

Pam McConnell



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To: Members, Toronto and East York Community Council

Re: New Business- Re-Naming of Bloor-Parliament Parkette as Rekai Family Parkette

Recommendation

1. Direct the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to report back to Toronto and East York Community Council on re-naming Bloor-Parliament Parkette (625 Bloor Street East) located at the intersection of Bloor Street East and Parliament Street, the "Rekai Family Parkette."

Background

I am writing to request that the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation initiate a re-naming report for Bloor-Parliament Parkette (625 Bloor Street East) located at the intersection of Bloor Street East and Parliament Street.

I have received a request to honour the contributions of the Rekai family to Toronto.

In 1948, Paul and John Rekai left their native Hungary for Paris to escape Soviet occupancy. Both brothers had worked at the St. Roch Hospital where Paul was a member of the medical staff and John was a surgeon. From Paris, the two immigrated with their families to Toronto in 1950. Upon receiving their medical accreditation, they converted an old house on Sherbourne Street into a private hospital serving the needs of Toronto's new immigrants.

The Rekai Hospital grew to a 32 bed facility and was named Central Hospital in 1957. Multicultural staff provided a unique service to anxious patients and their families who spoke only their native tongue. Staff provided translation in 30 languages because the Rekais strongly believed that medical care was neither effective nor humane when language and culture separated patients from caregivers.

In addition to languages, there was also a commitment to serve patients with diets that were familiar to them, and so a menu was developed flavoured with international cuisine. Most importantly, when it came to planning the care for the patient, great consideration was given to his or her background and how their culture viewed illnesses and different healing practices. Central Hospital eventually expanded to 170 beds and was offered to the Province of Ontario to become one of the few truly multicultural public hospitals in Ontario.

In 1988, the Central Hospital Foundation decided to extend their services to long term care, to provide care and comfort to elderly citizens who experience difficulties communicating in English. The Rekai Centres became the first multilingual, non-profit nursing home in Canada, adopting the same philosophy of care as its founders and was located adjacent to Central Hospital on Sherbourne Street.

Today The Rekai Centre at Sherbourne Place is a 126-bed long-term care home regulated by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care. The Rekais' vision is very much alive today at The Rekai Centres. Staff and volunteers take special care to recognize the various cultural identities of residents while fostering a spirit of togetherness.

In 2005, on the site of the former Wellesley Hospital, the vision expanded to the new The Rekai Centre at Wellesley Central Place at the corner of Sherbourne Street and Wellesley Street East. The Rekai Centre at Wellesley Central Place is a 156-bed long-term care facility regulated by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care.

Today, between The Rekai Centre at Sherbourne Place and The Rekai Centre at Wellesley Central Place, 282 residents are cared for in a culturally sensitive milieu.

Kati Rekai, John's wife, immigrated to Toronto from Hungary along with John. Kati was a prolific children's writer. Her series "The Adventures of Mickey, Taggy, Puppo and Cica," introduced children to numerous cities and countries – including Toronto – in an innovative and educational way. This series has sold over 300,000 copies world-wide and has been published in seven languages. Her books championed multiculturalism and tolerance around the world.

Kati was also very active with The Writers' Union of Canada, promoting Canadian writers and literature by organizing 20 Canadian Book Exhibitions around the world.

John, Paul and Kati Rekai have all been appointed to the Order of Canada for their contributions to Toronto and Canada.

Predeceased by her husband John and brother-in-law Paul, Kati Rekai passed away on February 1, 2010.

I believe that the significant contributions of the Rekai family deserve recognition from the City of Toronto. The Bloor-Parliament Parkette, located adjacent to St. James Town – a community that has long been served by the Rekais and their legacy, is a perfect location to recognize their commitment to multiculturalism, diversity and health.

Respectfully submitted,

Pam McConnell
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