

Residents cook up a neighbourly idea

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Some amazing things have happened since a group of Alexandra Park residents came together to better their community.

The initiative to revitalize the downtown west neighbourhood and make it a safer and healthier place got underway about three years ago when the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) surveyed residents on the priorities for their community.

What topped that list was a strong desire from Alexandra Park residents to green and beautify their neighbourhood.

"It's all about residents' leadership," said Sandra Gonzales, a TCHC community revitalization consultant.

Gonzales initially made contact with Alexandra Park residents and with her assistance helped spearhead the formation of a local community group named The Green Space Collective.

Over the last three or so years, neighbours have held community clean-ups and planting events, among other things.

The latest spinoff is the Recipe for Community project, an initiative made possible through a partnership with the Toronto Community Foundation, the City of Toronto, Toronto Community Housing Corporation, and the Green Space Collective. Alexandra Park Community Centre, Arts for Children and Youth, Red Pepper Spectacle, Scadding Court Community Centre, St. Stephen's Community House and Toronto Mosaic were also instrumental in making the vision a reality.

"Recipe for Community shows the great results that arise from community partnerships," said Rahul Bhardwaj, president and CEO of the Toronto Community Foundation, in a release.

"The cooperation between the Community Foundation and our wonderful group of partners has resulted in an even better Alexandra Park."

In December 2009, dozens of community members gathered at the Alexandra Park Community Centre to celebrate the launch of the new community project, which included tasting some of the scrumptious recipes featured in the A Pinch of This, Recipes from Alexandra Park cookbook.

"This is a great night. We've all been waiting for the fruits of our labour to arrive," said Councillor Adam Vaughan at the Dec. 9 event.

"Every time (the Alexandra Park community) steps up to the plate great things happen."

In early 2009, food columnist, broadcaster and cook Marian Kane with the help of Lesleigh Landry and a handful of local residents started gathering and testing all of the recipes in the 39-page cookbook.

"This all started as an off-the-cuff idea I had. I can safely say these recipes work," shared Kane, who lived in the Kensington Market area for 25 years, at the launch party.



Residents cook up a neighbourly idea. Contributors Mary Wright (left) and Geanie Sarjue serve up some barbecue chicken at the launch of the A Pinch of This: Recipes from Alexandra Park cookbook. *Staff photo/JOANNA LAVOIE*

"I know this community very well and food is a universal connection. Everybody eats."

Seventeen-year resident Geanie Sarju's barbecue chicken and Jamaican 'rundown' recipes are featured in the new cookbook.

Thrilled to be celebrating the launch with friends and supporters, Sarju, a member of the Green Space Collective, said cooking is something she loves to do.

"When I cook, I cook with love," she smiled.

"I like to help people. I volunteer in this community and I do whatever it takes."

All proceeds from the sale of A Pinch of This, Recipes from Alexandra Park, which sells for \$5, will be redirected back to the community's cooking programs and gardens.

To obtain a copy, call 416-678-3439 or email greenspacecollective@yahoo.ca

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