



PAT MCGRATH, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Youngsters from the Michelle Heights Community House removed the ice from a community basketball court so people in the neighbourhood can play, just one of the tasks they have taken on over March break to spruce up their community and give it an image boost.

# Children tackle community image

## Michelle Heights youngsters do their part to give neighbourhood facelift

BY LOUISE UMUTONI

As they devour their meal at the Michelle Heights Community House, the little girls squabble about their favourite characters from a popular TV show.

"I like Fatim," one girl says between bites. "I like Teddy," says another.

No one would guess that this is their first and probably their only real meal for the day. The girls come from various places in Africa. Only minutes earlier, they had joined with other children to scrape ice off their basketball court, in just one of their attempts to give their neighbourhood a facelift.

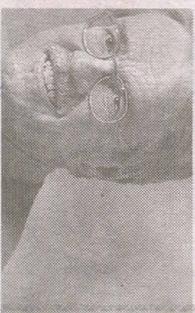
Many people associate Michelle Heights, south of Carling Avenue in the Britannia area, with crime and violence. But rather than crawl under their beds to hide from all this, little Jazmine Ismail and her friends have chosen instead to change their community's image.

"We want our neighbourhood to look really pretty and we are removing ice on the courts because the boys want to play basketball. We all love basketball," Jazmine said, flashing a toothy grin.

Removing ice is not all they're doing. The children are also clearing garbage and putting up bird feeders.

"The kids decided there were some things they wanted to change about their neighborhood," said Bill Robinson, a volunteer at the community house. "We helped them do this by organizing this and bringing in students from Bell High School and Mackenzie High (in Deep River) to help out."

Ministers having difficulty saying the magic word — 'yes'



RANDALL DENLEY  
COMMENTARY

The long wait for federal and provincial political approval of Ottawa's transit expansion is starting to get a bit silly. The key ministers at both levels are not against the plan, but they can't quite bring themselves to say the word "yes."

The city got a little flurry of media coverage this week when it formally released its request for money, but the real negotiations have been going on for months behind closed doors. Given the high level of awareness of this plan, the latest public comments from federal Transport Minister John Baird and provincial Municipal Affairs Minister Jim Watson were discouragingly familiar.

Baird reprised the \$200 million federal ministers have been promising since the time of the previous Liberal government. The cheque must be getting worn out with handling by now.

It's "not a question of whether or not we will support the plan, it's how much," Baird said. That puts the question succinctly, but it doesn't provide the answer. The \$200 million the federal government is offering as a one-third share of a rail pro-

CITY

# Stops: Announcement system to cost \$6.72 million

Continued from PAGE C1

Green argued against the extension, saying there's nothing stopping the company from getting drivers to shout out the stops or use intercoms to do it.

In a tersely worded ruling issued last week, agency members Raymon J. Kaduck and John Scott agreed with Green and to clear up any confusion that might exist at the bus company, put OC Transpo on a deadline.

In the latest ruling, the members said after the November 2007 ruling, OC Transpo "misconstrued" what it meant by a "reasonable time frame" to get the stops announced when the company assumed this to include the time it took to get the automated systems installed.

The members noted this is scheduled to be finished two years from the agency's original ruling, when solving the problem within 90 days was what the agency had expected. The agency said that by Transpo's own estimate, the stops are being called 80 per cent of the time now. This is better than it was, but far from the agency's order to reach 100-per-cent compliance in a reasonable amount of time.

The ruling says as soon as Transpo discovered it wasn't complying with the order, it should have

requested stops announced all the time and in a way people can hear. It also ordered the transit company to post monthly compliance reports on its website for two years starting in May, to give Green copies of the reports directly, and list further complaints.

The ruling ends with a warning to OC Transpo. "Nothing in this decision shall limit the power of the agency's enforcement division to undertake independent investigations of compliance by OC Transpo with this decision, to investigate complaints or to levy administrative monetary penalties," it says.

In a memo to city council and senior city management on the issue, OC Transpo general manager Alain Mercier says the company has instructed drivers to call out stops, and that progressive discipline will be meted out against drivers who don't do it. He also notes the current 80-per-cent compliance rate is much better than the 40-per-cent rate observed after the initial November 2007 agency ruling.

He said transit management thinks they will be able to "exceed" 90-per-cent compliance on a regular basis until the end of the year, and that he expects 100-per-cent compliance after the automated systems are installed at a cost of \$6.72

# Change: Most of these children are 'victims of labelling,' co-ordinator says

Continued from PAGE C1

Robinson says the children particularly complained about garbage cans being too close to the houses. In the summer they overflow and the smell is unbearable.

Robinson said the children decided the problem could be solved in three ways — by picking up the garbage, creating awareness and educating the public.

"So far, the children have written to the west end councillor Alex Cullen about the garbage problem and hopefully that will have some effect," Robinson added.

Another volunteer, Ben Fleming from Mackenzie High, said that with media attention on this week's project, the young people might not have to wait that long for change to set in. Mackenzie sent a team to Ottawa for three days to help with the project.

"Yesterday 12 garbage cans were emptied by the garbage collectors

and yet they usually pick up the garbage on Fridays, so maybe they heard something on radio," Fleming said.

Euihyun Yang, another student who gave up time from his March break to help as a volunteer, said he enjoyed working with the children, especially because of their enthusiasm. He went on to say that he was not afraid to work in the neighbourhood despite its bad reputation. It's a rep he thinks is exaggerated anyway.

But one of the girls, Helina Germa, said there are some bad people in her neighbourhood. She said she used to see some of them standing in a parking lot near the community house, drinking and smoking.

Russell Borden is the co-ordinator of Michelle Heights Community House. He noted that many people in the area cannot afford much, and must deal with the stigma of being on assistance.

"We are trying to change that at the community house and we have

projects lined up for the children. We are trying to give these children self esteem because most of them are victims of labelling," Borden said.

"Some are called poor, black, Caucasian, and most of these labels make them hate school and you know what happens after that. A lot of them can't even afford meals and we thus give them food after every program.

"But we can boast of success stories — I am a success story," said Borden, who was raised in the neighbourhood and later returned to become the community house co-ordinator.

An important part of the neighbourhood facelift plan, dubbed "Who is Nobody," is a faceless, colourless doll that the children decorate after every successfully completed project. The doll "serves as a constant reminder of the work they have done in the community" said Borden.



NOTICE OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT CENTRE

citoyen

and