

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Good evening and thank you for coming out to the annual meeting of this historic Montreal institution and, in doing so, showing the board, volunteers and staff such support in their on-going efforts.

As you will soon be hearing in Lynn Verge's Executive Director's report, we have had an exceptionally busy and productive year and I will leave it to her to present some of these accomplishments.

I would like to start by highlighting an important change in the structure of our organization since our last annual meeting. Our membership adopted a new set of by-laws at a special meeting held in November. I would like to thank the members of the board for their conscientious focus on the complicated and important task of drafting these by-laws and an especial thanks to Lionel Blanshay for guiding us through the legal intricacies.

Our extended history has left us with many legacies from bygone eras and some of these were evident in our old by-laws. For example, previous rules required that only Life Members were permitted to vote at meetings or stand for election to our board. The new by-laws usher in a new more democratic era, where Annual Members can take their place alongside Life Members in determining the direction of our institution.

While certain antiquated elements of our old by-laws no longer reflect a 21st century Atwater Library and Computer Centre, our heritage as Canada's only Mechanics' Institute still in operation will remain. Our National Historic Site status was awarded not just because of our building but to reflect the evolution and continuity of the activities that happen here. I often stop to read the words carved over the circulation desk 90 years ago: "*The Object of This Institute is to afford instruction and knowledge in the Arts, Sciences and Industries.*" This defining statement still speaks to our sense of education and outreach to the community. We are proud of our roots and always seek out ways to honour them, as has been done so splendidly tonight with the opening of our new archival exhibit curated by Edward McCann.

Speaking of our building, it is a pleasure to see progress on the grand project of restoring and updating it while making use of some of the Parks Canada matching grant. Some exterior work is not readily evident but the most recent improvements are there for us to see and admire. I refer to the brass railing overlooking the atrium and the restoration of the Tupper Street door. The railing makes this a safer place and was required to bring us up to municipal code, but was done in a manner very much in keeping with our 1920s building. We have much more planned on the building front, including that much desired elevator. But we have a two-fold challenge ahead of us: to raise the funds to pay for the restorations and upgrades, and to manage the disruption while still providing our full range of services to the community. We look to all of you - members, volunteers, staff and donors - for your support and cooperation in this challenge.

As some of you will recall from my report at last year's meeting, I stumbled into the role of President when I volunteered to fill in on an interim basis after the resignation of my predecessor. What has sustained me in this challenging role over the past 15 months has been knowing that I have not been alone, but was one of a team of board members, all of whom believe in the importance of the Atwater to our community and bring their diverse skills to the cause. We have had several new members join the board since our last annual meeting and I would thank them for volunteering and ask David Tarr and Karin Marks to stand and be properly introduced, as well as Noah Redler who will be nominated tonight as a new director. We have also had retirements from the board, either during the year, or effective with this evening's meeting. Thank you Philip Webster, Lynn Burgess, Christiane Loiselle, Nahid Ahmed and Richard Lord for your services to the cause. This leaves to thank the backbone of the board – those who will soldier on at my side and contribute so much in so many ways to our success – Marshall Wansbrough, Martin Cundall, Bob Bourdius, Lionel Blanshay, Sam Gatelaro, Paul Marriott and Mary Rivard-David.

A highlight of being President has been attending our semi-annual volunteer appreciation lunches. I hear some great stories about what first moved individuals to offer their time to the Atwater community and what keeps them doing so, for multiple decades in some cases. It was a particular pleasure to present a number of long service awards to our volunteers,

capped off with the awarding of an Honorary Life Membership to our longest serving volunteer, LaFlorya Gauthier.

While the lifeblood of this organization is its volunteers, credit for our forward movement really belongs to our dedicated staff lead by the wonderful and ever-energetic Lynn Verge. It is a great credit to Lynn that her biggest accomplishment has to be the building of such a competent and professional team, both by mentoring existing employees and making some great new hires.

While every non-profit organization will have its challenges, financial and otherwise, we have made tremendous progress over the past year. The credit belongs to the host of volunteers and staff; I merely “presided” and have been honoured to have had the opportunity to do so.

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted.

Mark Gallop, President
14 June 2011