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Name that lane

Fighting crime and local pride are two reasons for new project

By **BETH MACDONELL**

Unlike its Annex neighbour, Harbord Village is full of laneways. This network of back streets between Bathurst Street and Ossington Avenue define the village in many ways.

Used for everything from garbage collection, to walking and exploring, to the ground where kids first learn to ride bikes, the laneways have played an important role in neighbourhood life, but have gone unnamed for generations.

But that's all changing. Locals are teaming up with the City of Toronto to name the lanes.

"The idea [to name the laneways] has been in my head for quite some time," said Gus Sinclair, who has been involved with the Harbord Village Residents' Association (HVRA) for 15 years. But, he said, "It's been a slow process."

Sinclair, former chair of the HVRA and a current board member, said the idea got serious last spring, when there was a swarming involving teenagers near Bloor and Bathurst streets in a laneway.

The police and fire department told the community if the laneways were christened, it would help authorities find people in distress more quickly.

The goal is to pick monikers within the next year. The plan also seeks to have residents put their address numbers on the back of their properties that face the laneways.

Through public meetings and their website, the association hopes to get the creative juices flowing and involve the community in choosing names.

"It's a great concept to remind local residents about the people who have shaped the neighbourhood," said Peggy Mooney, executive director of Heritage Toronto. "We would hope that there would be some interpretation of the new names, which explains their origin and creates greater awareness of local heritage."

Sam James, owner of the Sam James Coffee Bar (297 Harbord St.), has been living in Harbord Village for the past five years and says he walks through the laneways all the time. "They bring a certain charm to the neighbourhood. They have an old school feel, they're an un-urbanized



Locals would like the Harbord Village laneways to get monikers that reflect the neighbourhood. Some ideas so far include historical titles, and naming them after the countries where local immigrant populations came from.

oasis," said James. "The names should reflect the neighbourhood."

That was the case with the naming of Frank Kovac Lane, just west of Manning Avenue. Frank's Garage was a staple in the village. After its owner, Frank Kovac died, the community organized to have the lane by his garage named in his honour.

The laneways speak to the history of Harbord Village. The first house was built in 1865, followed by greater development between 1880 and 1890, said Sinclair. "We are Victorian."

For the Victorian era row houses, it was important to have laneways for commerce and supplies such as coal. The Annex was developed after 1902, making its housing style Edwardian. The homes there tend to be spatially separated.

Sinclair said the use of the laneways as a place of commerce still lives today. He said there are often people doing recipe exchanges and swapping cooked food.

The laneways are a reference "back to the days of service. Now they are a

place of neighbours," said David J. Patrick, who has lived on Jersey Avenue for the past eight years and has co-owned the Linux Caffe (326 Harbord St.) with his wife for the past four-and-a-half.

Patrick is excited about the project. He said whatever is decided, it should stay in harmony with the existing street names.

He would like to see a committee look into the historic significance behind street names such as Grace Street, Crawford Street, and Clinton Street, to find out who some of the interesting people are who have lived and worked on them over time.

Another idea brought forward was to name the lanes after the countries that made up the area's immigrant populations. In Cabbagetown, where a similar naming process was underway, residents decided on songbird names.

Sinclair said the next step would be to figure out exactly how the naming process will proceed. "We are just getting started," he said. "We see this as a community building experience."