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After 30 years, the Greek Saturday schools dance again



Photo by Denis Styles



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Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The ballrooms of Château Royal carried the sound of Greek music well into the evening of April 26, as families from across Greater Montreal gathered for a celebration that had been more than a generation in the making. Bouzouki melodies rose above the clinking of glasses, students in traditional dress threaded their way through tables of parents and grandparents, and three school communities from across the metropolitan area met under a single roof for the first annual Supplementary Education School Dance. Hosted by the Hellenic Community of Greater Montreal and joining the Laval, Montreal and South Shore campuses, the event placed three weighty themes in the foreground: the transmission of the Greek language to a generation born outside Greece, the role of the Saturday schools in sustaining that transmission, and the durability of a community institution that marks its 120th anniversary in 2026.

The dance arrived after a long pause in the school calendar. Vasilios Christodoulopoulos, secretary of education at the Hellenic Community of Greater Montreal, told guests from the podium that the last comparable dance had been held in 1994, when he was a third-year student at the Aristotelis school. "We're back," he said, drawing applause from a room of more than 250 guests. Christodoulopoulos said the years following the pandemic had weighed on enrolment across the supplementary system, and described the evening as a deliberate effort to rebuild participation. He pledged that the curriculum across the three schools would be modernized to serve current students and attract new families.

The president of the Hellenic Community of Greater Montreal, Basile Angelopoulos, used his remarks to place the Saturday schools at the centre of community life. "In Greece, a child is born Greek," he said. "Here, a child must become Greek, and the only way we can make that happen is through our education system, through the sacrifices made by our teaching staff." He told the audience that the community's most recent Radio Marathon, held earlier in 2026, had raised approximately $450,000, the highest figure in the campaign's history. Those funds, he said, were distributed equally among the five branches of the Socrates-Demosthenes school network where supplementary education operates. Angelopoulos closed with an appeal for continued participation in the Lahioforos lottery campaign now underway.

Eleni Tourkochoriti, general director of supplementary education, addressed the room on behalf of the three schools she oversees: Agios Nikolaos, Platon-Omiros and Aristotelis. She framed the evening as the start of a tradition that the community hopes to institutionalize. "The supplementary education system is a demanding undertaking," she said, "and it requires sacrifice, time and consistency, especially because it takes place on Saturdays, which is a sixth school day for our students." Tourkochoriti credited the three Parents' Committees, drawn from each campus, with the logistics of the evening, and thanked the dance instructors who had prepared the students over months of weekly rehearsal.

Jacques Bouchard, professor of modern Greek Studies at the Université de Montréal, addressed the parents directly on the question of language transmission at home. "A child at home may learn only 700 or 1,000 words," he said, "but the child gains something that money cannot buy. It is the linguistic sense." Bouchard reminded the audience that Greek had been spoken for 40 centuries and written for 36, and that its grammatical structure continued to inform speakers of Western languages. He described Greek as the mother tongue of Western civilization. Nikolaos Karalekas, general consul of Greece in Montreal, joined the gathering between engagements and described Tourkochoriti as "the soul of the supplementary schools."

The dance program, prepared jointly by the dance teachers of the three schools, opened with the Tsakonikos, a slow ceremonial dance from Tsakonia in Laconia traditionally performed to close a panigyri. "It is a dance that usually closes the celebration," said Leonidas Papazoglou, the dance teacher for the South Shore campus. "We will use it to open ours, with all the children from all three of our Saturday schools." Approximately 60 to 70 students took part, performing dances drawn from Epirus, the Aegean islands, Arcadia, Crete, Macedonia and Zakynthos. Loukas of the Platon-Omiros campus and Chrysovalantis of Laval shared the floor with Papazoglou. Each instructor works with limited rehearsal time, since dance is taught for roughly half an hour each Saturday in each class.

Athina Sita, co-director of the South Shore campus and herself a dance instructor, told guests that the size of the gathering had exceeded expectations. "We had more than 250 people here for our first dance in 30 years," she said. "I am amazed by how supportive everyone has been." Her co-director, Vasilis Bourbounis, called the evening a powerful start for the joint program. The three Parents' Committees that organized the event, with members drawn from Laval, Montreal and the South Shore, described the dance as the result of months of co-ordinated planning across the three campuses.

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Greek Montreal prepares for Mother's Day with roots that reach to antiquity

By Dimitri Papadopoulos

In Greek households across Montreal, the second Sunday of May arrives with the scent of fresh flowers on the kitchen table, plates of koulourakia set out for visiting children and grandchildren, and a quiet reverence for the woman at the head of the family. Mother's Day, observed this year on May 10, carries a particular weight in the Greek-Canadian diaspora, where the holiday draws together two streams of inheritance: an ancient Hellenic veneration of the mother as life-giver and a modern North American observance rooted in the early 20th century.

The festival's deepest roots reach back to antiquity, when springtime rites in ancient Greece honoured Rhea, mother of the gods, and the goddess Demeter, whose name combines the Greek words for earth and mother. The Greek Orthodox Church later associated the day with the feast of Ypapanti on February 2, marking the presentation of Jesus at the temple by the Virgin Mary 40 days after his birth. Greek families observed motherhood on that date until the 1960s, when many began to align with the second Sunday of May, the model established by Anna Jarvis and proclaimed by American president Woodrow Wilson in 1914.

For the Hellenic Community of Greater Montreal, marking its 120th anniversary in 2026, the holiday holds particular meaning. Mothers and grandmothers have long served as the principal carriers of the Greek language, the Orthodox faith and culinary tradition in immigrant households, ensuring that children born in Quebec continue to speak Greek at home and to observe the rhythms of the church calendar. In the days leading up to the holiday, students at all the Greek schools of the community in Montreal, Laval and the South Shore prepare handwritten cards in Greek for their mothers and grandmothers.

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Youth dancers at Cretans' Association of Montreal squeezed upstairs as basement remains under outside lease





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Inside the Laval clubhouse where generations of Cretan families have gathered to dance, to celebrate name days, and to teach their children the songs and steps carried from the mountain villages of the island, the rooms have grown crowded. The youth dance program of the association, the same ensemble whose children appear in traditional dress at Greek Independence Day commemorations, at parish festivals, and at the cultural gatherings that mark the calendar of Hellenic Montreal, has been holding its rehearsals on the upper floor of the building, splitting practice slots and at times placing groups of children downstairs and upstairs at once. The basement that long served as the rehearsal hall for those young dancers has been let to an outside church congregation since the early months of the pandemic, and a petition signed by 159 members of the community, calling for the return of the room to the youth, has now placed the procedural workings of the Cretans' Association of Montreal under a level of public scrutiny rarely seen in its three decades of operation.

The petition was organized by Jimmy Nikolidakis, a longtime member of the association, and asks the board to dedicate the basement space to dance instruction, cultural programming, and gatherings for the youth of the community. According to correspondence from the Board of Directors, signed earlier this month and emailed to Mr. Nikolidakis on the Sunday that followed, 18 of the 159 signers were determined to be in good standing under the association's constitution, meaning they had remitted their dues for the 2026 calendar year. The constitution requires the signatures of at least 30 members in good standing, accompanied by names, addresses, and physical signatures, in order to oblige the board to act. On that basis the board's letter advised that the petition "does not meet the formal requirements that would oblige the Board to act."

The remaining 141 signers, by Mr. Nikolidakis's account, belong to families whose involvement with the association spans multiple generations and whose dues for the current calendar year remained unposted at the moment the petition was tallied. His open letter to the membership raises a question concerning whether the application of the threshold serves the spirit of an organization built by volunteer labour and family donation across more than thirty years. "After thirty plus years of members and their families supporting this Association, volunteering, donating, building it from the ground up," he wrote, "they are now undermining your voice over a technical requirement." He framed the matter as one of "respect for members and respect for our youth."

The basement at the centre of the dispute was leased to an outside church congregation during the COVID-19 pandemic, at a moment when the association's own programming had been suspended and the room was unused. When community activities resumed, the basement remained under the tenant's occupancy. The youth dance program, which had previously rehearsed in that hall, was relocated to the upper floor of the building, where the available space cannot comfortably accommodate the ensembles. Practice time has been reduced. Groups of children have at times been required to rehearse downstairs and upstairs simultaneously. "It's chaos," Mr. Nikolidakis said of the present arrangement, describing the conditions under which the children continue to train.

The board has agreed to convene an informational General Assembly within 15 days of its letter, at which the proposed lease arrangement, the present situation regarding the tenant, and the use of the space will be presented to the membership. A Special General Assembly will follow at a later date, at which a formal decision will be taken by the members in attendance. The board describes the approach as one undertaken "in good faith and in the interest of transparency and collaboration with our members," and has pledged "an opportunity to ask questions and express their concerns in an open and respectful forum." The two-meeting structure has drawn scrutiny from the petition movement, which has asked why a vote cannot be taken at the same assembly where the information is presented. Mr. Nikolidakis has characterized the arrangement as "a clear delay strategy," and the documents released by the board offer no procedural reason for the separation of information from decision.

A further development reported by Mr. Nikolidakis concerns the composition of the board itself. According to his account, two board members have stepped down from their positions in connection with the leadership's handling of the basement question. Neither of the resigning members has, to date, spoken publicly about the matter. The petition organizer has also stated that the board has declined to publish his communications on the official platforms of the association, leaving him to address the membership through his own social media accounts. "I apologize for posting personally," he wrote at the opening of his statement, "but the board refuses to allow my posts so members can see our updates."

The basement at the heart of the dispute occupies a particular place in the institutional memory of the Cretans of Montreal. Generations of children have learned the pentozali and the sousta in that room, have pinned the kerchief and tied the stivania of the traditional dress, and have stood before parents and grandparents to perform the dances of Heraklion, Chania, Rethymno, and Lasithi. The young dancers who appear in costume at Greek Independence Day, who perform at the spring and autumn festivals of the parish, and whose photographs fill the social pages of the community, learned their steps in that hall. The transmission of the Cretan musical and choreographic tradition in the diaspora has rested in significant measure on rooms exactly like this one, where children spend hours of their week in the company of their cousins and their friends, hearing the lyra and the laouto, learning the words of the mantinades, and growing into the bearers of a culture older than the Canadian nation in which they live. The pride the community takes in those dancers when they appear in public is the visible fruit of the work done in private, in the rehearsal hall, week after week. A room of one's own, in the life of a diaspora community, is the room in which the next generation learns who it is.

The petition organizers have called on members to ensure that their dues for the current year are remitted in advance of the assemblies, so that the constitutional threshold is unambiguously satisfied at the next round of consideration. Mr. Nikolidakis has urged members to attend "in full force" and has restated his intention to press for a full vote, an expedited timeline, and the return of the basement to the youth.

The basement at 3055 Cartier Ouest had served as the rehearsal hall for the youth dance ensembles of the Cretans' Association of Montreal across the decades preceding the COVID-19 pandemic, after which the room was let to an outside church congregation and has remained under that tenancy.

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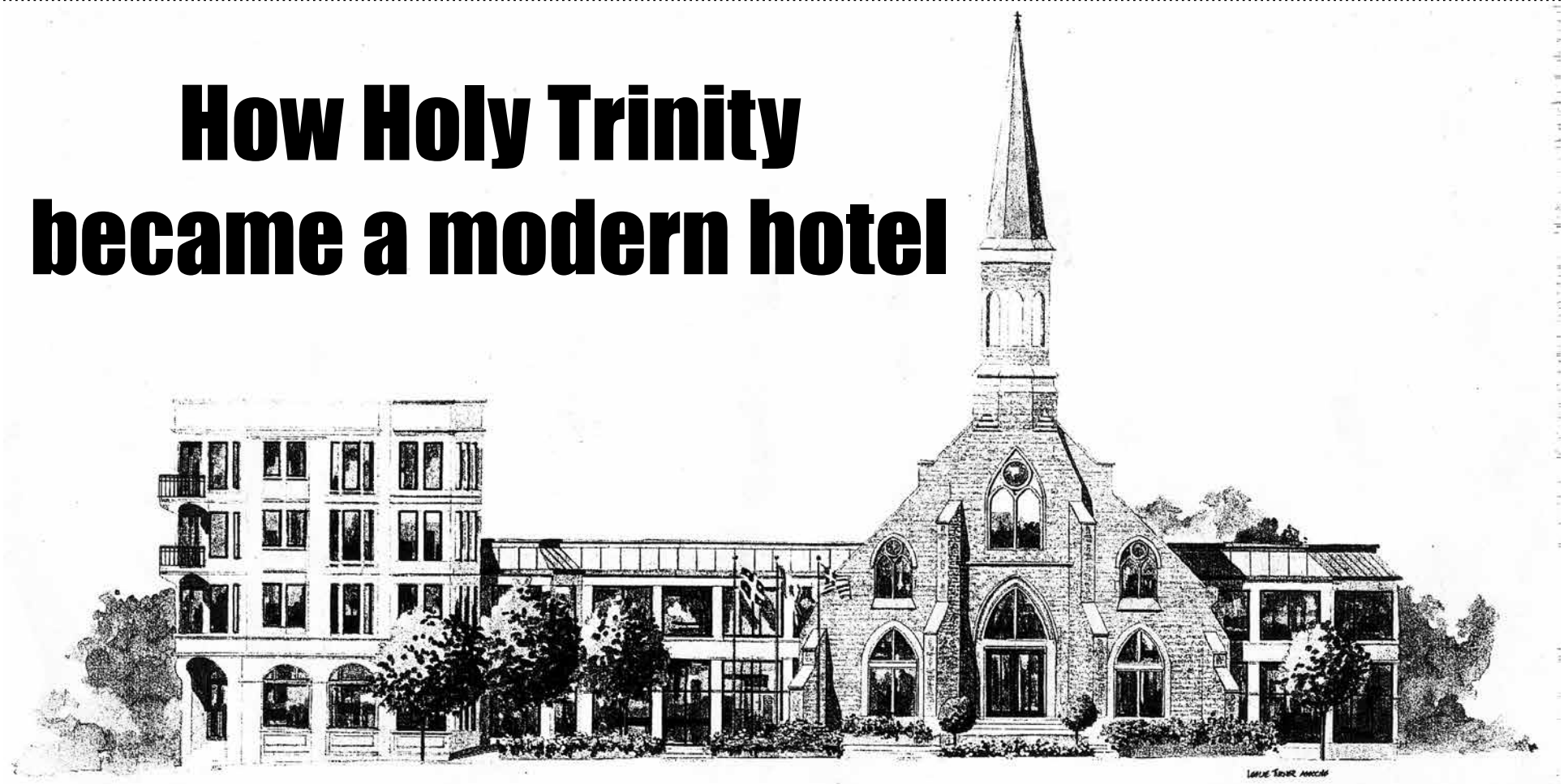
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How Holy Trinity became a modern hotel



By Dimitri Papadopoulos
with files from John Coconas

In our previous edition, we detailed the severe financial deadlock and administrative infighting that paralyzed the Hellenic Community of Montreal following the devastating 1986 fire at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church. This month, we conclude this ongoing retrospective by examining the final, tragic chapter of the Sherbrooke Street sanctuary. Archival documents and historical accounts from the late 1990s reveal a chaotic era where the remaining hopes of resurrecting the church finally buckled under the weight of insurmountable institutional debt, high-profile political scandals, and abrupt municipal intervention.

For years, the ruined church stood as a visible testament to the community's financial paralysis. The shattered stone facade offered a daily, sad contrast to the rapidly developing downtown core of Montreal. This stark reality sparked deep resentment among the Greek public who had generously contributed to the initial grassroots fundraising efforts based on grand promises from community leaders. The refinancing efforts secured in the early 1990s served merely as a temporary economic relief that delayed outright bankruptcy. Historical community records and public critiques frequently referenced the use of reckless loans to satisfy immediate, lingering obligations to creditors like OLTON from the previous 12-year administration. The then leader of the EPOK political faction heavily criticized these specific financial decisions during radio broadcasts, describing them as reckless "maritime loans" (thalassodaneia) designed to satisfy a loyal base of 70 followers.

Despite this crushing financial reality, no community leader formally abandoned the objective of restoring the church until 1997. In 1996, President Vasilis Katsampanis and former president Adrian Maris formed a specialized committee to aggressively promote the Holy Trinity restoration file. The committee included Rev. Nikolaos Papageorgiou alongside prominent community members Kostas Papachristou, Constantine Milonopoulos, and Theodore Christeas. The group conducted extensive public and private hearings and distributed participation bulletins across the community.

This 1996 initiative introduced a highly conservative architectural draft prepared by architect Lagopoulos. This pragmatic design aimed to rebuild the church while centralizing and housing Greek state and consular services within the same complex. Historical observers note that this concept carried significant potential had the consular authorities advocated for it with the Greek government. The initiative ultimately collapsed amidst bitter internal divisions fueled by local controversies, known historically in the community as the Greek consular wines scandal and other issues.

The failure of this final restoration push coincided with the collapse of a major school merger initiative between Montreal and Laval. This subsequent failure prompted the sudden resignation of the Katsampanis administration. Nicholas T. Pagonis assumed the presidency without an electoral mandate in 1997. The three-year administrative period under President Pagonis proved catalytic for the property's ultimate fate. This administration operated with the absolute and constant support of the political faction EPOK, led by the late Kostas Vrakas and Filippas Sofronas.

The new administration immediately faced intense pressure from an increasingly impatient roster of creditors. The most prominent demands came from the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec alongside the private individuals who had personally guaranteed $1,500,000 of that specific institutional loan. Paralyzed by monthly debt obligations they could not meet, the Pagonis administration officially shifted the community priority toward selling the highly valuable Sherbrooke Street lot.

By this time, the abandoned property had suffered profound physical degradation. Left completely unprotected and unfenced, the sacred site became a haven for illicit downtown activity. A second fire broke out in the ruins in 1996, followed shortly by another blaze that completely destroyed the adjacent presbytery. The church that had once echoed with the Divine Liturgy had devolved into a severe public hazard. President Pagonis justified the decision to sell the property by accurately recording that the site had become a public urinal and a gathering place for drug addicts.

Desperate for immediate liquidity, the administration entertained various commercial offers. In 1997, the proprietors of the popular Club Soda entertainment venue made an initial approach to purchase the lot through an anonymous broker. The negotiations failed, as did a second acquisition attempt by the venue in 1998. The prolonged indecision surrounding the property was eventually violently interrupted by municipal authorities. On April 8, 1997, the City of Montreal, citing severe public safety concerns, issued a strict demolition order without any prior warning and dispatched heavy machinery to Sherbrooke Street.

The demolition of the Holy Trinity ruins stands as one of the most agonizing moments in the history of the local Greek community. As the municipal bulldozers moved in, dozens of Greeks rushed to the intersection. Recognizing that the destruction of the structure would be completed in a mere half hour, they gathered as silent mourners. They stood weeping on the sidewalks, waiting for the dust to settle so they could collect the scattered stones. The rubble represented a collection of consecrated relics from their youth. Today, fragments of the Holy Trinity masonry remain carefully preserved as holy artifacts in the homes of countless Greek families across Montreal.

The eventual disposition of the land involved complex financial maneuvering that culminated in an emphyteutic lease, transferring control of the property to private developers for decades. The historical context of the site adds layers of irony to its modern incarnation. The original 1865 building functioned as a Methodist church before the Greek community purchased it in 1925 to serve as their primary religious and cultural center. In the early 2000s, investors developed the corner into the boutique Hotel Opus, later rebranded as Hotel 10. This development integrated the adjacent Joseph-Arthur Godin building. Built in 1915, the Godin building holds rich heritage value as one of Canada's first residential structures constructed with reinforced concrete in the Art Nouveau style. The hotel developers commissioned architect Dan S. Hanganu to design a massive contemporary structure directly over the footprint of the demolished church, linking it to the historic Godin building. Hanganu was the exact same architect the Hellenic Community of Montreal had hired in 1987, paying him hundreds of thousands of dollars in community funds to draw the unrealized Place Sainte-Trinite project that initiated the financial ruin of the church.

The current generation of Greek-Canadians inherits a complex history regarding the Sherbrooke Street property, governed by legal documents crafted by their predecessors. According to the structural timelines of the emphyteutic lease signed roughly a quarter-century ago, the underlying property rights will revert to community control in 2055, just 29 years from today. At that distant date, the future custodians of Montreal Hellenism will possess the authority to finally erect a small commemorative shrine on the site to honour the faith, culture, and resilience of the immigrants who built the foundation of this community.

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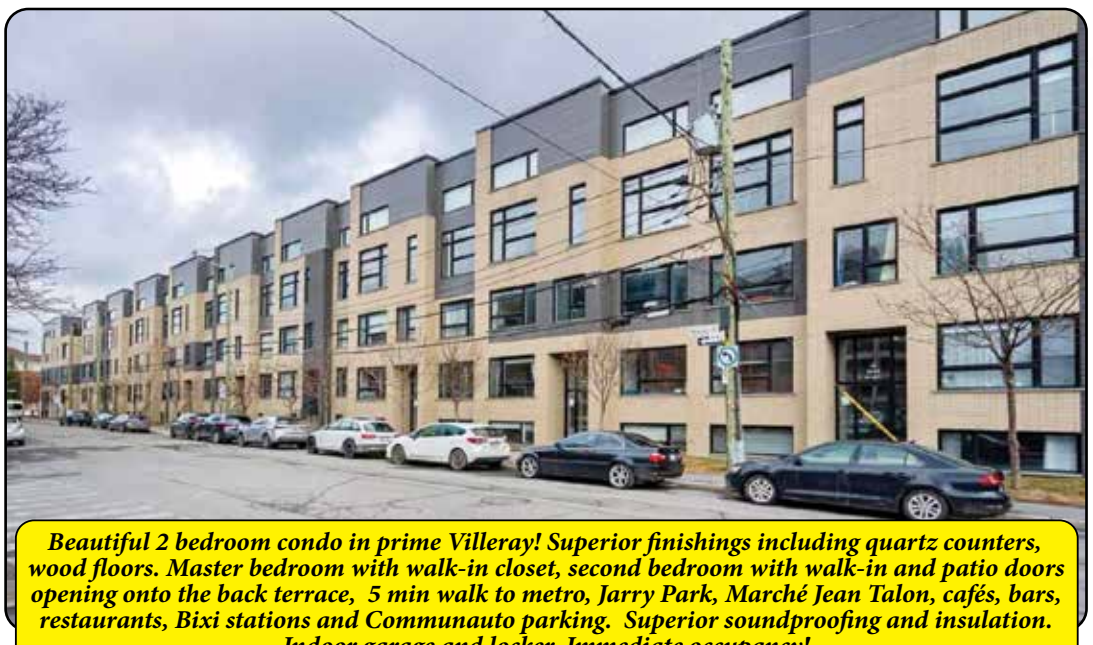
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Happy Mother's Day

On this Mother's Day, I extend my warmest wishes to all mothers. Thank you for your love, strength, tenderness, and devotion. Your presence brightens our families and our community each day.

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