

# An inspiring story on the eve of International Women's Day



**Mike Cohen**

On the eve of International Women's Day, it is my privilege to recognize a

Kirkland lady who can inspire us all: Lora Cerulli Totilo.

I met Lora recently at a power lunch organized by Marcie Balaban, the visionary behind corporate relationship marketing organization Let's Get Going and I knew I had to tell her story. By day she

runs her own recruitment agency called PCV (Personnel Chez Vous). But when we met she wanted to share her story to others whom may be suffering from emotional abuse. "I want to show the world that you can still get up, put your lipstick on, sincerely smile and contribute to the world," she maintains.

Without identifying names, Lora says she was made to feel that her birth was an inconvenience. "Throughout my lifetime, to put it lightly, I was reminded of that," she says. "Unfortunately, when I would raise my hand trying to express my hurt, I was just told I was being too sensitive, a baby, an ugly redhead. I was advised not to cry... it just made me look even uglier. I was told I was fat, a pain and that was that. Sure once in a while I was thrown a compliment, but apologies never followed.

"Like many childhoods, mine too did leave me with some deep wounds and scars. Only now have I finally just started to understand how to self-love and finally self-validate myself. I feel so badly I did not learn sooner."

After being bullied so badly in Grade 6, Lora took it upon herself at the age of 12 to find a private school and enroll at Villa Maria After being refused entry to College Jean de Brébeuf at the age of 16 due to her lack of French proficiency she would not take "no" for an answer, got accepted and graduated in two years alongside with all of her francophone friends.

Success in business followed as director of sales at a large mutual fund company. While on maternity leave, the institution decided to conveniently restructure the organization and she had her post abolished. With the encouragement of her husband she became a recruiter, first for a company and then her own. I was so pleased to meet her. Lora is indeed an exceptional role model for women everywhere.

**NORTH CAROLINA VIBE:** Dollard des Ormeaux native Stephanie Freed-Burns



**Lora Cerulli Totilo**

PVC PHOTO



**Stephanie Freed-Burns and Visit North Carolina's Eleanor Talley.**

BY MIKE COHEN/THE SUBURBAN

is the Canadian public relations manager for Visit North Carolina, the official tourism organization for the state. Based in Toronto, she was here last week for a series of media sessions alongside regional representatives from Raleigh, Charlotte, Durham, Brevard, Johnston County and the Outer Banks. I took part in the event at Marcus Restaurant at the new Four Seasons Hotel. The State of North Carolina sure did come across to me as impressive. What does it have to offer? Professional sports teams in the NFL, NHL and NBA; college sport powerhouses like

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As a young man I became more involved in protests and causes for Indigenous Rights and before I turned 30 years old, I too became an elected representative in my community and quickly got involved in issues on the Regional and National level. After 2 terms in the political seat I decided to step away from politics due to the restraints of the machine. I decided that I would be more effective and able to create change at a better level through the music platform. This platform is my new battle field and allows me to talk directly to a broader audience. Hip Hop's my weapon.

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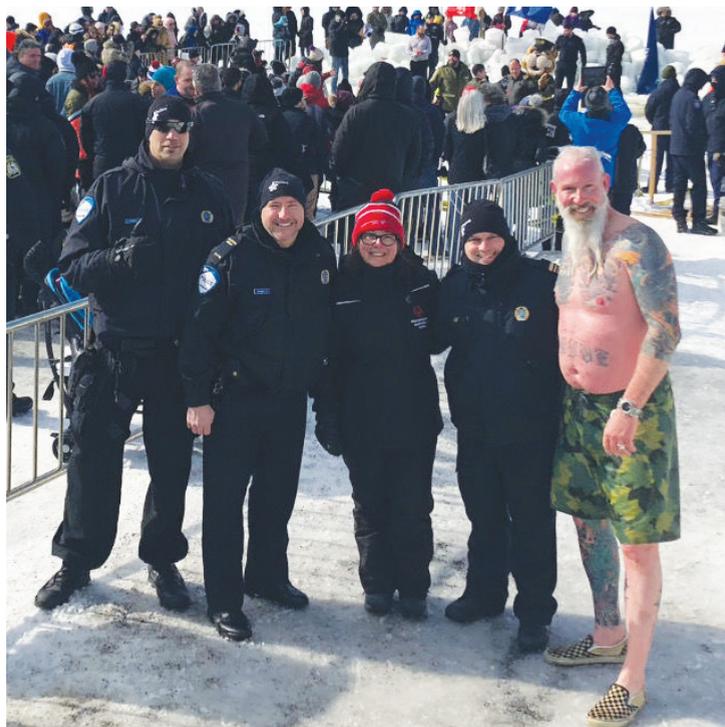
## The Special Olympics 11th edition of the Polar Bear challenge

By Chelsey St-Pierre  
The Suburban

The Special Olympics fundraising team set up the 11th edition of the Polar Bear challenge in Lachine recently to raise funds for more than 8,000 Special Olympic participants in the province who compete in 17 different sports.

The Polar Bear challenge is a unique fundraiser where the brave participants pay \$50 to jump off the ice into the freezing water of the St-Lawrence river at the Lachine canal. The scene looked like a massive ice fishing hole, but instead of fishing out — the participants were fishing themselves in.

A group of people dressed in summer wear stood dancing near the entrance of the event dumping water on themselves and grooving to disco beats. Across the walkway from them was a hot chocolate stand where everyone could go to warm up. All around; police force members of the Sûreté du Québec, the SPVM, CN police and the



Left to right: SPVM Agt. Santana, SPVM spokesperson Jean-Pierre Brabant, Francine Gendron (Special Olympics executive director), Far right, Sterling Downey - Deputy Mayor of Montreal.

RCMP attended the event as proud supporters of the Special Olympic games.

Deputy Montreal Mayor Sterling Downey jumped in the ice-cold water in support of the

cause. "I feel that it is important to encourage and inspire people through my actions." Downey told *The Suburban*. "Today is my son's birthday; it is important for me to instill the important value of supporting the community in my family," he explained calmly whilst standing outside dripping wet, wearing a bathing suit in sub-zero temperature.

According to Special Olympics executive director Francine Gendron, the opportunity for special needs individuals to participate in sports and to compete in the Special Olympic games helps them to grow in all areas of their life.

"The participants gain an enormous boost of self esteem which helps to develop their autonomy," Gendron told *The Suburban*. "When they learn to push their limits in sports, it drives them to push their limits in life," she explained. "When you see them competing, you just fall in love because of the great joy you experience watching them." ■

BY CHELSEY ST-PIERRE

### COHEN

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Duke and North Carolina State; world class BBQ and incredible southern fusion cuisine; funky and artsy Mountain towns; unique boutique accommodations; epic cycling routes all the way to the stunning Outer Banks beaches with unparalleled windsurfing and fishing; great art museums, music; and shopping in Charlotte and Raleigh. In 2018 Air Canada launched new direct service to Raleigh from Montreal.

**LA CAGE WEST ISLAND:** For West Islanders who miss La Cage, Brasserie Sportive (nee Cage Aux Sports) after it closed in Pointe Claire last year, President and CEO Jean Bédard told me last week that his team is looking for space to open a new one somewhere in the same area. Regional Director Adrian Saad, a West Islander, is part of the search team.

**COHEN CHATTER:** K103.7 FM Radio Kahnawake News chief Paul Graif announced last week that veteran broadcaster Jeremy Zafran will be the station's afternoon news announcer and reporter. Jeremy was most recently at CBC Radio One. Both are West Island residents.



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