

This issue of *real leaders* takes us across the country to Ottawa, Winnipeg and Saskatoon for a look at innovative community development initiatives. **Andrejs and Lorraine Berzins** are working to achieve a more ‘satisfying’ type of justice. **Joe Bova** shows us the importance of history and culture in revitalizing communities in downtown Winnipeg. And 20-year-old **Chris Ross** discusses what it is like to be a young publisher of a popular Aboriginal magazine for youth.

**Andrejs and Lorraine Berzins** are a fascinating couple. Both involved in the criminal justice system, Lorraine was a social worker who counselled prisoners in the federal penitentiary system; her husband, Andrejs, recently has retired from his position as Chief Crown Attorney in Ottawa-Carleton. Working at different ends of the law, Andrejs was in the courtroom prosecuting defendants, while Lorraine dealt with the offenders as they were serving their sentence. Both came to the same conclusion: Canada’s justice system is far from perfect.

Lorraine was the first female Classification Officer at the medium-security detention centre in Campbellford, Ontario. One day, a prisoner’s escape went awry and Lorraine was taken hostage.



*Lorraine Berzins remarks: “Bringing about changes in public understanding and judicial practice has become the work of my life.”*

“It was certainly a character-forming experience,” Lorraine says wryly. “I don’t know how else to describe it. Being in that situation gave me insight into the dynamics among the prisoner, the police and myself as the hostage – I saw the prisoner’s fear and I had to find a way to help him be less afraid if either of us was going to leave alive. I began to understand what dangerous people can be experiencing which makes them dangerous to us.”

The experience had a profound impact on Lorraine and it was obvious to her that the justice system was not providing offenders with the tools which eventually would allow them to be reintegrated into society. “Many of these offenders had lived such difficult lives and their problems run so deep – the tools that the system gave us, as social workers, are beside the point in terms of the realities that these prisoners have experienced.”

Lorraine began to shift her approach in her work. She researched policies related to dangerous offenders and came to the conclusion that the use of legislation often was tied to the public’s fear rather than to the seriousness of the offence the criminals had committed. “An approach to justice based on retribution and an adversarial legal set of tools and definitions simply do not fit the nature of the problem,” Lorraine states firmly. “Bringing about changes in public understanding and judicial practice has become the work of my life.”

Her current involvement with the Church Council on Justice and Corrections reinforces her feeling that the basic underpinnings of justice do not have to be punitive. The mandate of the Church Council is to assist churches and other community groups to reflect on and participate in the reform of the criminal justice system. That reform is focussed on a restorative approach whereby victims, offenders and communities can move towards a healing and community-building response to conflict and crime.

“For Canadians, justice is based on creating outcasts and keeping people excluded from the community. This is a different approach, it’s restorative justice,” Lorraine explains. The Church Council looks for an alternative to incarceration – and for good reason. Eighty-four percent of inmates in provincial peniten-

tiaries are in prison for nonviolent offenses, and it costs \$52,953 a year to keep an offender in prison compared to \$10,951 for supervision in the community.

Beyond these costs, the Church Council sees the value in addressing the needs of both the victim of the crime and the offender. The justice process is centered around the actions of the accused and largely overlooks the psychological and spiritual needs of the victim. The key, Lorraine asserts, is to help offenders come to terms with their guilt and work through a process towards repairing their relationship with the victim and the community.

The Collaborative Justice Project (CJP) in Ottawa attempts to mediate this process. The project is a comprehensive approach to restorative justice and attempts to address the needs of both victims and offenders. It serves victims by providing opportunities for an admission of responsibility by the offender, an opportunity to meet with the accused, a voice in the court sentence and personal support, thereby encouraging personal healing and closure. The accused are encouraged to explore the harm that has been done to the victim, develop a plan to address the personal issues that contributed to the behaviour and initiate reparation to the victim.

The number of mediation projects which deal with first-time offenders and minor offenses is growing. But Project Coordinator, Jamie Scott, explains why the CJP is unique: “The initiative calls into question the emphasis on ‘punishment’ as opposed to ‘healing.’ But more importantly, we are implementing a best practices approach in an area where restorative justice is not being applied: in cases where violent offenses have been committed.” Jamie notes that both Lorraine and Andrejs were instrumental in establishing the Collaborative Justice Project: “Lorraine is a ‘conceptualizer’ and



*Andrejs Berzins recently has retired from his position as Chief Crown Attorney in Ottawa-Carleton and has been praised for implementing various restorative justice initiatives in the community.*

comes up with many creative ideas. Andrejs has had the courage and insight to be willing to try new things within the criminal justice system. I would have to say that the Collaborative Justice Project is evidence of the culmination of their thinking.”

Lorraine comments that she and Andrejs shape each others’ understanding of the justice system in Canada. “Because our jobs align us with different sets of people, we are both surrounded by a variety of different perspectives. Over the years we’ve pooled our observations, knowledge and understanding, and we’ve learned a great deal from each other.” As Chief Crown Attorney in Ottawa-Carleton for 15 years, Andrejs’ position takes him to the opposite side of the criminal justice system – into the courtroom.

Andrejs is also a proponent of what has become known as ‘satisfying justice,’ a response to crime that helps victims heal while holding offenders accountable for their actions. He notes thoughtfully: “I’ve been able, in my job, to experiment with some of the ideas that Lorraine has been advocating over the years. It’s a good combination: her theoretical concepts and my ability, given my position, to try them out in the community.”

Indeed, Andrejs has been praised for his ability to implement restorative justice initiatives locally through his input into the criminal justice system in Ottawa-Carleton. Ten years ago, Andrejs helped to implement a mediation program in which victims and offenders would meet to resolve their differences. The program was the first of its kind in Ontario and has served

as a model for other jurisdictions. More recently, he assisted in developing the Community Justice Committee project. These committees consist of volunteers from the community who mediate discussions among victims, offenders, families of both parties and social workers.

Mac Lindsay was Andrejs' Senior Assistant for 15 years. He describes Andrejs as an "idea person" and talks about how Andrejs implemented an informal diversion program for first offenders who had committed minor offenses. "It was a way to divert cases away from the regular system which meant fewer trials. Andrejs' initiative reduced the 'clogging up' of the court system with minor matters," Mac praised.

Andrejs also has been recognized for his work relating to offenders with psychiatric disabilities. In June 1999, he received an award from the Canadian Mental Health Association for his work in creating the Court Outreach Program at the Court House in Ottawa. The program ensures that the special needs of accused persons suffering from mental health problems are adequately met. A few months later, the Government of Ontario presented Andrejs with the Amethyst Award which honours an outstanding professional in the Ontario Public Service.

Beth Lynch is Manager of the Victim Crisis Unit for the Ottawa-Carleton Regional Police Service. She first met Andrejs in 1980 when they were both members of a task force on wife assault. "Andrejs was really ahead of

his time. Before there were any formalized government guidelines, he worked hard to ensure that supports were put in place for victims and helped to implement the Victim Witness Assistance Program here in Ottawa." Beth also has kind words for Lorraine: "She is a wonderful activist with many creative ideas, and Andrejs feels that her work has allowed him to be more creative in his job. They are both incredibly committed people who work tirelessly to fight for change."

Keeping busy since he has retired from his position as Crown Attorney, Andrejs has just returned to his native Latvia with Lorraine. The couple is participating in a Canadian Criminal Justice Reform Project which will assist Latvians in improving their justice system. The Canadian delegation, of which Andrejs and Lorraine are members, consists of a team of experts including a judge and a probation officer. In Latvia, there is no probation system and few alternatives exist in sentencing. The team was sent to share information about the justice system in Canada and to inform Latvians about different approaches to criminal justice.

"Restorative justice is still an idea which is quite new – it's not yet mainstream," Andrejs comments. "But the way our current adversarial system works, there's inevitably someone who is not happy. Usually the victim's needs are so great that it is almost impossible for the justice system to address them. Restorative justice helps to provide a more humane system which would adequately meet human needs."

**Joe Bova** has held a variety of positions throughout his career. He has worked as a barber, an aid for the Liberal party, a community developer and he currently manages his own construction company. But the position with which Joe identifies most strongly is that of a volunteer.

As a business owner in Winnipeg, Joe has always felt that he has a responsibility to contribute to his community. “I believe that any successful businessman is successful precisely because he is fully involved in his community – because he puts back into the community ten times what he took out,” Joe affirms. And Joe certainly has made some substantial contributions to Winnipeg – he is credited with helping to turn the city’s once-deteriorating Corydon Avenue into a bustling Little Italy.

When Joe came to Canada from his native Italy in 1962, he was 15 years old and his family settled in Winnipeg. Too young to work, he returned to school. His interest in cities and their neighbourhoods was born a few years later as a student of Political Science at the University of Winnipeg’s Institute of Urban Studies. Joe’s main interest in community development stemmed from his questioning why some cities are so vibrant and full of character, while others seem plagued with social, physical and environmental problems. “My passion became to help cities come alive,” Joe explains.

Joe became involved in the construction industry in 1974. His partners had the technical skills, and Joe felt he had the necessary management skills and networks to make the masonry company a success. Now, Man-Shield is the largest general contractor in Manitoba with offices throughout the province and contracts across Canada and the United States. “Our objective is to achieve a more national scope. We already have a permanent office in Thunder



*Joe Bova believes that “history and culture are two elements of utmost importance in the development of any community.”*

Bay, Ontario, and our next step is to establish offices in Calgary and Edmonton.”

In the early 1980s, Joe built his first office building on Corydon Avenue. “I think I chose Corydon more out of nostalgia than any other reason. When I first immigrated to Winnipeg, I spent a lot of time on Corydon. There were many Italians in the neighbourhood, and I have fond memories of the area. I remember a group of us gathered around a shortwave radio every Sunday morning at Nucci’s Grocery Store to listen to the soccer games broadcast live from Italy.” For Joe, it was a powerful memory. But the avenue was poor, neglected, in a state of decay, and the crime rate made personal safety a concern. Families began to move to the suburbs.

“I couldn’t bear to see the street deteriorate. When I imagine my favourite city, I see



the shops of Via Veneto, I see the Trevi Fountain, I see the Bernini Fountains on Piazza Navona, I see artists painting, sculpting, making music, I hear the din of the engines of industry, and above all I see people, masses of people exuding their energy to create something we call community.” Joe felt that Corydon Avenue was dying because it lacked a real sense of community.

Joe went back to the lessons he had learned while studying at the University of Winnipeg. “I realized that the best-developed communities are those where the citizen involvement is the highest,” he explains. So he got to work. He called on his neighbours, organized meetings and formed the Corydon Merchants Association. He met with area residents, asking them what they felt would improve the situation of the neighbourhood and encouraging them to become involved in the development process.

Though the City tried to impose a development plan on the community, Joe realized that it made the most sense to respect the ideas of the residents themselves. “The simple lesson I learned in those days was that a fool could put on his clothes better than a wise man could do it for him,” Joe comments. He understood that the key to revitalizing Corydon Avenue lies in its character – or what ancient Greeks called *Ethos*: the essence of being. “I deeply believe that history and culture are two elements of utmost importance in the development of any community,” Joe states firmly.

Corydon Avenue clearly had character, it just had to be nurtured. Joe’s first initiative involved relandscaping the street with funding from the municipal government. Redesigning the street to give it a more Italian mood and spirit acted as a catalyst for residents. The physical facelift worked wonders: Residents began to



*The construction of the Circle of Life Thunderbird House in downtown Winnipeg is testament to the Aboriginal community’s commitment to their neighbourhood.*

identify with the area which was developing a personality and life of its own.

Merchants were encouraged to build open-air patios. Italian organizations began to hold social activities on Corydon. Winnipeg's annual Italian festival, which attracts more than 120,000 tourists, was centered around the area. Joe enthuses: "Now Corydon Avenue is a place where visitors come to buy a gelato and take a walk to admire the uniqueness of the neighbourhood." But the transformation did not happen overnight. Nonetheless, in the past 15 years, tax revenues for the area have nearly doubled. "Success breeds success: Corydon has become one of the safest streets in Manitoba because a well-used city street is apt to be a safe street," Joe explains.

Greg Fiorentino is a professional engineer and one of Joe's partners at Man-Shield. He remarks: "Corydon Avenue was Joe's first major community development project, and he's done something that the City of Winnipeg and its Italian community can be very proud of." Greg affirms that Joe was the driving force behind the initiative: "When Joe decides to do something, he gets very passionate about it. He's a visionary who doesn't take 'no' for an answer."

Two years ago Winnipeg's Mayor, Susan Thompson, asked Joe for his help in revitalizing Main Street. With the success of Corydon Avenue behind him, Mayor Thompson thought Joe could apply the same principles to an area of the city which was hopelessly neglected and abandoned by all but the poor. The area was riddled with problems, including crime, drugs, prostitution and arson. But no one had asked the residents of the area what they wanted for their neighbourhood. In answering these questions, community members began to harbour hope for their street.

But Main Street was an area of town with which Joe was less familiar. He visited the neighbourhood and thought that it must have had character once, but clearly there was nothing left of it. How does one assign character to someone or something? "Well, you go back to its roots," Joe answers simply. "To resurrect Main Street, we went to the area and looked for anything still burning under the ashes that made up the street – any sign of life. We found it at the Aboriginal Centre." And where they could not find any life they looked into the history of the area: They found that Assiniboine, Métis and Selkirk settlers had once lived there. In this history, they uncovered the *Ethos* of Main Street.

Archie Arnott is the Vice-President of the Royal Bank in Winnipeg and has worked closely with Joe. Both men were members of the North Main Task Force created by the Mayor to address Main Street's problems. Archie and Joe are both committed to downtown redevelopment and helping the city's Aboriginal community. Archie notes: "One of the things that impresses me most about Joe is his devotion to the task at hand. At first, Joe didn't know very much about Aboriginal beliefs and history, but he worked hard to learn about their culture. Joe is very sincere in his approach – he developed genuine friendships in a very short time. The Aboriginal community saw that he could be trusted."

Today, the transformation of Main Street is still in its infancy, but several groups have partnered to help achieve this goal. The Aboriginal people of Winnipeg have made a commitment to the area by agreeing to build a community centre named the Circle of Life Thunderbird House. The centre will house a day care, a youth complex and a gallery which will showcase the work of local artists. A housing project also is planned for the neighbourhood, and the Oserodak Ukrainian Culture Cen-

tre is considering expansion. Though Main Street still has a long way to go, the first steps have been taken and Joe is optimistic. “Main Street has the potential to bring the Native community into the mainstream of the socioeconomic and cultural life of Winnipeg. And there’s nothing more beautiful than to watch people take ownership in their own community.”

Joe is a wonderful storyteller. He often tells a tale that captures his philosophy of community development: “When I was growing up in Italy, I was told a story by the elders in my

town. A boy caught a sparrow that had fallen out of its nest when he saw an elder walk up the street toward him. The boy placed the sparrow in his hand and thought: “Now I will trick the elder. I will ask him whether the bird I have in my hand is dead or alive. If he answers that the sparrow is alive, I will squeeze my hand and it will die. If he answers that it is dead, I will open my hand and it will fly away.” The elder approached and the boy asked: “Old man, is this bird I have in my hand dead or alive?” The elder replied: “That, my son, is strictly in your hands.”



**Chris Ross**'s first encounter with magazine publishing was at the age of 16 in his Grade 11 English class in Fort Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan. His teacher had assigned a creative writing project and suggested that Chris develop a newsletter containing interviews with people from the Aboriginal community. Chris explains: "When I did the interviews, I asked the people I talked to if it would be all right if I included their business cards in the newsletter. When they offered to pay me for advertising, I started to think that maybe this was a project I could take further."

And take it further, he did. Chris Tyrone Ross, now 20, is Editor-in-Chief of *Generation X* (now known as GX), a magazine currently distributed in Saskatchewan. Its main goal is to create a positive image of Aboriginal youth. Complete with articles on music, fashion and sports, GX has all the elements of a publication that appeals to teen readers. Chris is adamant in explaining that GX is a magazine geared to all youth, not just Aboriginals. However, Chris is using the publication to help remove barriers faced by First Nations people by attempting to give them a vehicle to express themselves.

"We feature an Aboriginal person on every cover and many of our writers are Aboriginal youth," Chris states proudly. "There are a lot of negative stereotypes of First Nations people and this magazine gives them a more positive image and a stronger voice."

But the magazine was not born overnight. In September 1997, Chris published the first edition of a newsletter called *Inner City Youth* – the predecessor of GX. It was distributed in inner-city high schools across the province. A year later, Chris won the Innovator Award at the 1998 Sasktel Youth Awards of Excellence. This particular award, created that year specifically with Chris in mind, honours a



*Chris Ross (centre) poses with delegates of the 7th World Summit on Youth Entrepreneurship in New York City.*

young adult who has achieved success in a business venture. With renewed confidence in his abilities, Chris published the first edition of *Generation X* in the fall of 1998. The 10-page, black-and-white publication was distributed in local high schools and quickly became very popular.

A year later, Chris received a business grant from Aboriginal Business Canada and a loan from the Saskatchewan Indian Equity Foundation to expand the magazine. "I wanted to turn the magazine into a full-fledged business," Chris explains. Now armed with a solid business plan (developed with the help of the Saskatchewan Indian Equity Foundation) and enough funding to properly expand his venture, Chris bought office supplies, desks and computers, and rented office space at the First Nations Bank building in Saskatoon. He immediately began working on the special First Anniversary issue of the publication. The Millennium issue soon followed and featured a glossy colour cover and a fashion 'centerfold'

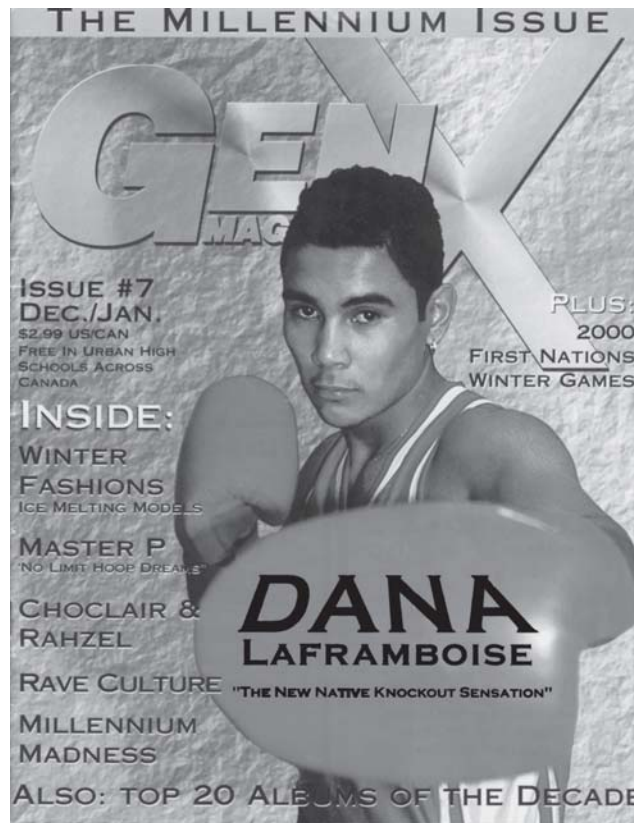
with two native models. The most recent issue is the largest yet – a 48-page magazine which now boasts a circulation of 8,000 copies.

Though the magazine is available free to high schools and local merchants – the publication is distributed in cafés – Chris also sells subscriptions to the quarterly edition. He explains that, like any magazine, most of his revenue comes from advertising.

Chris understands the value of partnerships in his venture. As a member of the Saskatoon District Chamber of Commerce, he places great importance on networking and works with various organizations to obtain support for his publication. Chris often negotiates deals with community businesses. For example, the photo shoot for the centerfold of the millenium issue was done by a local photographer in exchange for a full page of advertising.

Chris notes that the biggest obstacles he encountered in launching the magazine were organizational difficulties. “The main problems I ran into were time management and financial problems – trying to figure out where the money was going to come from. Plus, a lot of people didn’t think I could get the magazine off the ground. There was a lot of pressure from all angles.”

Paul Barnsley, Editor of Saskatchewan SAGE, says that Chris surprised a lot of people. Paul first met Chris at a Youth Job Fair where Chris was sitting at a booth promoting his newsletter. Paul was intrigued and approached him to talk about his initiative. “Chris has an atypical energy for a 20-year-old,” Paul enthuses. “He is ambitious and is doing things that kids his age just don’t think of doing.”



*The cover of the special Millennium issue of GX magazine.*

As a result of his meeting with Paul, Chris began to write articles and columns on youth issues for well-established Aboriginal publications including Saskatchewan SAGE and SaskIndian. Paul sees many advantages to having Chris involved with his newspaper: “Despite his young age, Chris is very political and he is extremely plugged in to what is going on in the industry. He’s a great contact for me because he is so well connected.”

Chris explains that he gained much of his experience from Bert Crowfoot, publisher of the national newspaper *Windspeaker*. Chris met Bert in Regina at the National Aboriginal Achievement Awards. Chris wanted to learn more about the publishing industry, and Bert invited him to *Windspeaker*’s head office in Alberta to observe for two weeks. “Bert was a mentor to me and I’ve learned a lot from him,” Chris affirms.

Bert comments: “It was interesting to have Chris at our office. Chris has a bright future – to achieve what he has at his age is remarkable.” Bert is a softball coach and takes great pleasure in coaching youth and helping them to succeed. For Bert, coaching a 20-year-old newspaper editor is really no different than what he does with his young athletes. Watching Chris build his magazine, Bert sees all the triumphs and obstacles Chris faces along the way. “He is very motivated but his youth sometimes shows. Chris has learned the hard way in some cases: He has had to make difficult business decisions and the results weren’t always what he expected. He learned some important lessons. He still has a lot to learn about the business but he certainly has great potential.”

Bert notes that when Chris first started his publication, he was enjoying his experience so much that he wanted to encourage other young adults to follow in his footsteps and start their own newspapers. Bert explained how important it was that Chris capitalize on this

market rather than encourage direct competition! “I had to tell him that he had a really good thing going with his magazine – he was tapping into a youth demographic that the other Aboriginal publications in this province don’t appeal to. I guess I tried to convince him to ‘think business.’ ”

Chris changed his line of thinking and decided to encourage Aboriginal youth in other ways: He now sits on the selection committee for the SaskTel Aboriginal Youth Awards of Excellence. GX also features a column entitled ‘Leaders of the New Millennium’ in which the magazine profiles young Native adults who “represent the importance of education, the drive for success and the power to learn.” Among others, the article features Guy Lonechild who, at 26 years of age, is the youngest Chief in the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations. The column profiles a wide range of young leaders, from athletes to filmmakers, and describes their success stories.

“I think I have a good eye for people, and there really are a lot of young people out there who are doing some great things. They deserve some credit and GX tries to give them that,” Chris remarks.

Chris is always looking for new ways to expand his business and eventually hopes to become more involved in the telecommunications industry. He recently attended the 7th World Summit on Youth Entrepreneurship where he and other young adults from different countries met to discuss business ideas and opportunities for joint ventures. “What I’d really like to do is start my own multimedia business,” Chris says enthusiastically. Nominated in 1999 by *Maclean*’s magazine as one of ‘100 Canadians to Watch,’ we’re certainly watching, because as Chris says: “I’m only getting started!”

*For more information, visit the GX website at <http://www.gx-online.com>.*

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