

CENTENNIAL NEWS FEATURE - Coronavirus in Canada

Coping with COVID-19

Centennial residents share stories of how they're doing during this extremely difficult time.

"We all have a responsibility to listen to public health officials and do our part to flatten the curve."



Glad to return to Canada

While vacationing in Florida, **Gail and Dan Tustin** became aware of a virus developing in China. When CNN reported that a cruise ship had docked but was unable to let passengers disembark, this sent alarm bells ringing!

They still enjoyed sitting around the pool with other Canadians, but soon many of those who drove were leaving. The Tustins had flown down and their tickets home were for March 31. Meanwhile, COVID-19 reports were getting worse. They decided to cut short their stay after the government urged snowbirds to leave immediately! After trying to connect with Air Canada by phone and online for three days, they drove to Tampa airport to deal directly with the airline. They got a flight for March 19.

Gail and Dan arrived at the airport early but as they were about to go through security there was a computer glitch. They had to wait for over an hour along with a few hundred people behind them. Glad to report their story has a happy ending. The aircraft landed just in time for them to celebrate their 49th anniversary on Canadian soil. Canada never looked so good!

Making it work and having fun

Susan Koivisto and her husband are fortunate to work from home. "It's a juggling act," said Susan. They take turns working so each of them spends time with the children. Today is "planting beans day," effused the little four-year old who was proudly filling an egg carton with soil and seeds. Susan and her hubby feel like they are running a little school with their son leading the curriculum. Dad and son learned about yeast as they baked bread another day. The little girl is a great sport and goes along with her big brother's ideas. "We're making it work and having some fun," Susan mused about the school and daycare closures.



Showing compassion and generosity

"During this extraordinary time, we all have a responsibility to listen to public health officials and do our part to flatten the curve." **Beyhan and Khosh Farhadi** are distancing themselves from others physically but socially connecting through technology. Beyhan and Khosh check in with family – especially elders – a few times a day by telephone and video chat with friends. If neighbours need them, they know they are there to help. They said they are lucky not to be in financial hardship, so when they can, they redirect their income to organizations supporting vulnerable people in the city and local businesses that are struggling to stay open.

During walks along the waterfront and Rouge Park with their two children, Beyhan and Khosh maintain their distance but connect to others by waving and smiling more often. At home, they watch movies as a family and prepare meals together. Creating a sense of routine during a crisis is so important. Both of them are now working from home, taking shifts at the computer and trying to maintain personal space. "The house is a mess," Beyhan said, "but we don't care. It is a stressful time for the community; now, more than ever, we need to show compassion and generosity to ourselves and each other."



Using time productively

Shirley Ramsey, a retired nurse, has a very practical attitude towards the restrictions caused by the COVID19 outbreak. Shirley worked through the SARS epidemic and she thinks that COVID19 is much more serious. "We don't want to lose the whole summer!" Shirley's view is that every person must be strict now in following Public Health directions. "We can all hope to get to the end of this if every single person takes this situation seriously," Shirley is in regular contact with her children and she has laughs with her grandchildren via FaceTime. Passers by will notice that Shirley has spent this social distancing time very productively – her front and back yards are exceptionally clean and tidy! She found some good leftover paint at home and is taking on a painting project, too. Walks in the rain or shine, projects inside and outside her home, a stack of good books and keeping in touch with family and friends keeps Shirley ever smiling.

Adjusting to online classes

Ryerson University student **Sara Bacon** had to quickly adjust from travelling to classes downtown to focusing on online classes in her home. It was an adjustment as in-class learning varies tremendously from online learning for these particular courses. "It's difficult to stay engaged with the material without having a professor explaining concepts with anecdotes from their personal experiences," Sara said.

Once Ryerson was closed, small groups of students would meet off campus to complete group assignments. Now with clear social distancing directives from Public Health officials, "it's extremely challenging to complete group assignments and convert presentations to an online format, especially since we are unable to meet in person. Luckily we are able to stay in touch online and support each other through these strange times."

The end of March, as usual, brings the added stress of final exams and culminating assignments. Sara is finding some relief from saving commuting time each day. "It's nice to save on gas and parking, but my learning experience feels less valuable," Sara and her colleagues are facing additional stress around the uncertainties of their next semester.



Stranded in Lima, Peru

Nicole Bayes-Fleming has been stranded in Lima, Peru since March 15. In an email, she said, "Unlike Canada, Peru's response to coronavirus has been quick and strict. All domestic and international travel is shut down, meaning you cannot get from one city to the next, let alone get back home to Canada. All restaurants are shuttered. Tourist attractions are closed. The only businesses still open are grocery stores and pharmacies. If anyone leaves the house to go for a run, to visit family, or for some reason other than buying essentials, they face arrest. There is a nightly curfew between 8 p.m. and 5 a.m."

When the Peruvian president made the decision to shut down all borders, he gave travellers 24 hours' notice. This came only two days after Prime Minister Justin Trudeau urged Canadians to come home. Many people like Nicole were in the midst of securing travel out of Peru when the borders were suddenly closed. "All of us have lost money on flights that have now been cancelled, and face having to pay a steep price to come home as the price for tickets has doubled or tripled." Nicole said that information is difficult to verify, as the government has been slow to contact them.

