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## PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY



East Scarborough Boys and Girls Club executive director Ron Rock

### **Kingston-Galloway: eastern promises**

BY SHAWN MICALLEF June 09, 2009 13:06

Toronto has dozens of neighbourhoods with names most of us don't recognize. Of those we do, either know them because they're celebrated or because they're notorious.

The City of Toronto has designated 13 "priority" neighbourhoods and some have familiar name that fall into the latter category. Malvern or Jane-Finch, for example, are known for reasons residents there wish they weren't. So too with Kingston-Galloway, another one of those 13 neighbourhoods, located in the almost-farthest reaches of East Scarborough.

Neighbourhoods are like people — bad reputations are easily acquired but hard to shake, but with neighbourhoods there's the added injustice that the reputation can be spread by relatively few individuals. The crossroads of Kingston and Galloway Roads would likely not have risen to notoriety had it not been for the [Galloway Boys](#), the local gang that knew both how to both pick memorably sing-songy name and to give a neighbourhood a bad reputation. The Galloway Boys' activities —including murder — placed the area into Toronto's wider consciousness.

The curious thing about Kingston-Galloway, and a lot of neighbourhoods like it, is that when you are there, in middle of it, you might never know it's a priority area. There are apartment towers,

bungalows, townhouses, strip malls, used car lots, Starbucks, Tim Hortons and high schools — things that resemble what a lot of Canada looks like. The landscapes of Canadian priority don't match the cinematic picture that's been painted of "bad neighbourhoods," so there is a sense of cognitive dissonance when there.

Just like in downtown Toronto, very different environments can exist close to each other, further undermining the cinematic (that is, American) image of [blighted neighbourhoods that go on for miles](#). Travel south on Galloway a few blocks on foot, across the GO and VIA tracks, and you encounter the big lawns and bigger trees of [Guildwood Village](#), one of the wealthiest postal codes in the city.

At the south end of Galloway is the old Guild Inn, its grounds turned into an outdoor sculpture gallery made up of chunks of old Toronto architecture from lost buildings. Next door a lost road — likely the ghostly extension of Galloway Road — leads down a steep ravine to the beach that stretches east and west for kilometres. Unless you know what's on top of the bluffs, it's remarkable that a massive metro area of nearly 5 million people completely disappears.

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I went for a walk with Trichelle Primo. She's lived in Kingston-Galloway all of her 19 years and runs an after-school program out of the East Scarborough Boys and Girls Club on Galloway Road just on the other side of the tracks from the Guild and bluffs. "It's not as bad as people make it seem," she says. "Everybody knows everybody."

As we zigzag around the neighbourhood, down a quiet postwar suburban street with the disproportionately mythical name of "Overture Street," through the Gabriel Dumont co-op (with one of the highest concentrations of Native Canadians in Toronto), and by public housing buildings, she greets people along the way and points out the obvious: the area is clean, it's quiet and it's more like the rest of Toronto than different.

The reasons this is a priority neighbourhood are somewhat hidden at first glance, but as the Boys and Girls Club executive director Ron Rock explains, it's due to lack of services. "Downtown you can walk a kilometre and you'll hit all kinds of services," he says. "In East Scarborough, they are few and far between."

He shows me around the neighbourhood as well, pointing out Toronto Community Housing buildings — often where the trouble with the Galloway Boys happened before police effectively broke up the gang a few years ago — and then the [East Scarborough Storefront](#) nearby on Lawrence. Located in a former police station, the Storefront is a collection of 35 social agencies under one roof — "a one stop shop" — that share resources and offer services. It provides a

computer room, lessons on how to access the internet and make resumes, space for community groups to meet, courses on nutrition and even a community garden outside.

Sahar Vermezyari, co-ordinator of programs and services at the Storefront, says they received 17,000 requests for services last year, “from how to find a lawyer to belly dancing classes — we want people to feel comfortable enough to ask for help.” Like Trichelle, Ron also seems to know everybody, engaging people along the way personally, asking a fellow at the Storefront how his job search is going, for example. As the community catches up to the rest of Toronto with service it’s obvious there’s already a strong network of people here who provide the solid human infrastructure that is as strong as the kind small towns are romanticized for having.

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Wandering the neighbourhood, you see physical traces of a small town. Before the crossroad-inspired name took over, Kingston-Galloway was known as West Hill, a name that lives on here and there on street signs and school buildings. West Hill was a busy stop on the road to Kingston but eventually it was consumed by Scarborough and later Toronto. On Lawrence, in between community housing towers and townhouses, is St. Margaret’s church and park. Its adjacent cemetery is not fenced in, so the park blends into it, the kind of fuzzy boundaries we don’t see as much in cities.

Each Thursday during the summer, a Festival Market is held in the park. Local vendors selling either produce or crafts and small items can rent a table for \$2 or \$5 dollars. One of the organizers Sandra Hutley, has lived in the area for 35 years and still calls it West Hill — a name, she says, that started to disappear when they lost their post office 10 years ago. Like many longtime residents of Scarborough, the change she notes most are the buildings that sprouted up in between the houses over the years.

This market is important to the area, as there are few public places available for community gathering. In 2007, nearby Morningside Mall was torn down, replaced by an outdoor strip mall. It’s similar to [the story in Don Mills](#), where the former mall served as a neighbourhood hub, but the new outdoor shopping centre leaves little room for formal and informal community gathering.

The lack of public space other than parks makes a place like the Boys and Girls Club critically important. Trichelle has been going there since she was seven and feels like she grew up there. Serving over 16,000 kids last year, the club has just launched a campaign to raise \$1.5 million to expand and open up the nearly windowless 1970s building, adding new program rooms, arts, media and dance studios and an expanded gym. The area’s former city councillor and hawkish budget chief David Soknacki revealed his old-fashioned Red Tory self by donating his \$30,000 councillor’s severance to kick-start the campaign.

The club's motto, "A good place to be," will endure and get better with the expanded club — but hanging out in Kingston-Galloway, the feeling I get from residents I meet is that it could be the whole neighbourhood's motto — something not even the Galloway Boys could take away.

[Psychogeography](#) appears every two weeks. Email [letters@eyeweekly.com](mailto:letters@eyeweekly.com).

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*Email us at: [LETTERS@EYEWEEKLY.COM](mailto:LETTERS@EYEWEEKLY.COM) or send your questions to [EYEWEEKLY.COM](mailto:EYEWEEKLY.COM)  
625 Church St, 6th Floor, Toronto M4Y 2G1*