROTHERS
- ENJOYS PLAYING SOCCER
- FAVOURITE CELEBRATIONS ARE CHRISTMAS AND HER BIRTHDAY



Rev. Takouhi Demirdjian-Petro speaks at the 'We Are Neighbours' campaign exhibit launch at the Brockville Public Library in September 2017.



Natasha with her catch of the day, Petit-de-Grat Island, Nova Scotia.



Dima and Amy, travelling.



Chef Ben Mukherjee



Sarah Gibbons with Leeds and Grenville MP, Gord Brown at the Brockville Farmers Market (2016). Photo by: Twitter @gordbrown



Brothers Neil and Hal MacKay, welcome refugees at the airport.



As a newcomer to Montreal, Takouhi (left) kept close ties with the Armenian Community. Here she is photographed with the Armenian Evangelical Youth selling Easter baskets .



Takouhi (left) with her two sisters, Ruth and Choughik in Beirut, Lebanon (around 1973).



Andressa (right) with her host mother, Meghan Sample.



Emmanuel in Lake Nakuru, Kenya



From left, Peter Yerdon, Harold Hess, Peter Galvin and Charyl Trussell share a laugh at the piano in the Brockville Arts Centre musi-theatre. Photo by: Ronald Zajac/The Recorder and Times (2014)



Bushra networking.
Photo by: Danielle Murphy Studios

Meet Harold

Tell us a bit about yourself. Where were you born and raised? Can you tell us a bit how the region has evolved over the years?

I was born in Winchester, Ontario and raised on a family dairy farm south east of Kemptville, in North Grenville. The farm is still operated by the fourth and fifth generation of our family. Our community in the 60's was very close knit with much of the focus revolving around church and long established family farms. Over the last 40 years the farm focus has remained but a greater number of residents in the area are commuters to jobs in larger centres.

As a retired elementary and secondary teacher, Vice Principal and Principal, with over 30 years' experience with the Upper Canada District School Board, can you give us some examples of how newcomer children and their families bring both positive experiences as well as challenges to classrooms and schools?

While attending school in the 60's and 70's most schools in our rural region were usually 100% from white European lineage. At that time, urban schools would see more immigrants from non-European countries. While working in the school system for 30 years, till 2012, as well as today, more newcomers from all around the world, arrived in our communities. They were the face of more religions and customs that were new to our area. As our communities grew and valued our global reality, schools and staff supported, valued and celebrated what newcomers could share, creating a more global understanding in classrooms. As educators and parents, our biggest challenge was to try and not make assumptions in our schools about newcomers needs. We learned we must ask for leadership from newcomers and be inclusive in our school communities.

What do you love about living in Leeds Grenville?

It is a wonderful blend of rural and urban communities who all show a community pride. A great place to live and grow with family and friends.



Photo by: Andy Wheeler/snapd 1000 Islands



- BORN IN WINCHESTER, ONTARIO
- RAISED ON A DAIRY FARM IN NORTH GRENVILLE
- ENJOYS THE ARTS AND IS INVOLVED IN COMMUNITY THEATER

"(Leeds Grenville) is a wonderful blend of rural and urban communities who all show a community pride. A great place to live and grow with friends and family."

In 2014, you joined the Volunteer Centre of St. Lawrence-Rideau as the manager. What advice can you give to a newcomer wanting to volunteer in Leeds Grenville? Newcomers must feel confident in stepping up and sharing their skills to our non-profits and business community. They can start to do this by volunteering. They must understand it is ok to ask for support and see that reaching out as a volunteer is a great way to network. Volunteering is a great way to meet people and feel included.

How do you like to spend your free time?

I enjoy volunteering and meeting people. I enjoy the arts and am involved in community theatre where I love to see youth and newcomers welcomed to our community events. I love to see their leadership skills and confidence while they are making community contributions. I value the opportunity to volunteer with the local YMCA and Children's Mental Health and other organizations that value inclusion as an operational mandate.

Meet Alice



My name is Alice Yao Wang. I was born in China.

In 1991, I came to Canada as a visiting scholar. Upon my arrival, I was so excited and curious to discover new things that were different from my home country. I was inspired by the natural scenery and enjoyed the freedom of thoughts and speech, the courtesies of the nation, as well as being respected no matter who you are and where you are from.

Everything seemed so gorgeous, until I studied Business Administration at Wilfred Laurier University - the education system is so different. In China, if you review your textbooks, attend class and do the homework, you can surely comprehend requested information. However, without Canadian cultural background, I could hardly grasp the main ideas of the content, although I thought I understood every single word. For instances, the professor mentioned Johnson & Johnson and the Easton Centre as a case study, technically I understood the theory of management concepts, but in reality, I was totally lost, not knowing who is Johnson and what happened at the Eaton Centre. In Canada, students are trained and encouraged to do their own research, whereas in China, everything is taught in class or is in the textbook.

After I immigrated to Canada, I realized life was not easy! My skills and diploma were not being recognized here. I had to start from scratch. I felt uncertain, distressed and lost confidence in myself. This issue lasted for years until I started my own business.

Through opening a restaurant business, I gradually gained my confidence. I felt useful and helpful in the society by providing employment opportunities to local people and new immigrants. Through participating in community activities and inviting Chinese immigrants to join local events, I no longer feel deserted, on the contrary, I have become an enthusiast in the community.



- BORN IN CHINA
- CAME TO CANADA AS A VISITING SCHOLAR
- LOVES CANADA FOR ITS NATURAL BEAUTY

"I love Canada for its natural beauty with four distinguished seasons, but more importantly, for the people that make you feel welcome!"

Looking back on my past experiences, I would like to give some advice to newcomers: the best way to settle in a new environment is to move into a community where there is someone you know well, such as a friend or a relative. It will help you release emotional stress to a great extent, and you will get the desired assistance you need.

Last, but not least, I would like to share with you is, I love Canada, not only for its natural beauty with four distinguished seasons, but more importantly for the people that make you feel welcome! Canada opens its arms to embrace people of different cultures - that has made Canada the

greatest country in the world! I cherish Brockville, a small city full of vitality and friendship. It's my second hometown and I would love to live here for the rest of my life!

Did you know?

Did you know that from 2013 to 2014, China was the top source country for international students in Canada. (Source Statistics Canada, 2016)

Meet Sarah & Bill

Where were you born and raised?

Born in Ottawa and Lanark County, Bill and Sarah have deep roots in Eastern Ontario. At the age of 21, Bill moved from Ottawa into Lanark County where he stayed until 1975. He then relocated to the Frankville property that currently hosts Gibbons Family Farm. An old stone farmhouse was his and Sarah's first home on the property. In 2010 Bill built and moved into another house where he currently lives. Sarah has remained true to her country roots and now lives in Mallorytown with her husband.

Bill: Before opening Gibbons Family Farm as a business, you were a dairy farmer. What made you turn your hobby of maple syrup, into a business?

Bill explained that he worked with dairy cows for 20 years but always dabbled in maple syrup production. He made a living from the cows but eventually, wanted a change. He began putting more time and effort into maple syrup production, making it into what he calls a 'glorified hobby' that he affectionately says 'just got out of control'. Bill never expected the business to blossom into what it is today

Sarah: How did you get involved in the family business?

Sarah's first memories of involvement with the family business were from a young age when she would take time off from school to help with sap collection. After a long hiatus from sap collection that spanned through university, overseas travel and various social work jobs, Sarah began helping on the farm during the 2001 season, working the off-season on local cruise ships. She alternated between farm and tourism work until 2005 when she was asked to manage the business while Bill cared for aging parents. Weeks morphed into months and eventually, Sarah became a full-time fixture of Gibbons Family Farm. This was very unexpected. When Sarah left Frankville to study at the University of Guelph, she did so with little intention of returning to Leeds Grenville. Sarah exclaims with a smile that, "By no means did I think I would be the one staying on the farm!"



- FATHER-DAUGHTER TEAM WHO MANAGE GIBBONS FAMILY FARM
- LOVE THE QUIET, EXPANSIVE LANDSCAPES OF LEEDS GRENVILLE
- HAVE INTRODUCED AN ANNUAL SAUSAGE BOIL AS A NEW SEASON TRADITION



What's the best /most challenging part of running a family owned business?

Both Bill and Sarah agree that not having a boss is a big perk of running a family owned business. But with that perk comes significant responsibility. As Sarah

explains, 'being self-employed means being solely responsible for your own pay cheque.' As the maple syrup season is very weather dependent and only occurs for a short period of time, challenges also include hiring staff. Bill and Sarah explained that it is hard to find people who can essentially be on-call and willing to work extremely long hours until Mother Nature says that sap season is done. They continued by saying that it can also be hard to remember that as business owners they can't expect employees to have the same level of commitment to the business that they do.



If you were sitting down and having a conversation with a newcomer/immigrant who was thinking about starting their own business, what is the best piece of advice you would offer?

As English is the primary language of Leeds & Grenville customers, Sarah feels that having strong English skills is an important contributing factor to a newcomer entrepreneur's success. Bill agreed with Sarah but went on to say that one needs to be friendly too and "probably personality is even more important than good English." Finding a business that is needed in this area would also contribute to success or if planning to be home or web-based, ensuring the product or service is needed in Ontario or Canada. Bill and Sarah recommend 'starting small' and not borrowing more money than you are comfortable with.

Maple syrup is symbolic of Canada and trips to the sugar bush are a spring-time tradition for many Canadian families. Do you have any personal, cultural or family traditions you love to celebrate?

Maple treats in the springtime are a Gibbons family tradition but instead of driving to Lanark County to buy them, like the Gibbons family did when Sarah was young, the Gibbons now produce their own sweet goodies! Christmas crackers on the holiday table have also been a long-time Gibbons family tradition and Sarah tries to carry this on from her Grandmother. Members of the Gibbons family can also expect Polish treats at each family gathering as Sarah's mother hails from Poland.

MERRICKVILLE-WOLFORD

Meet Neil



- BORN IN WASHINGTON, UNITED STATES
- LIKES TO PLAY SOCCER WITH HIS FRIENDS
- FAVOURITE ICE CREAM IS CHOCOLATE MINT



From left to right: Wendy Quarry, Neil MacKay, Line Pelletier, Hal MacKay, Heddy Sorour, Fred McFarland, Gwendy Hall, Graeme and Bonham-Carter

Neil is 11 years old and like his sister Fae, was born in the United States. Neil says he enjoys living and growing up in a small town where everyone knows each other. We learnt in Fae's story, that the MacKay family hosts "woofers" (a world-wide movement linking volunteers with organic farmers and growers) on their family farm. Neil's favourite part about hosting exchange students and "woofers" from different parts of the world is learning new languages. When asked what advice he would give to a newcomer moving to Merrickville, he said "Everyone is nice in Merrickville, don't be afraid to go up and talk to people".

Neil likes to play soccer with his friends. One of his favourite places to visit in the summertime is the local ice cream shop. His favourite ice cream flavour is chocolate mint!

Meet Ciony



What brought you to Kemptville?

Ciony, originally from the Philippines, and her husband have always had a bit of the 'travel bug'. Meeting in Laos, where they were both working in the 1960's, they eventually made their way to Kemptville in 1981 after Ciony's husband's job brought him to Eastern Ontario. Always adventurers, they moved to Kemptville without

ever seeing their new town or house! Overseas travel and work continued for them, but Kemptville remained their home base; Ciony and her husband returned in the late 1980's and have lived in the same home ever since.

What was the best thing about moving to Kemptville?

As someone from the Philippines, a country that places enormous value on friends and family, Ciony loved (and continues to love) the small-town feel of Kemptville. She got to know many people by offering her Filipina hospitality to neighbours. Introducing herself with a loaf of banana bread under her arm and invitations to join her for coffee enabled her to meet many people in the area. Ciony continues to welcome people to her home by regularly hosting 60+ people for International Friendship Club potlucks.

What was the hardest thing about moving to Kemptville

Finding work and making professional connections came as a challenge to Ciony when she arrived to Kemptville in the 1980's. The town lacked employment agencies and so as much as she could, Ciony took the initiative to attend events and open houses of local organizations. She used these events to introduce herself, learn more about each organization and after much hard-work, eventually secured full time work with a local social services agency.

Did you know?

Since 1989, The International Friendship Club of Kemptville and surrounds, has provided a platform for immigrants to meet. Contact Ciony Ljungar 613-258-7370 for more information.



- BORN AND RAISED IN THE PHILIPPINES
- HAS LIVED OR WORKED IN LAOS, THE UNITED STATES, FRANCE, SWITZERLAND, PHILIPPINES, CANADA AND THAILAND
- FOUNDER OF THE INTERNATIONAL FRIENDSHIP CLUB OF KEMPTVILLE AND SURROUNDS

What advice would you give to a newcomer moving to Leeds Grenville from another country?

'Don't just stay home and vegetate. Go to the library, read the newspaper for things to do – go out and meet people. People are just waiting for you to smile to show your friendliness.'

"Don't just stay home and vegetate. Go to the library, read the newspaper for things to do—go out and meet people. People are just waiting for you to smile and show your friendliness."

Meet Heddy & Gary



Howaida Sorour (everyone calls her Heddy) was born in Cairo, Egypt and came to Canada in 1986. When asked 'what brought you to Canada' she said it was "by a series of accidents, quite literally". As a young girl, one of her friend's father worked for the Canadian embassy in Cairo, so she spent quite a bit of time around the embassy. One day, she was hanging around and one of the

drivers recognized her and told her that the Canadian embassy was accepting applications from people wanting to move to Canada. Next thing she knew was inside the embassy filling out paperwork. "It was totally unplanned and I was in a hurry, so I didn't really remember filling out the paperwork and sort of forgot about it," she said.

A few weeks later Heddy received a letter from the Canadian embassy asking her to come in for an interview. She attended the interview and "I guess it went well," she laughed. Three weeks later Heddy received a letter at home stating she had been granted immigrant status. Heddy's decision to come to Canada was on impulse, "I wasn't really thinking, I just saw the word *visa*" she said. At the time, it was quite difficult to get a visa to leave Egypt, "it was a lengthy process, you would have to apply 6 months ahead of time" she said. Having travelled quite a bit as a child, Heddy was ready to take on a new adventure. "I guess you could say I had the travel bug" she said, "I thought it was going to just be another adventure...31 years later, and I'm still here!" she said laughing.

When asked what advice she would give to a newcomer moving to Canada, she said there are two big things that a newcomer may have to adapt to. The first being, distances. When Heddy first arrived in Canada, she settled in Toronto, "I was shocked by how far Vancouver really was" she said. She gave an example for some perspective, "if you drive six hours outside of Cairo, you'd be at the border, if you drive two days you would be all the way through another country," she said. From Merrickville, depending on what direction you are going you aren't even through Ontario or just entering Quebec!

Heddy also mentioned that if you are a newcomer coming from a warm climate, getting used to winter and the weather will be another challenge to adjust to. "In Cairo, there is no such thing as a weather" she joked. For fun, Heddy pulled up the weather in Cairo on her phone...sure enough, 30 degrees, bright sun, 7 days in a row! "No one can ever prepare you for Canadian winter" said Heddy. When asked if 30 years later she had adapted, she laughed and replied "no".

In her spare time, Heddy volunteers with numerous community groups including, the Smith Falls Rotary Club, the Smith Falls



- **HEDDY WAS BORN IN CAIRO, EGYPT & GARY WAS BORN IN QUEBEC CITY**
- **HEDDY VOLUNTEERS FOR THE ROTARY CLUB & RIDEAU BRIDGE TO CANADA REFUGEE GROUP**
- **GARY IS A DRUMMER & MARTIAL ARTS TEACHER**

Hospital, and acts as an Arabic translator for the Rideau Bridge to Canada refugee group.



Meet Gary

Gary Roberts was born in Quebec City. As a young boy, Gary moved around a lot. "My father was an electrician so we moved around a lot for his work. We lived in Bay St. James, Thetford Mines, we also lived in Bermuda for a year," he said. By the age of 6, Gary's family

settled down on the south shore of Montreal, where he lived until he was 18.

Gary lived in the Ottawa area for most of his adult life, but he says there is something unique and special about living in a small village. "In the 8 years I've lived in Merrickville, I've met and am good friends with more people than I did all those years in Ottawa" he said. "I grew up in a small town, so I am familiar with it. I like how you can walk down the street and recognize your neighbours," he said.

Some interesting facts about Gary – he is a drummer, a martial arts instructor, he has a 5th degree black belt and he runs a weekly 'open mic night' in town.

Meet Shannon

Tell us a little about yourself. Where were you born and raised?

I was born at Brockville General Hospital and raised on Caintown Road north of Mallorytown. I lived my whole childhood in the same old stone house with my parents and a younger sister and brother. I went to high school at Brockville Collegiate Institute and then continued my education at Dalhousie University (Halifax) and then at Queen's University (Kingston).

Do you have any personal/family traditions that you love to celebrate?

My family has a number of traditions that we like to celebrate but I think the biggest tradition is that we spend a lot of time together. We have all settled within a hour and a half of our childhood home and my sister and I are within 10 minutes of our parents. We spend all holidays together and usually have dinner about once a week. Christmas contains the traditions that I miss the most when I am away...Christmas Eve candlelight service at St Paul's Presbyterian Church followed by a party at my parent's house, Christmas morning breakfast of cinnamon rolls and present opening followed by a wonderful Christmas dinner in the afternoon.

What advice would you give to somebody moving to Leeds Grenville from another country?

Leeds Grenville has an unbelievable number of attractions available to everyone but you need to search them out! To those who have lived here our whole lives I think we sometimes struggle to see everything this area has to offer. I was away at school and working elsewhere for 10 years and it was only when I returned that I fully realized what we have here. Whether you love sports, the arts, the outdoors, history or small town life you can find it here. Many people think that our community restricts the possibilities of what we can achieve but I firmly believe that all doors are open for people of all ages and backgrounds. I'm proud of how welcoming our small towns are to families from all corners of the world.



Shannon and the Skyward Active Health Centre team at a Brockville Country Club Business Mixer. Photo by: snapd 1000 Islands (2017)



- COUNTRY GIRL AT HEART
- SUCCESSFUL PHYSIOTHERAPIST AND ENTREPRENEUR
- LOVES TO TRAVEL AND SPENDING TIME WITH HER FAMILY

"I was away at school and working elsewhere for 10 years and it was only when I returned that I fully realized what we have here. Whether you love sports, the arts, the outdoors, history or small town life you can find it here."

What do you love about living in Leeds Grenville?

I am a country girl at heart and Leeds Grenville has allowed me to live in the country while still doing the job I love. I had always dreamed of travelling the world and had ambitions to do that as a physiotherapist. I have been lucky enough to have had that opportunity while still being able to come home to my quiet house in the middle of nowhere! I love our lakes and woods and most of all, the friendly faces of people I have known my whole life.

How do you like to spend your spare time?

My husband and my young son are my priorities when I am not working at my clinic. We love to travel and

spend as much time as possible with our families. I have always been obsessed with sports so I also spend a lot of time either playing or watching sports or being a physiotherapist at various sporting venues across the country.

Sharing Food & Stories

Meet Your Gananoque Neighbours

There is just something about food.

It is a centerpiece of holiday festivities. It is how neighbours welcome newcomers in their community. In the dining room, families share traditions. In many cultures around the world, coming together and sharing a meal are the most communal and binding moments.

In France, for example, communal meals are very common. The French tend to spend a full hour at the dinner table, and during that time, they're actively engaging with family and friends.

In Spain, a long-held tradition is la siesta. For many Spaniards, a true siesta includes taking a break (around an hour or two) to eat, nap and escape the heat. However, for some working Spanish in the cities – those who can't make it home to rest in the afternoon – siesta is spent with colleagues. It is the time to have a good meal with your coworkers and get to know each other better.

What we can learn from these cultural traditions, is that meals are about more than just the food; they're also about conversation and connection. Food is also a great vehicle for sharing culture with people from different backgrounds.

The Gananoque Public Library did exactly this by hosting a multicultural potluck earlier this week to celebrate the arrival of the 'We Are Neighbours' exhibit in Gananoque. Local residents were encouraged to bring a favourite dish representing their culture or heritage.

Over twenty local residents came together to exchange food, stories and culture. Long-time Leeds and Grenville residents, immigrants from Nepal, India, England and Mauritius, as well as Canadian-born residents who relocated to Gananoque from

other provinces, each took turns sharing their stories. Stories about their travels, stories of how they came to live in Gananoque, and naturally as it was a potluck, there was plenty of conversation over the food spread on the table.

One resident, originally from Mauritius (an island east of mainland Africa) shared "I never learnt anything about Canada before I came, all I knew was that it was cold," she laughed.

Another gentleman, who was born in a small village in England, spoke about his entry process to Canada, "I had to have a job lined up before my application would be accepted. I ended up doing a transfer through the company I was working for in England."

For another resident who grew up in Kingston, she shared that she was "tired of the hustle bustle of the city", so she decided to relocate to Saskatchewan for a more remote and calm life. Eventually she came back to Eastern Ontario, but chose Gananoque for that small town feel.

A local chef spoke about what cooking means to him, "For me, the joy of cooking is sharing it, to see others smile after finishing a meal. It's the love, a way of expressing gratitude."

For another resident who grew up in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, who moved to Gananoque with her family years ago, said "I love it here [Gananoque], it's a great location, you have your choice of cities around you." But ultimately, "we choose to stay here because of community".

Our neighbours having amazing stories, so why not invite them over and dig in! Sharing a meal is the perfect time to ask them about their home country, their traditions, their stories – ask them anything, really. All that's left to do is sit back, relax and listen.



Meet Emmanuel



Where were you born and raised? What do you miss the most about your home country?

I was born in Zimbabwe, which is in Southern Africa. I moved to Canada in 2010. I was an expedition leader and safari guide across Africa for over a decade, so I definitely miss the wildlife, long bumpy roads, year-round great weather, and camping under big starry night skies.

I also find that I sometimes miss the sights and sounds of people going about their day - working, chatting, laughing, children playing, music in the background, dogs barking etc. You were constantly surrounded by people and life-in-action. I also think of family often.

How did you come to live in Brockville (Leeds and Grenville)?

I met and married a beautiful girl from the Brockville area and one day woke up to find myself on the other side of the world, in Brockville, knee-deep in snow when I moved to Canada in 2010!

What had you heard about Canada before you came? What stereotypes/expectations did you have? Were your initial expectations accurate? Can you give us an example?

Yes, I suppose like many people around the globe I carried an impression of Canada as having polite people, cold winters and a love for hockey. It turns out all three are true! And actually now that I've lived here for some years, I would add one other Canadian stereotype to the list, that is not very well-known overseas - Tim Hortons!

On a more serious note, I'll add that the most important impression that people around the world have of Canada is that, even though it is still a work in progress like every other country - it is still arguably one of the most free, fair and equal societies in existence. It's a country traditionally known for doing the right thing for its people as well as on the world stage. Traditionally, other countries wait to see where Canada stands on critical issues before adopting a platform because they respect the Canadian tradition of being fair and having the good of the world-at-large, at heart. What many Canadians do not know is that Canada belongs to the world. This is because as long as a country like Canada exists and has its ideals and positive traditions intact, other societies have an example to esteem to and emulate. We are a country that gives others hope. Are we perfect? No. But we are a work in constant progress and we have done many good things for ourselves and for others. And even though these are very testing times, I believe it is imperative for both new Canadians and those born here, to fiercely safeguard the virtues and traditions that made this country great and have always been passed down from generation to generation of Canadians.



- BORN IN ZIMBABWE (SOUTHERN AFRICA)
- WAS AN EXPEDITION LEADER AND SAFARI GUIDE ACROSS AFRICA FOR OVER A DECADE
- ENJOYS COOKING AND EXPLORING NEW RECIPES

"We are a country that gives others hope. Are we perfect? No. But we are a work in constant progress and we have done many good things for ourselves and for others."

Foremost, that of just being good to one another - being generous, kind, fair, welcoming, helpful and yes - polite! That was my impression of Canada and it is my impression still.

What advice would you give to a newcomer moving to Canada or Leeds Grenville more specifically?

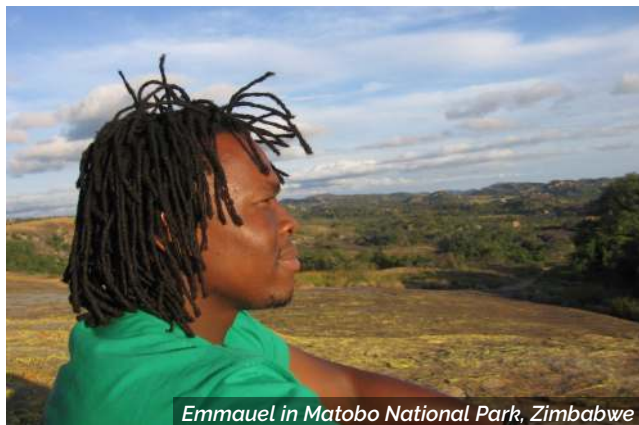
Bring a warm coat! More seriously, when I first arrived it soon became clear to me that I had to relearn most of the things and knowledge that we take for granted as adults.

You have to be open to this process in order to succeed as a newcomer. It's almost like being a child again or learning a new language. You have to relearn how to dress because the elements and weather are different. You have to relearn social skills because how people interact with each other in Canada is often different to what you're accustomed to. You have to relearn how to navigate the workplace because often the rules of engagement are different and how you interact with your colleagues and managers is different.

MEET EMMANUEL CONTINUED

WE ARE NEIGHBOURS

The biggest challenge can be realizing that the skills and knowledge you have accumulated through your life that were very valuable and valued in your old country can sometimes be almost completely irrelevant as a newcomer to Canada and you have to be prepared to start again and rebuild your knowledge and skills base. So my advice to a newcomer is to be prepared for a possible dark period, but by keeping your focus on your long-term goals and dreams, and doing what you need to do to rebuild your foundation, sooner or later the sun will shine again.



Emmanuel in Matobo National Park, Zimbabwe

How do you like to spend your free time?

I grew up around sports and so I enjoy following a variety of sports. I am yet to adjust to more traditional North American sports like ice hockey, baseball and football – I'm still trying to understand the rules! So I'm still following the sports I grew up with like rugby, soccer and cricket. I'm also yet to learn how to skate. I attempted it once and was stumbling, crashing and wiping out all over the pad while all around me, children below the age of 10 were gliding around effortlessly. A humiliating experience that I'm still recovering from! Ha-ha!

As I mentioned, I was an expedition leader across Africa for many years so I still have the occasional itch to explore. These days I do it by sometimes just taking long drives on roads I haven't been on before and just seeing where they go. I enjoy that. In recent years I've also developed an interest in cooking and enjoy exploring new recipes. But most of all I like to read and I like to learn. Self-development is a key element to life and fulfillment. I think there is great satisfaction in learning new skills and learning how to be creative beyond what you previously thought was possible for you. The human spirit is limitless.

Meet Emma

ELIZABETHTOWN-KITLEY

Where were you born and raised?

I was born at the Brockville General Hospital in Brockville, Ontario. I grew up in downtown Brockville, up the street from the armories. When I was 14 years old, we moved to Lily Bay, in the Township of Elizabethtown-Kitley. I consider myself a born and raised "Brockvillian" – other than moving away for university I've lived here my entire life.

Do you have any personal/cultural traditions you like to celebrate?

My parents are both of British and Scottish descent, so we celebrate very traditional holidays, Thanksgiving being my favourite. Coming from Nova Scotia, my mom taught us traditional Celtic song and dance growing up, so at holidays, singing often occurs!

What do you love about living in Leeds Grenville?

I love the small town feel, the St. Lawrence river, and all the local activities! We are an hour drive from Canada's capital, and within short driving distance of all the eclectic surrounding communities!

How do you like to spend your free time?

When I'm not working, I enjoy hiking, hanging out with my friends, spending time with my family and most importantly eating. I'm a huge foodie, so things like the local farmers market on the weekend are definitely a must.



- BORN AND RAISED "BROCKVILLIAN"
- A "FOODIE", LOVES TO SHOP AT THE LOCAL FARMERS MARKET
- ENJOYS HIKING AND SPENDING TIME WITH FRIENDS & FAMILY

Meet Lee

Where were you born and raised?

I was born right here in Brockville at the Brockville General Hospital. I went away to college at Algonquin, I wanted to "get out of the small town". When I finished college, I moved to Calgary for a few years to work. In my late 20s I wanted to put some roots down, so I decided to move back to Brockville, and I was fortunate to find employment. I have new and old friends and my family is in the area. I definitely have a new perspective of Brockville as an adult, it's an amazing place to live.

Can you tell us about the Canada Homestay Network and how you got involved?

The Upper Canada District School Board (UCDSB) has a partnership with the Canada Homestay Network – the largest and most experienced homestay company in Canada. For international students coming into the UCDSB within Leeds and Grenville, they need places for students to live. The Homestay Network finds families and homes willing to take students in. The intention is for the hosts to treat the students like their own son or daughter.

I currently work at Fulford Academy, so I'm already used to working with international students and that lifestyle. When I met my wife, Meghan, she was also working at Fulford at the time. We both knew Matt Raby, who's the Executive Director of the UCDSB International Education Program, so he was a common connection for us. When we bought our home, Matt mentioned this program might be something we would be interested in. We have a fairly good size home and we have the space, and we don't have kids of our own yet, so the timing worked.

When did you start hosting international students?

We hosted our first international student three years ago. We have had the same Brazilian girl, named Andressa, for the past three years. She originally came to do what she thought was going to be grade 10, but they made her do grade 9 over again. She didn't want to be left behind from her friends back home, so she actually completed grade 9 and 10 in one year. Then



- BORN AND RAISED IN BROCKVILLE
- WITH HIS WIFE, THEY HAVE HOSTED OVER 7 INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS SINCE 2015
- LOVES PLAYING HOCKEY AND CYCLING

"We have a fairly good size home and we have the space, and we don't have kids of our own yet, so the timing worked."

she came back for grade 11, and now she's in grade 12 at TISS and is planning to go to a Canadian university next year.

We've also had other students throughout that process too. We've had a girl from Mexico who was with us from one year, another student from Spain for one semester, and other students through Fulford Academy. The owner of Fulford Academy

has another business outside of the Academy, where she brings students in for college, university and high school to Leeds and Grenville and surrounding area. We had two Chinese students with us for one semester who were attending St. Mary's. We have also taken in a student from Equatorial Guinea over the holidays, as she wasn't able to go home for Christmas.

We have also had one other Chinese student, who was connected to us through a colleague at Fulford Academy, she lived with us for two years while attending BCI. The student's mom also came and visited for a summer and stayed longer, so we actually had her and her mom living with us for a while.



Lee (left) with international students and wife, Meghan (far right).

What has been the most rewarding part of being a host parent?

Just knowing that Andressa, who came here when she was only 15 years old, has a safe place to live. I consider her part of our family and I love her as if she was my own daughter. The relationship I've made with her family is absolutely amazing. I joke with her dad, that we are long lost kindred spirits that have been connected through this experience. It's been rewarding to see how much her parents appreciate what we have been able to offer their daughter. We don't have much, but we've been able to offer her so much more than any money could provide, and them knowing she has a safe place, that makes me feel really good.

We actually went to Brazil and we met Andressa's family. We stayed with them and travelled. Despite the fact that Andressa is 17, her parents aren't that much older than Meghan and I. So there wasn't a huge gap in age, her parents are some of my best friends now. They came and stayed with us the following year and I'm in contact with her dad all the time. This experience has completely opened up a whole new world – I would have never thought I would ever travel to Brazil. Now I have connections and family down there.



Now that I've done it [hosted international students], I would want to do it more so with my own children one day, because I think it would be such an amazing experience for them. It's been an amazing experience for me, and I definitely recommend anybody to get involved in the program. Now, I will say not every connection with every student is going to be the same. We've had a very special connection with Andressa, but we've also made other great connections on different levels with other students, depending on how long they were with us for. There really hasn't been a bad moment.

Have you experienced any challenges? Do you have any suggestions to overcome them?

I wouldn't say there have been many challenges. I work in an international environment, so I am constantly communicating with international students. So, I am somewhat 'trained'. Probably the biggest thing for me at first, was giving people space.

When you bring people you don't know into your home, it's somewhat weird at first, until you get to know each other.

There's always going to be cultural differences, something that's normal in their culture is different here. Whether it comes to food, or daily activities and routines. But you just have to be open, and understand that just because you think something is normal, doesn't mean it is for them. I've also learnt to ask a lot of questions to ensure I'm being understood.

How do you like to spend your free time?

We're a very active household – we play soccer, hockey and like to go hiking. We have two dogs and a cat, so we are always out walking our dogs. I like to cycle, and I am part of the Brockville Cycling Advisory Committee. Meghan and I were also on the Committee for the Brockville Winter Classic event. When we decided to move back to Brockville and make it our permanent home, we really bought into the small town community. So we got involved in everything and anything we could, it works for us and our lifestyle.

What do you love about living in Leeds Grenville?

It's what I know. It's always been my home, despite how I felt about it in the past. It's the comfortable place it always was. My mom lives around the corner from me, and my dad a brother are a few streets away. My aunt and uncle have also retired here. I have a great group of friends, new and old. I've also been able to become immersed in the community through volunteering and my career as well. There are so many amazing people in this community.

"Now that I've done it (hosted international students), I would want to do it more so with my own children one day, because I think it would be such an amazing experience for them."

Did you know?

In 2016-17 the Upper Canada District School Board (UCDSB) welcomed over 500 international students. If you are interested in hosting an international student during their studies in Upper Canada, please contact Canada Homestay International at 1-877-441-4443 or visit www.whyhost.com.

Meet Andressa



Andressa Costa, born in Fortaleza, Brazil is an international student currently studying at Thousand Island Secondary School (TISS) in Brockville through the Upper Canada District International Education Program. Andressa first arrived to Brockville when she was 15 years old, and has been living with Lee and Meghan Sample, her homestay parents for the past three years. Andressa originally came to Canada to learn English, "I was supposed to

only come for one year and then go back, but then I really liked it. So I decided to stay another year, and then I decided to just graduate here. I want to go to university in Canada next fall" she said.

One of the main reasons Andressa decided to stay in Brockville to continue her studies was that she felt safe here and enjoys the freedom that comes with that feeling of security. She went on to explain that, "15 years old in Canada do stuff that 15 years old wouldn't do in Brazil, like walk alone. In Brazil, that's not a thing, being able to get a bike and go to school." The school system and structure is different as well she said, in Brazil students take 15 subjects, versus here it's 4 per semester. "I like the structure of the classes here better, we have more projects instead of tests" she added. Andressa also commented on the class sizes, where in her hometown in Brazil classes sizes are much bigger, with 50 students rather than 30 here, "the teachers are closer to you" she said.

Andressa is very involved at school with clubs and sports. In grade 10 she tried rugby and cheerleading. She has been a member of Student Council since grade 11 and is also a member of the outdoor club. Andressa is also a key member of the school's 'Aquity club' – a club that works to make the school a better place for all students – LGBTQ, international students, etc. and it promotes a culture of acceptance.



- BORN IN FORTALEZA, BRAZIL
- INTERNATIONAL STUDENT AT TISS
- FAVOURITE SUBJECTS ARE MATH AND SCIENCE, WANTS TO BECOME A DOCTOR

"I was supposed to only come for one year and then go back, but then I really liked it. So I decided to stay another year, and then I decided to just graduate here. I want to go to university in Canada next fall."

When asked what she enjoyed the least about high school, Andressa, who is now in grade 12, said she has a lot to do right now, from looking for scholarships to researching universities, all on top of her regular school assignments. She added that even though she has been here for 3 years, English still isn't her first language, so it always takes her a bit longer than Canadian-born students. Andressa added, "I feel lost when it comes to apply for university in Canada – international kids do not have a lot of help". "I feel like we [international kids] miss out on opportunities for

scholarships". Andressa added that she would like to see the school expand more assistance and guidance for international students navigating university applications. Math and science are Andressa's favourite subjects, her dream is to go to medical school and become a doctor in Canada.

We asked Andressa to tell us about her homestay experience. As mentioned above, Andressa has been living with Lee and Meghan Sample for the past three years. "They are young, it feels more like friendship than parents to me, and they let

me have the freedom to do what we want" she said. Andressa participated in the couples wedding and also invited Lee and Meghan to Brazil to meet her family and visit her country. "They always try to bring the Canadian experience, like taking us to big family parties at Christmas and trying eggnog" she added. She discovered the Canadian delicacy, poutine, with them "it's the little things that makes Canada what it is" she said.

When asked if she would recommend a homestay to other international students, she said yes. "My parents have been great, but having friends who are also in the program, I don't think they educate the host parents enough about the student's culture". Andressa believes that there needs to be education from both sides. She says the reason for her positive experience with the Sample's is because they respect each other. "They respect the fact that I am Brazilian, I speak loud, I am crazy, and I respect them and follow their rules" she said.

Though Andressa understands that difficulties in forming connections can be combination of internal factors such as shyness or poor English-language ability, she also wishes that her peers at school were more open and culturally sensitive. "I see some kids – they don't know where we came from or how much we pay to be here – or they don't want to know. They think we come here because we have a lot of money or think we are refugees". She added, "It's not so much with me because I have an outgoing personality, but I see it with other international kids, they struggle with making Canadian friendships – because I feel like the Canadians don't make the first step to understand our culture".

We asked Andressa if she had any suggestions of ways to get Canadian and international students to engage with each other, she said "I feel like we should do a mandatory class in school, like in grade nine we are required to take a civics and careers class". "We should encourage people to come back to their roots, encourage people to be different, give them the opportunity to learn about their heritage". Another suggestion of hers was to have an assembly, "every year we have assemblies

about alcohol or drinking and driving, we should have one about learning about our neighbours, respecting and appreciating other countries and cultures."

"We should encourage people to come back to their roots, encourage people to be different, give them the opportunity to learn about their heritage."

We asked Andressa what she likes and dislikes about Brockville as a city. She said, "I like how it's cute, small, I love King Street and downtown." However, like many other international students, Andressa takes advantage of Brockville's close proximity to larger cities such as Montreal and visits when she can. "the trains helps a lot" she added. Although she finds Brockville small and maybe even a bit boring at times, Andressa sees Brockville's potential to attract even more students by having a university here, having more youth

oriented activities and being open-minded to learning about new cultures.

To finish off our interview with Andressa, we asked her what one piece of advice she would give to an international student considering studying in Canada. She answered simply, "choose your city wisely". When Andressa originally came to Canada, she chose a small town because she was so young. "I was scared of the big high schools in Toronto. At 15 I was not really independent, I didn't know how to take the bus". Now, after being here for three years and in combination with her outgoing personality, Andressa has many Canadian friends. However, she also sees first hand what a lot of other international students experience – loneliness, isolation and difficulties forming friendships with Canadians. She said, "I know of kids who came here and ended up living in Malloytown, they spent all weekend on their cell phone, what experience did this kid have? They paid a lot of money to play on a cell phone? Or came all the way here to meet another Brazilian or Chinese student?"

While smaller and larger cities each have their benefits, Andressa recommends that international students do their research into what city they think would be the best fit for them, so that they don't feel "stuck" in a small town or overwhelmed in a big city.



Andressa enjoying downtown Brockville's waterfront.

Did you know?

More than 500 students were welcomed to Upper Canada District School Board schools in 2016-17. Students are from more than 20 countries, including most prevalently: China, Mexico, Germany, Spain, Korea, Japan, and Colombia.

Acknowledgements

Thank You!

We would like to acknowledge the community partners who have supported the project and/or have hosted the We Are Neighbours Exhibit.

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| Brockville Public Library | www.brockvillelibrary.ca |
| Brockville Culture Days | www.culturedays.ca |
| Rideau Lakes Public Library | www.rideaulakeslibrary.ca |
| Gananoque Public Library | www.gananoquelibrary.ca |
| Gananoque Visitor Centre | www.gananoque.ca/explore-gananoque/visitors-centre |
| Brockville and Area YMCA | www.brockvilley.com |
| North Grenville Public Library | www.ngpl.ca |
| Prescott Public Library | www.prescottlibrary.info |
| North Grenville Times | www.ngtimes.ca |

Finally, the We Are Neighbours campaign would not have been possible without the participation of the Leeds and Grenville residents.



Where Are Your Neighbours From?



