

# 'Turtles' friends until the end

By Hannah Yoon

They are the only two Turtles left in Belleville, but they dutifully meet every day to drink coffee and read the paper at their local joint, the McDonald's on Belleville's Front Street.

It's been over 40 years since Don Allen, 80, and Shaun Rafferty, 77, first became friends. Both have bushy, untamed brows that dance above their twinkling eyes. They wear identical black winter hats, bearing different turtle embellishments that signify their membership to the Turtles, a club they established for divorced men back in 1971.

It all began at Sneaky Pete's, a restaurant formerly located in Belleville's Quinte Mall, where a group of divorced men in their 40s and 50s gathered every Friday to bond over their similar life situations.

"We were all either widowed, separated or divorced. All of us. And that's the reason we were cryin' on each other's shoulders," says Rafferty.

In 1973, Allen moved to Belleville with the Air Force. He first met Rafferty at Elk's Menswear. Rafferty invited Allen out to meet the guys, and the two have been friends ever since.

The men's faces light up as they reminisce about the things they did and talked about on those Friday nights at Sneaky Pete's.

"It was a bunch of fellas that got together. We were guys that liked to complain about women, drink beer and go to dance," says Rafferty.

Between 1971 and 1973, the Turtles grew to 11 members.

Originally the Turtles were called the 'Shovel Club,' because every Friday night they were 'piling it higher and deeper,' said Rafferty.

"There was so much bullshit we had to have a shovel," added Allen, laughing.

One day, Rafferty found a stack of membership cards in his house from the International Association of Turtles. He brought them into show his clubmates, and all agreed this official club would become their new namesake. From that day forward, they were known as the Turtles.

To be a Turtle, you had to be widowed, separated, or divorced and had to answer four skill-testing questions.

"What is it that a dog does on four legs and a man does on two legs?" asks Rafferty with Allen chiming in, "and a woman does on three legs? Something to do with three legs is in there."

Both Allen and Rafferty go back and forth attempting to figure out what the questions were, as Rafferty pulls out a



Photo by Hannah Yoon

**Shaun Rafferty, 77, left, and Don Allen, 80, who have been friends for 41 years, spend time at McDonald's Restaurant. They first met at Sneaky Pete's along with nine other men and became a group they called 'The Turtles.' Only three of them remain.**

bright yellow card from his wallet.

"Here we go. What is it a lady does sitting down, a man does standing up and a dog does on three legs?" He pauses before giving the answer. "Shake hands," says Rafferty, looking around for a reaction.

The Turtles spent their Friday nights drinking seven to eight beers, going out to eat and then making the Legion their final destination. In the '70s the Legion used to host dances, though the men deny they attended for the women.

"Not that we were thinking of dating them or doing anything like that, but it's like a smorgasbord; the more you look the more appetizing it becomes," teased Rafferty.

Members of the Turtles made strong vows never to get married again; but nine of the eleven ended up either married or with a long-time girlfriend.

In the beginning it was their mutual bitterness and frustration over women that drew them together. But as time went on, and they established new romantic relationships, they realized there was more to their friendship than bonding over broken hearts.

"We could just yap about how bad it'd been the first time around and how good it was now. The women appreciated us the second time around," says Rafferty.

By the early '90s, many of the men had met significant others, and the group

slowly started to disband. Some continued to go on vacations together, and host annual Canada Day, Boxing Day and New Years Eve parties.

Rafferty met his second wife, Beverley Dubber, through another Turtle's girlfriend. This helped her to feel included in the group right away. Over the years she could see the significance of having a strong group of long-term friends.

"I think it's very important because it's easy to be isolated the older you get. It's a little more difficult to get out. There's just a real bond between them," said Dubber.

Dubber looks at the Turtles as family. They were there when Rafferty was sick, when she had no vehicle to move her

daughter to Ottawa and they were people that would support her in the most needed times.

"They've been a very, very big encompassing group of friends," said Dubber.

Today, only three Turtles remain: Allen, Rafferty, and Griff Ketcheson, who lives in Arizona. All of the other members have passed away.

"Our little bunch of turtles have lasted 40 odd years now," boasted Rafferty.

"Slow and steady wins the race," chuckled Allen.

The friends will continue to meet every morning for coffee with their newspapers in hand maintaining a bond unshaken by time.



**This week's winner of our weekly Instagram contest is Joel Watson @jwat151. Keep the photos coming!**

## Leading Ladies premieres at Belleville Theatre Guild tonight

By Sarah Vissers

Heather Barker makes her directorial debut with the comedic play *Leading Ladies* premiering Thursday night at the Pinnacle Playhouse in Belleville.

With star-crossed lovers, miscommunication, scams, a play within a play, and a tango number, Barker has tackled a big one for her first play with the help of first time stage manager, Bill Dahl.

Presented by the Belleville Theatre Guild, Barker, who has acted in past productions such as *Bed Time Stories* and *Play it Again Sam*, enjoys community theatre because "everybody's equal, everybody's the same level, everybody just wants to build something together."

"It's a really beautiful thing to see it happen and people get excited," she said, backstage after the show's well-received preview Tuesday night.

Except for reading the play by Ken Ludwig, Barker has not seen any performances of the romantic comedy before. She did not want anything to influence her directorial decisions, and she has managed to put her own twist on a celebrated play.

"It is a really well-written farce, the first time I read it I laughed out loud just reading the script," says Barker. "It's got all the good basics of a comedy. It has all of those fundamentals of things that make me giggle."

Authentic 1950s roller blades with wooden wheels were brought in for Majja Thompson, who plays the role of Audrey,

to wear. Thompson can't skate, which works for her character, but she is certainly better on roller skates than the auto parts that were mistakenly sent to the Guild at first.

The set of this production is a unique design by Dahl. It is fairly complicated and took a lot of practice for the actors and stagehands to learn how to transition.

Although lighthearted, the play is not completely without genuine emotion.

"That classic gender role of the manlyman taking over the woman, that I had a lot of trouble with at first and then started to put into the perspective that, okay, first of all, the play is set in 1952. So it is a commentary on the time," said Barker.

"It's not making light or having fun with it, it's almost drawing it to the surface that

makes it easy to watch, easy to discuss," she continued.

When it came to casting, Barker recalls that there were many good choices and a great turnout for the auditions.

"Community theatre is notorious for not having men come out. The first night was all men, it was amazing! The second night we had a mix," said Barker. "We had a lot of great talent that came out."

The sense of community that theatre creates is what Barker loves about her job.

"You have this connection over a passion of creating art," she said.

"Whether you're director or mopping the floor before show starts, there's that camaraderie there, we built it together."

*Leading Ladies* runs until Feb. 22.

# Witnessing change in Ukraine

By Sarah Vissers

A graduate of the Loyalist College photojournalism program is reporting from the frontlines of a revolution.

Marta Iwanek, via Skype interview, said she was working as a sound assistant on a film in Ukraine when protests broke out in November. She went to Kyiv that same month to cover the conflict and has been there ever since.

Being of Ukrainian descent herself and having family in the western part of Ukraine, Iwanek has personal ties to the conflict.

"It was an important time for this country and I just felt like I couldn't leave."

After President Viktor Yanukovich backed out of a trade deal with the European Union in November of 2013, people flooded the streets of Kyiv in protest. Thousands of protesters have taken up residence in the Maidan, also known as Independence Square. Protesters say they are fighting for their human rights and freedoms, which they say is valued by the European Union. Some also say that if deals with Russia are made, it will be like going back to the Soviet Union era.

On Nov. 30, last year the Berkut Special Police broke up 200 peaceful protesters. On Dec. 1, hundreds of thousands of people marched in response.

"It felt like the start of something and it wasn't just about European integration anymore, it was about human dignity and the want of people here in Ukraine for respect and for laws to actually be laws and for there to be no corruption and that's how this protest started to evolve."

The evolution of this conflict has been violent at times, but also orderly. Military-style tents are set up, with bunk beds and even kitchens inside. The Maidan is becoming like a city within a city. Everyone volunteers in some way or another,



Photo by Marta Iwanek

**Berkut Special Police attempt to clear a barricade protecting Independence Square in Kyiv, Ukraine on Dec. 11, 2013.**

from making food in the kitchen to taking shifts at the barricades, allowing their peers to rest.

"When you hear revolution, you think chaos, marauding gangs and what not," says Iwanek. "The people here, if they catch someone stealing, then they make that person give the stuff back and then publicly shame them. There's so much order here."

As images coming out of Ukraine show violence and disorder, but there is a camaraderie among the protesters that is keeping the movement alive and well, even if it dwindles at times. Iwanek thinks the holiday season may have been the reason, but fear may be a factor as well.

After the death of Yuriy Verbytsky and the beating and torture of Dmytro Bula-

tov—who was abducted from a state hospital—these fears are a real possibility for protesters.

"A lot of people are disappearing. A lot of people are scared to go to regular hospitals for fear of being taken by police."

Considering it is what Bulatov claims happened to him, the fear is not paranoia, but an actual possibility. According to

Iwanek, there have been five makeshift hospitals set up in the Maidan to provide an alternative to state-run hospitals.

"A problem here is everyone agrees the government is corrupt, that it's bad, but there is no vision for the future and a big part of that is because there is no real leader of this movement. You need a vision for the future to have real change happen and right now, it's without that and that's concerning."

It is uncertain yet how much will change in Ukraine in regard to its government, but things are certainly happening on the ground level.

"All these interesting society groups are coming out of the Maidan. People are coming here. Like there's like a library and a student centre, people meeting and talking. That's kind of helping grow this grassroots awareness. So that's really important."

Loyalist College student, Tetiana Volobueiva was born and raised in Ukraine and moved to Canada in 2006. Her father currently resides in downtown Kyiv and is greatly affected by the conflict there. She encourages him not to leave the house too often, to avoid the violence that is occurring in the streets.

"It's very ugly right now, but it's about time to express that it's not the right people controlling this huge European country."

Although Volobueiva is not optimistic about the outcome of this revolution, it doesn't mean she isn't concerned about what's going on in her homeland.

"Of course I love my country and I miss my country a lot, but I just don't see where it will get better," says Volobueiva, "and I don't want to live in a place where I can't feel secure or my future is very uncertain."

Volobueiva can make a better living in Canada than in Ukraine, and she gives what she can to her father and sometimes her friends back home.