

## LOCAL NEWS

# Banff/Ledbury fun day a triumph of community spirit

BY SPENCER CALLAGHAN

spencer@thenewsemc.ca

A few years ago, the sight of children playing and adults setting up a picnic in the park at the corner of Banff Ave. and Ledbury Ave. would have been considered an illusion.

However, things have changed in this neighbourhood, as was evident at the Community Fun Day held on July 20, organized by the Banff Avenue Tenants' Association.

The Banff/Ledbury community has endured some tough times over the past few years, but thanks to the efforts of the community things are starting to turn around.

The event on this day featured a live DJ, balloon animals, games, prizes and a great buffet of dishes from the many cultural groups that live in the community.

Abid Jan, project manager for the South-East Ottawa Centre for a Healthy Community, who helped organize the event as part of the No Community Left Behind initiative, said the community used to be a place where people wouldn't even go outside, let alone congregate in one area.

"This is such a great change for this community. Older kids used to threaten their own parents from joining the tenants' association because they were worried they would talk about them. Now they are not afraid anymore," said Mr. Jan.

As children danced to the music in the park, Ottawa Police Const. Lisa Briggs watched, amazed at the community's transformation.



Balloon animals was one of the attractions of the recent Community Fun Day, held at Banff Park on July 20. The event was to celebrate the turnaround in the community in recent years.

"I think this is great. This is not the same Ledbury/Banff that the media report. They have got a bad rap and they're trying really hard to get over it and I think slowly they are doing it. We've got the community inviting the police now, where before that would have been unheard of," said Const. Briggs.

Const. Briggs, along with her partner Const. Mario Bergeron, was assigned to community in November to try and improve relations between the police and the community. Crimes used to go unreported in Banff/Ledbury due to fear of both the criminals and the police. Const. Briggs admits the

police had made mistakes in the past, but now the relationship is one of trust and cooperation.

"People would see us coming and they would go in their houses, they wouldn't want to talk. We're now greeted openly on the street by parents, by mothers of children who are in the (correctional) sys-

tem who will come forward and ask us for help with other children in the family so they don't have to go through the same thing," said Const. Briggs.

Reported crimes are up considerably in the Banff/Ledbury area, something that Const. Briggs says is a good thing as most illegal activity went unreported in the past.

River ward Coun. Maria McRae, who was on hand at for the event with prizes for the kids, says the city and the police have helped turn the community around but it is the residents who are making the biggest difference.

"It is the tenants themselves who are turning it around. It is the tenants who are telling drug dealers 'don't come down here.' It is the tenants who are in a position where they can start to take ownership and pride in where they live," said Coun. McRae.

Coun. McRae says the construction of the new playground at the Banff/Ledbury park is something she is most proud of as it has helped give the community a place to meet, play and feel safe.

The Banff/Ledbury Community Fun Day was made possible through the dedication of the members of the Banff Avenue Tenants' Association, led by president Fowzia Mohammad, who pulled off the event that only two years ago would not have been possible.

Mr. Jan sees even brighter days ahead for the community as it gains confidence from the event.

"This community has changed so much, this is just the beginning," he said.