



Photo by Mary Barber

Antonina Durham displays a homemade costume in the likeness of a Russian nesting doll, or Matryoshka, to be used in the celebration. Antonina says that Russia has "an old folk tradition."

Festival celebrates Russian heritage

By Mary Barber

Russian spirits were high at the Bayview mall on Saturday, Jan. 10. Celebrants gathered outside the Heartbeat thrift store, where the owner Antonina V. Durham was preparing for folk festivities.

Iolka, the Russian New Year, is celebrated on Jan. 13, six days after the Orthodox Christmas season begins. In Russia, traditions remain prominent and deep-rooted in the peoples' history, and the New Year's celebration is no exception.

Antonina, a Siberian immigrant and founder of the Canadian Russian Culture Society, hosted the 15th anniversary of Taste of Russia. Antonina's initiative is to support a bridge between different cultures and inspire communication between Russian-speaking people.

"When I came here, people were afraid of me," Antonina said. "People were com-

ing just to look at me because there were so few visible Russians here in Belleville during this time."

According to a 2011 census by Statistics Canada, the Russian population of Belleville is a small one, with only 205 people with a Russian background. But if the celebration is any indication, their community is vibrant and steeped in traditional values.

Antonina says that Russia and Canada share many similarities, especially in the sense that Canadian cultures differ from province to province. The same goes for Russia throughout its republics. Both countries are also ethnically diverse.

"For those coming here, language is key for our purpose of meeting - language is culture," said Antonina. "It's a different experience moving to a different country than it is to visit one. Many things are attached to culture and they are not always visible."

In 2001, Antonina began the Canadian Russian Culture Society to abridge the two cultures in Belleville. The local society, which Antonina refers to as her 'project' is a platform for cultural connectivity.

"When we come together we feel connected. We can understand that the other people here share cultural references; like poetry, music or humour," she said. "Cultural nostalgia can be tormenting. Some people have nostalgia towards old times but nostalgia towards your roots can be a depression."

One of the purposes of Taste of Russia is to shed light on misconceptions about Russian people. Many generations were terrified of the Soviet Union as an aggressive power.

"It's funny to me because I had no such upbringing in my generation towards western culture," says Antonina. "Russia has an old folk tradition."

These old folk traditions carried over

into Saturday's events, bringing people's spirits up, and giving people the opportunity to have fun and to communicate with others. Fifteen Russian-speaking people came, which Antonina said is a big number considering the small group of Russian people in Belleville.

Puppeteer Mike DeRushie, who had previously performed in Antonina's Russian-styled Pinocchio, said multiculturalism in Belleville has grown a lot since he was a child. But, "there aren't quite as many celebrations of different cultures I find around Belleville," DeRushie said. "And if there are, I find them quite low-key."

The event saw many colourful characters and costumes, including Russian nesting dolls and Grandfather Frost, or *Dedushka Moroz*.

Antonina and Grandfather Frost enthusiastically lead the celebrants around the New Year tree while proudly singing Russian folk songs. In one particularly

animated number, the spirited celebrants performed "the bear dance," where everyone's dancing evoked imagery of Russian bears festively dancing through the woods.

The bear has remained a widespread icon of Russia for nearly 500 years, symbolic of the Russian people's ability to face challenges with ferocity and sheer determination. In more joyful times, such as the New Year, the Russian bear has been a symbol of seasonal festivity and comradeship.

"When I came here in 1998 to the University of Toronto, I picked up a newspaper that included something about the political state of Russia," Antonina said. "It was such a stupid, primitive image of a big fat muscly woman making an aggressive expression; that was supposed to be symbolic of Russia's population."

Antonina said she hopes to dispel any negative imagery and stereotypes against Russian Culture for the future.



Photo by Graeme Murphy

Rev. Vicki Fulcher sits comfortably in the spiritual meditations room in Belleville General Hospital. Rev. Vicki Fulcher has been a working chaplain specializing in palliative care at the hospital for the past several years.

Minister offers a compassionate ear

By Graeme Murphy

Being an excellent listener and good samaritan is something that comes naturally to Rev. Vicki Fulcher. Her guiding presence reverberates through many people who walk with her on her spiritual path. Fulcher is a guiding calm.

Fulcher has been a chaplain, or spiritual care worker at Belleville General Hospital since 2005 and clergy of Bridge Street Church in Belleville since 2008. A prominent member of Belleville's spiritual community, Fulcher has a unique background that affirms her place as a

shepherd among sheep.

Having been a congregational member of the United Church of Canada since she was a young child, Fulcher said she recognized her calling at a very young age. After she received her masters in theology from Queen's University, the church allowed an ordination directly into chaplaincy, which isn't a common occurrence. Fulcher's specialty in palliative care requires a delicate work formula of patience, wisdom, and grace.

"There is a connection with the word chaplaincy. Among other placements, it has to do with hospitals and it's all

about working with people and, more importantly, accompanying them. I have learned that chaplaincy is really sacred accompaniment and that makes sense to me."

Such is the ceaseless mantra that absorbs Rev. Fulcher. Her inviting presence and demeanour alone deliver an essence of hope through times of bleak adversity. These are but a fraction of the abilities given to a very spiritually driven woman. Fulcher is a pragmatic listener and a devoted healer.

To hear Rev. Fulcher's story, go to: <http://www.qnetnews.ca/?p=47377>

Regulations change for medical marijuana

By Thomas Surian

In March 2014, the Canadian government changed the regulations surrounding medical cannabis that allowed only large licensed producers to grow for medical users.

This annulled the long-standing laws that allowed individuals to grow their own cannabis, leading to an uproar among the medical cannabis community.

Users have concerns regarding cost, quality and availability of the cannabis grown by the large-scale producers.

According to Health Canada, the Marijuana for Medical Purposes Regulations (MMPR) legislation creates conditions for a commercial industry that is responsible for its production and distribution. The regulations provide access to quality-controlled dried marijuana for medical purposes, produced under secure and sanitary conditions to those Canadians who need it, while strengthening the safety of Canadian communities. Lawyer John Conroy, a longtime medical cannabis advocate, filed a lawsuit against the government, accusing Health Canada of violating the rights of medical Cannabis users and growers.

As a result, the federal court granted an injunction on March 21 of last year. This allowed all licenced growers prior to the new regulations to continue to grow, until the courts make a final decision, expected to take place next month.

Ross Middleton lives in the Belleville area and has been a licensed user and grower for nine years.

"If it wasn't for the injunction, I wouldn't have the writ to grow my own," he says. "It's only because of the supreme courts that everything is on hold until we have a trial."

There are 38,000 of us that are covered by the injunction, and all of us are still

allowed to grow and still allowed to possess, but only until the trial is over, pending the outcome of the trial. I'm pretty hopeful, and all indications are that they are going to say yes."

Middleton uses medical marijuana to treat chronic pain caused by Peripheral Neuropathy with which he was diagnosed. He and his wife Deb own a small hydroponics store in Belleville. They sell equipment and supplies for indoor gardening. Approximately 60 per cent of the business comes from licensed cannabis growers. They are passionate about spreading knowledge and educating people about growing their own medicine.

"It works for me and for having neuropathic pain for years and trying every drug that medical establishments had to offer and none of them work," Middleton says. "It's the only thing I have left, and it works for me, it takes my mind away from the constant agony. That's what it does for me. Then who is to deny me that when nothing else will work?"

The federal courts are expected to come to a decision in the upcoming months -- whether they will continue to allow people to grow their own cannabis, or would they go ahead with the MMPP.

"It's been 100 years of probation and it has not worked. None of it has worked. It's time to change it, to keep doing the same thing over and over... and expect a different result. If you ask any psychiatrist, they will tell you that that is the definition of insanity," says Middleton.

"I don't see how they're going to convict a sick person for trying to treat their disease when nothing else has worked. How is that going to stick in court?"

Middleton is confident that the upcoming decision will be in his favour.