

Black Creek Foundation: helping artists in need

By SUSAN VANSTONE

Rigid Toronto zoning laws are causing problems for the city's visual artists.

Municipal government by-laws require artists to rent separate living and studio spaces, except in commercial areas. But because commercial space in Toronto is far beyond the reach of artists' modest incomes, as would be two rents, a large number live illegally in industrial buildings.

Last year, the non-profit Black Creek Foundation (BCF) — an organization established by four York economics professors as an avenue for public service research in economic matters — presented a brief, and a petition of 193 signatures to the Toronto City Council.

The BCF — whose 38 members are partly comprised of York graduates, faculty members, and students — have focused on the economic problems of visual artists since 1984.

The brief outlined the artists' financial difficulties, and the economic and cultural benefits that visual artists provide to the community. Artists — whose incomes tend to be sporadic and insufficient for Toronto's high living costs — cannot afford separate living and studio accommodations. The brief states that Toronto is the only one of nine major North American cities that does not provide zoning laws directed at encouraging the arts. It suggests greater subsidies and zoning changes, to allow for combined living and studio space for visual artists.

"If lucky, artists make \$6,000 a year on their art, so they must have part-time jobs," said BCF Secretary/Treasurer John Buttrick. "They can't get unemployment compensation, and they're being asked to pay two rents in today's housing markets? If that's City Council's answer, they're saying, 'Get out of town — you're not wanted here.'"

The BCF proposed that the two-storey, 3,000-square metre federal surplus building at 60 Atlantic Avenue could be leased through the provincial government, or sold directly to the BCF. With a site-specific zoning change, the building could provide 17 residential units and 20 studios to artists approved by the BCF's Board of Directors.

The BCF received approval of subsidies from the Ministry of Housing,



60 ATLANTIC AVENUE: The BCF has proposed that this site be converted to live/work space for artists.

However, it was under conditional terms — the BCF had to first find a building. Once a building was found, the government promised to subsidize 75 per cent of the artists' rent, and provide loans for renovations.

But, the BCF could not obtain housing funds for 60 Atlantic Avenue unless the municipal government rezoned it to include residential space. Studio space — a commercial use — would not qualify for subsidies, and converting the building to living space would not solve the two-rent problem.

However, Toronto City Council refused the BCF's request for a zoning change, arguing that such a move would force the entire area around 60 Atlantic Avenue to be rezoned for residential use. Council believes that a rezoning of the area would force industry out, increase the demand for housing, raising rents, and eventually drive out the artists. City Council however, does not oppose renovating the building into work space.

BCF Past-President Fred Lazar said that City Council saw that subsidies for both housing and studio space would solve artists' financial problems. "At face value, that would appear to be a solution," Lazar said. "But the difficulty is that artists don't work nine to five, and there's the question of safety and day care.

If the artist lives and works in the same place, there is no worry about taking public transportation late at night, or making arrangements for children," he explained.

The BCF found that no programme for subsidizing visual artists exists in Toronto. Buttrick explained that unlike most theatre or dance companies, which have publicists and administrators, individual artists lack the means necessary to obtain sufficient financial support. The Toronto Arts Council does not fund visual artists, said Buttrick, and Statistics Canada research from 1985 to 1986 showed that visual artists get only one per cent of all government arts subsidies in Canada.

Lazar suspected that "motherhood" comments were made by City Council, regarding the need to support artists and develop a viable arts community in the city. However, the BCF has received no response to its petition. Buttrick said that while in contact with the Mayor's office this month, he was told the petition had been lost.

Lazar saw two groups in the City Council — one favours keeping the area industrial and is reluctant to change any zoning laws. The other is willing to negotiate, as it sees rezoning as a way of converting the area to residential use.

BCF board member and York vis-

ual arts professor Judith Schwarz noted discrepancies between "token and unseen acknowledgement" of the arts. The municipal government gets kudos for the film festival and arts awards, she explained, since those are well publicized, public events. However, the city is unwilling to change zoning, or provide housing. Also, Schwarz added, the city overlooks the economic base provided by the arts — materials, exchanges of services, and employment of architects, administrators, curators, critics, and technicians.

Buttrick said that the city's rezoning has created a need for downtown residential units. "The city has rezoned the railroad lands and Massey Ferguson," he said, "and this little bit is not going to be rezoned? The city is doing everything to increase the demand for housing in that neighbourhood. There's commercial enterprises all around, and [60 Atlantic Avenue] is supposed to be industrial?"

The importance of obtaining a government building, explained Lazar, is that they are relatively cheap. "The cost would be exorbitant to buy a building from another group and pay full market price. No one could afford the resulting rents," he added.

The building must be downtown, he continued, so that artists can inte-

ract, and be close to galleries.

60 Atlantic Avenue is a good location for artists, said Buttrick, as it is near King and Dufferin, where artists converge, and warehouse space is plentiful. The building has high ceilings, and would be relatively cheap due to the industrial — rather than residential or commercial — neighbourhood.

Work space would need minimal renovation, but living areas would need major upgrading, said Lazar. "Given the fact that there are no other buildings in the downtown core that could be made available by some level of government for a low price, the BCF is dealing with what's available," he said.

Prior to joining the BCF, Schwarz worked on a search committee for inexpensive accommodations for artists in Toronto. The committee found that rental costs for galleries averaged \$3,000 a month — which, she said, is an enormous financial pressure on an artist-run group. No spaces were found as prices were high all over Toronto.

"The whole demographics of downtown have changed," explained Schwarz. "Queen Street used to have second-hand stores and older buildings. Now it's developed. New buildings like the SkyDome, Roy Thompson Hall, and the Metro Convention Centre, have brought in new interests. Developers have come in, and rents have increased," she continued.

Schwarz said she knows artists whose rents have doubled from one month to the next.

"[Underfunding] is a problem of tremendous urgency," she said. "I really wonder what the future is for graduating visual arts students. Artists may choose to move — imagine a city that is emptied of artists."

"Black Creek is trying to make the city aware that the art community is an important part of the cultural and economic fabric of the city," said Schwarz. "Toronto is proud of being a cultural city," she added, "and there has to be true acknowledgement at the level where zoning is changed, and creative requirements are understood."

"It is important for the organic and cultural growth of the city to recognize contributions of artist and to adjust the laws so that artists don't have to leave the city."

Attention Class of '89

Put your university or college education to work with a one-year post-diploma program at Georgian College.

These programs are designed to focus your background in the Social Sciences or Humanities into a fulfilling career.

• Recreation for Special Populations (Orillia) 12-month program

courses in leisure education, counselling and life assessment

16-week competency-based internship

career possibilities with seniors, law offenders, persons with developmental or physical impairments.

• Communicative Disorders Assistant (Orillia) 12-month program

courses in speech-language pathology, alternate modes of communication and auditory disorders

16-week competency-based internship

careers include assistant or technician in facilities or agencies serving clients with communicative disorders, such as schools, residential institutions or clinics

Georgian College has an excellent track record in placing graduates in related employment. Call toll free 1-800-461-9696, ext. 566 (Ontario) or (705) 722-1566. Or mail the coupon below.

I would like more information and an application for:

Recreation for Special Populations Communicative Disorders Assistant

Name: _____

Address: _____
(apt., street) (city) (prov) (postal code)

Phone: () _____

Mail to: College Information Services
Georgian College
One Georgian Drive
Barrie, Ontario
L4M 3X9

Georgian College



York Alpine Ski Club

"RAFFLE RESULTS"

Grand Prize: Kemper Snowboard

— Christine Pollitt

1st Prize: Racing Skis

— Steve Carpenter

Consolation Prizes:

Neveca Boot Bag — Doug Trangard

Elan Ski Bag — Paul Derege

Uvex Goggles — Paul Rosenberg

Leather Racing Gloves — Joanne

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS
FOR DONATING PRIZES
KEMPER SNOWBOARDS • KENMARK SPORTS
DITRANI DESIGNS • NEW WAVE SPORTS

KENMARK SPORTS
RICHMOND HILL

DITRANI DESIGNS
TORONTO

NEW WAVE SPORTS
COLLINGWOOD