

Twenty-five (!) years at Bettye Hyde Co-op

Cindy Mitchell

When I first saw the ad in the *Ottawa Citizen* for the Director's position at a historic Ottawa co-operative school in Sandy Hill I couldn't believe my luck. My husband and I had just moved to Ottawa for his federal government job and I didn't know where I was going to fit in. While exploring our new city, Sandy Hill was one of the neighbourhoods that impressed us with its beautiful homes and eclectic mix.

Having been the director of two other co-operative schools back in Winnipeg I knew from the moment I stepped into the century-old All Saints for my interview that this was exactly where I wanted to start the next chapter of my professional and personal life. What an amazing 25 years it has been.

All our dearest and closest friends have raised their children starting at Bettye Hyde, and our 23-year-old son Deni is also a proud grad. The support received through the years from our dedicated parent volunteers has allowed me to continue the legacy of Bettye Hyde herself. After 75 years Bettye Hyde Co-operative remains a place for children and their families to meet, share and care for each other and develop lifelong connections and friendships.

I had the privilege of celebrating the school's 60th anniversary with one of its founders, Polly Hill, and Bettye Hyde,

who was the school's first paid employee. Diane Stacey was my first co-worker, one in a line of wonderful women (including our Blackburn Ave. neighbour Lynn Murphy) who have kept the school vibrant and welcoming. Rosemary Bayne was the church secretary and she and I became fast friends. Soon after I arrived, the minister Joan Riding planted a tree in memory of her father and to shade our children. The support we received from the church usually funnelled through one of my first volunteer presidents, Jane Waterston, who always advocated on our behalf and shared our space with her Sunday school children.

When it was time to leave the church basement I was worried I was losing a community, but in fact the move just expanded it. The people who stepped up to find us a new space were alumni and neighbours—people who cared about maintaining the mixed use of our neighbourhood and its historic homes.

Leanne Moussa, Masood Quereshi, Alexander Armstrong, Randy Innes, Dean Pallen and Frithjof Lutscher put in countless hours to secure and develop our beautiful new home. The house at 43 Blackburn had belonged to one of Bettye Hyde's best friends, Betty Ellis, who asked Bettye to be godmother to one of her children. I believe this is just another sign that this all was meant to be.

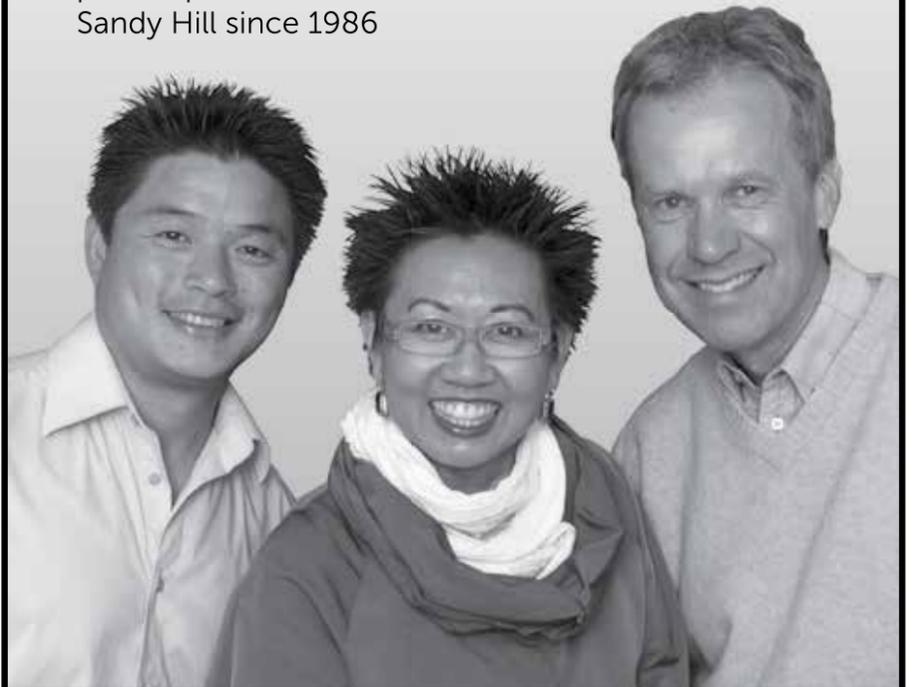
The neighbours of Bettye Hyde who chipped in five years ago to secure the beautiful "Carriage House" saved the day.

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Due to their philanthropy our dream of creating a paragon early childhood centre was realized. From a small part-time nursery school we have grown into a full-time Early Learning Centre with seven dedicated early childhood educators and a full-time cook. From the days of young parents coming in to clean, paint, provide snacks and spend their mornings helping care for the children, to today with parents still volunteering their time to be on our Board of Directors and help raise funds for the centre, Bettye Hyde has not only survived but thrived. This is a testament to the community of Sandy Hill and its people.

Left — Cindy then. "Well, that was a good hire!" says Karen Junke who helped interview Cindy Mitchell in 1993.

There are literally hundreds of people who believe in the original vision of our co-operative school that I would like to thank. From "my" first board, with Gisèle Forsey, Mary Moncrieff, Brian Murphy and Martha Scott, Jane Waterston, Anne Meehan and Claire MacDonald, to Baxter Williams who returned to his role as treasurer after 20 years to ensure our new business model was viable.

In many ways the last 25 years have flown by, but when I stop and think, there are hundreds of faces, smiles and laughter, rich and meaningful conversations, bitter-sweet good-byes, children frozen in time, lives changed, so many important pieces that bring me to a place of immeasurable gratitude. From the bottom of my heart I am so glad to have had the opportunity to spend the majority of my days with the children and their families in Sandy Hill.



Cindy now. Still working co-operatively with many — colleagues, children, community.

The Bettye Hyde team, in the Carriage House, includes l-r Cindy Mitchell, Janet Leblanc, Lisa Lajoie, Sue Bailie, Keisha Oliver-Perryman, Liz Hurtubize, Sharlene Allard and Lana St. Jean