

Ralph Thornton and His Legacy

Born in Toronto in 1905, James Ralph Thornton was described in the classic community organizing book *The Power to Make it Happen* as “one of the original moving spirits in the Riverdale community”. He was an independent taxi driver for much of his working life, a beloved local community leader, and a good neighbour whose front living room was an organizing centre and place of respite.

The late 1960s and 1970s were turbulent years in Riverdale as they were elsewhere. On both sides of the Don River the City was busy with its urban renewal schemes. People’s homes were expropriated to make way for new housing but the Expropriation Act of that period meant that people lost about a third of the value of their homes when they were forced to sell to the City. Ralph Thornton was a key community organizer against the City’s plans and helped people stay united in the fight. Though unable to stop the city from demolishing homes they were able to force a big change to the Expropriation Act in 1968, requiring that owners be paid enough to buy a comparable home. This was such a big change that the city abandoned the idea of tearing down neighbourhoods because it was too expensive to pay people fair value for their homes. Don Mount Court, the Ontario Housing Corporation’s development adjacent to Ralph’s home on Hamilton Street, was the last urban renewal scheme of the City of Toronto.

Ralph was at the fore of many other community efforts to shift power to the working class residents of Riverdale who were directly affected by policies on housing, income security (including welfare) and planning. Disgusted by the Riverdale Hospital’s policy of excluding the public from its cafeteria in the early 1970s, Ralph Thornton tackled the hospital head on. The hospital changed its policy and invited Ralph to become a member of their board of directors. Ex – Toronto mayor John Sewell said that this was how Ralph got things done – by being outspoken, pragmatic and on the side of justice and fairness.

Ralph’s community work might be described today as a combination of direct action and lobbying. In the 60s and 70s his way of working was both radical and instrumental in neighbourhood renewal in Riverdale. Community organizer Dale Perkins said Ralph “was a pillar of the early organizing campaigns that peaked in 1972 when the Greater Riverdale Organization was formed... Ralph was the community’s very finest patriarch and leader. Long may his spirit prevail”.

Though Ralph died in September 1974, others through the Greater Riverdale Organization continued to find ways of giving local residents a voice in how decisions were made and City resources used. After the post office at 765 Queen Street closed in 1975 it took five years for it to become a community centre supported by the City but governed by a volunteer board of local residents. The Centre was named after Ralph Thornton to honour his work and “spirit”, as well as those of the many other residents who fought for healthy, just and liveable neighbourhoods.



Bringing Community to Life

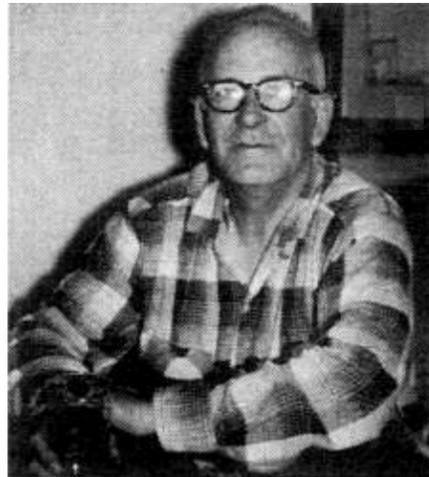
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Ralph Thornton lived in Riverdale for 60 of his 69 years and drove a cab most of his working life. A strong believer in elected leadership. Ralph once told a man who had lost the support of his neighbourhood group that, without a quorum there wasn’t an organization. “You are” he said “e pluribus unum”. You are out”!



Mr. and Mrs. Thornton



“If we had more people like Ralph, the city would be a much nicer place, there would be more equality, fairness and consideration for others – we would have a society and city that we could be proud of”.

John Sewell



Bringing Community to Life



Annual General Report 2010

Message from the President and Executive Director

Greetings and welcome to our AGM. This year we are celebrating our 30th Anniversary and are grateful for **this community that we've been a part of for so long.** RTC is unique, not only to our neighbourhood, but to the City of Toronto as well. We are not just a community centre, but a place for community empowerment. Many of you know the history of Ralph Thornton after whom we are named. He was tireless in his commitment to improving the health and wellbeing of everyone in this neighbourhood, often taking on irresponsible businesses, and even City Hall itself. Through his efforts, he inspired others to take action and make their voices heard, and to not just accept the way things were if a wrong was being done.

This centre was born in the spirit of Ralph Thornton as a place where the voice of our community could be heard. South Riverdale had long been an industrialized community with many health and economic challenges. Now, thanks to Ralph, and many, many more people over the years, our neighbourhood has changed for the better. However, new challenges are arising, not only in our area, but throughout the rest of our city.

In our 30 years we have been many things to our neighbours---we have run programs for youth and for new Canadians, provided a space to dance and sing, a space for weddings and parties, and also held a space for our community to come together to address the issues that affect us the most. It is this function that has been the spirit of our centre. Issues of social justice, affordable housing, environmental health and much more have all seen forums here.

We have a great city with many services that are so important to us. It is time for us to come together once again to protect the things that are dear to us and important for the health and wellbeing of our community. Please join us in this coming year in showing your support for our City and all the services, centres and people that make it a great place. We have all worked too long and hard to lose many of the rights and services that are now being threatened. Remember, that we do have the power to affect change---it's **what Ralph** believed, and the reason that we are still here today.

Sincerely,



Tracy Horvath
Board President
Ralph Thornton Centre




Shawn Conway
Executive Director
Ralph Thornton Centre



Everyone in South Riverdale is welcome in the halls of RTC. Whether you are interested in child and youth programs, our computer resource centre, recreation and education, community news and activism or simply a meeting space to host your own gatherings, we have room for you.

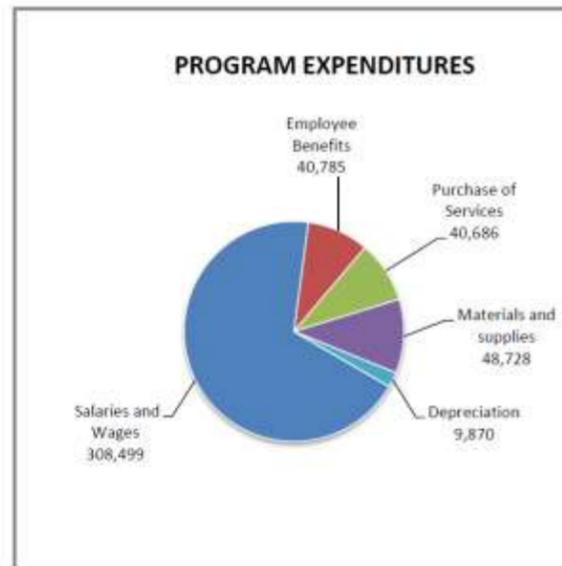
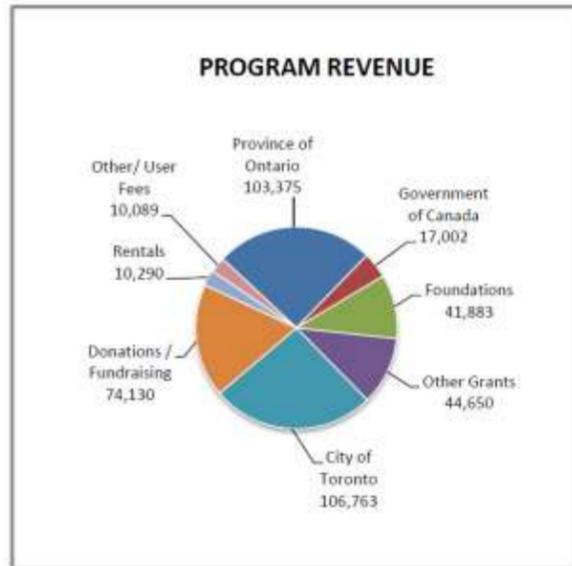
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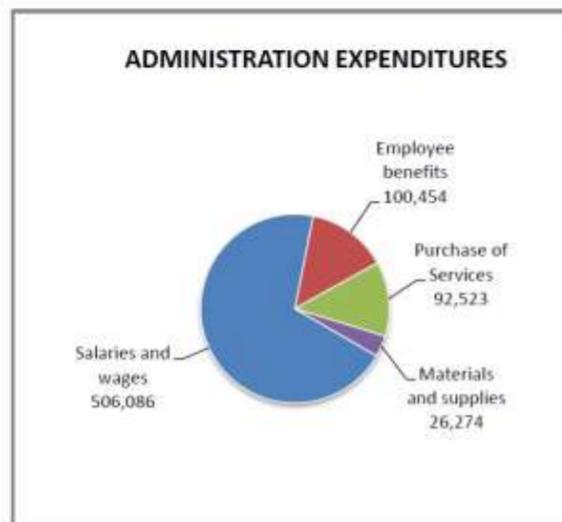
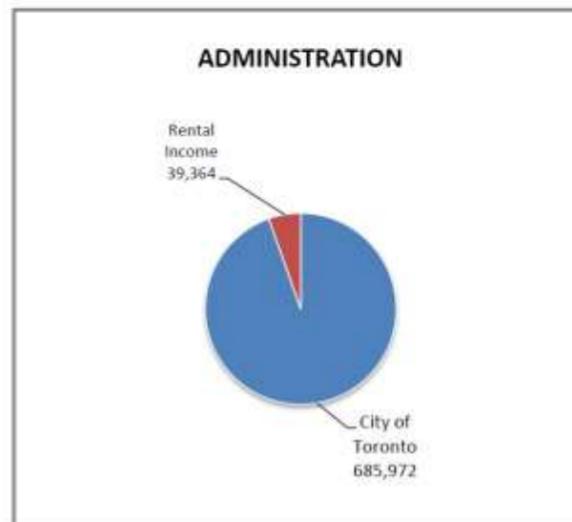
2010 SUMMARIZED FINANCIAL INFORMATION
For the year ended December 31st, 2010



Province of Ontario	103,375
Government of Canada	17,002
Foundations	41,883
Other Grants	44,650
City of Toronto	106,763
Donations & Fundraising	74,130
Rentals	10,290
Other / User Fees	10,089
Total	\$ 408,182

Salaries and wages	308,499
Employee benefits	40,785
Purchase of services	40,686
Materials and supplies	48,728
Depreciation	9,870
Total	\$ 448,568

Programs include: Strong Voices, Strong Communities (Rivertowne), Computer Resource Centre, Community Murals for Change, Summer Day Camp, Mentor Programs, Riverdale Community Development Institute, Children and Youth Programs, Volunteer Development and Community Animation



City of Toronto	685,972
Rental Income - Toronto Public Library	39,364
Total	725,336

Salaries and wages	506,086
Employee benefits	100,454
Purchase of services	92,523
Materials and supplies	26,274
Depreciation	1,425
Amortization- deferred capital contributions	(1,425)
Total	725,337

Administration includes administrative salaries and costs associated with the operation of the building, including heating and maintenance.

Bringing Community Together in Rivertowne

Strong Voices, Strong Communities Project

RTC has always been a strong presence in the Toronto Community Housing neighbourhood of Rivertowne (the former Don Mount Court). But for the past two years, we have concentrated significant time and resources into Rivertowne, with funding from Toronto Community Housing's Social Investment Fund and the Metcalf Foundation. Additional funds were also secured from the City of Toronto Office of the Environment, the Toronto Arts Council, the Ontario Arts Council and Downtown Toyota.

Rivertowne is heralded as Canada's first deliberate mixed income neighbourhood and RTC is proud to be at the forefront of this exciting movement in neighbourhood revitalization.

Since the project began in late 2009, Project Coordinator Dale Hamilton has assisted Rivertowne residents in a process of community development that has included the creation of a "social infrastructure", which appears well on its way to sustainability after the end of the funding cycle in the fall of this year. This infrastructure takes the form of an interconnected web of action teams and ad hoc committees, overseen by a broad-based steering committee known as The Rivertowne Navigators. Another group of tenants has emerged and are in the process of being trained as resident community development workers. All these local residents are keenly interested in making Rivertowne a better place to live.

In keeping with RTC's track record as a centre for community arts activities, arts-based initiatives in Rivertowne include the creation of a youth theatre troupe (The Carbon Busters) who have been undertaking environmental education for over a year, plus a theatrical walk scheduled for October 8 and 9th of 2010. This theatrical walk, called "In Another's Shoes" will explore what it would be like if very different people were to switch lives for a day.

RTC will seek to continue its important role as a resource and facilitator of change as Rivertowne grows into a model of mixed-income urban living from which other communities can learn.



Children & Youth Programs

Afterschool Program

Neighbourhood children come together each day to take part in a variety of educational, cultural, social and recreational activities at the **Ralph Thornton Centre's Afterschool Program**. The goals of the program are to enhance and improve academic performance, improve self esteem, build self confidence and increase social and life skill competencies. Through getting help with homework, playing games, baking muffins or creating an artistic masterpiece the children learn to get along with others, explore their talents and master new experiences.

- Eight to 15 children participated each day in a free program offered Monday through Friday throughout the 2010 school year.
- Youth leadership development training was offered to 17 youth who in turn volunteered their time to support the children.
- Children and youth attended the program from five area elementary schools and four secondary schools.
- An improvement in attitudes toward school and an increased interest in academic studies were noted by children, parents and staff.

"We would just like to say how thankful we are to have a great afterschool/ homework program for our kids to go to. ...it was a great learning experience for the kids" Catherina, Parent



Riverdale Action Centre (RAC) Camp

RAC Camp is a summer day program provided in partnership with Jimmie Simpson Recreation Centre and Woodgreen Services for children between the ages of three and twelve. Children participate in a variety of activities including arts and crafts, games, sports, and fieldtrips.

- On average 62 children enjoyed fun filled activities during each weekly session.
- RAC Camp provided employment opportunities for 12 post secondary and secondary students as well as Counsellor in Training opportunities for youth.

"RAC camp has been a great experience" Nick Pasquale, Camp Counsellor

Mentor Program

The Mentor program is a Children & Youth program that is designed for newcomer children from the Chinese community. It offers one to one and small group tutoring to help improve English language skills. Enjoyable social and recreational activities are used to teach various skills and introduce topics that help the children to adapt to, and thrive in the new Canadian culture. Useful parenting and settlement information is also provided to parents through workshops.

- Ten to 14 children were served each day and were supported by 11 to 14 youth mentors.
- Mentors developed their leadership skills and built self-confidence in their skills.
- Parents gained information and connected with other families and community members.

"Each week I help children learn and improve their English language skills, and they help me to become a better human being." Genevieve, Volunteer Mentor



Providing Space for Community Building, Fun & Learning



The Ralph Thornton Centre offers a place for neighbours to meet, celebrate special events, exchange ideas and participate in services. In addition to the programs offered by the Centre itself, community members use the space for a variety of personal, wellbeing, learning, social and community mobilizing purposes. On any given day activities such as ballroom dancing, Tae Kwon Do, creative writing, yoga, support groups and neighbourhood gatherings and meetings are taking place within the Centre.

- The Centre was visited approximately 105,951 times by community members in 2010.
- 183 civic and community meetings were held in the meeting rooms.
- Residents regularly use this beautiful historic building to share their special events and ceremonies, such as weddings, anniversaries and birthday parties.



Bringing Community Together

Lewis Pearsall Computer Resource Centre (LPCRC)

The Lewis Pearsall Computer Resource Centre has provided a unique employment service to the Riverdale community for over 10 years. Program participants are provided with a range of employment support services including computer use, internet access, resume assistance, resume and document critique's, job search, career planning and individual assistance and training opportunities.

- LPCRC had 18,976 user visits in 2010.
- On average, 60 people used the LPCRC each day in their search for employment and educational opportunities.
- 96% of the people who completed a satisfaction survey stated that the LPCRC was an important and helpful aspect of their job search strategy.
- 43 Volunteers donated 2,606 hours of their time to assist others at the LPCRC.

"I really like being among people and being able to help them. I have learnt a lot from volunteering here.", Omer Kefell



Volunteer Development

The Ralph Thornton Centre thrives because of the dedication and commitment from people in our community willing to donate their time and skills to help others. Our team of volunteers lend their enthusiasm and skills to all areas of our programs and services.

- Community members worked in nine RTC programs, participated on five committees. They provided key support to less visible but vital functions such as fundraising and policy deployment and they assisted with outreach and special events, such as the Canada Day Celebration, Riverdale Art Walk Festival and Chinese Lunar New Year.
- 322 community volunteers generously donated 11,173 hours of their time and energy to support the activities of the Ralph Thornton Centre.

Community Building Through the Arts

Youth Mural Program

The Graffiti Transformation Mural Program had another successful year in South Riverdale as they took on the outdoor arena at Jimmy Simpson Recreation Centre and graced the walls of the Ralph Thornton Centre's lower level.

- Seven youth artist were hired and participated in training on design concepts, work safety and gained general employment skills.
- The Mural Team completed a large new outdoor mural at Jimmie Simpson Park and repaired two murals painted in past years.

"It was a great experience for me, because we all got to further develop our large scale painting skills and talk with people in the community with whom we would otherwise not connect with."
Rebecca Chan, Youth Artist



Youth Photo Voice Project

15 youth used the medium of photography to engage the community in a conversation about environmental issues and potential local solutions.

- Youth gained confidence and increased self esteem and learned valuable life skills in the project.
- The project culminated with a photography exhibit of the youths' work at the Ben Navis Gallery.



Neighbourhood Diaries Project

- School aged children learned about their neighbourhood through a series of facilitated storytelling and arts sessions.
- A life sized robot was created by the children which was toured throughout the neighbourhood to build connections between the children and their community.

Community Kitchen Programs

The Ralph Thornton Centre's Community Kitchen initiatives provide a focus for personal and social change. People who find themselves under-employed are provided with the opportunity to build life and employment skills while preparing fresh, healthy food.



In partnership with Toronto Employment and Social Services, the Talking Spoon Community Kitchen program engaged more than thirty single parents over ten months. The participants learned how to prepare fresh food and affordable meals, connect with neighborhood employment resources, and **attained the Toronto Food Handler's Certificate**



The Fantastic Food Fanatics (F³) came together in the Fall of 2010 at Ralph Thornton's Community Kitchen. This enterprising group soon discovered not only a love for creating food together but also the warmth of sharing their experiences as single parents. Over the past year F³'s refreshingly strong-minded attitude has given way to new found catering ventures both in-house for volunteer and business celebrations, and within the Riverdale neighbourhoods.



"The F3 experience has given me a sense of leadership, a deeper understanding of my community and how best to apply myself in providing for its future."

Lina Gisondi · F3 member

The "Hub" Community Kitchen provides an opportunity for community members to prepare and share a healthy meal on a budget. It's also a wonderful occasion to meet new people and learn some new cooking skills.



The Riverdale Community Development Institute (RCDI)

The Riverdale Community Development Institute (RCDI) is the Community Development program of the Ralph Thornton Centre. Our unique model links several college and university placement students with community development initiatives in South Riverdale each year. Students studying in diverse disciplines such as Social Work, Community Work, Nursing, Environmental Studies, and Education are selected from a number of academic institutions. The multi-disciplinary team works within the various program areas of RTC and with the community to address both current and emerging social justice issues.



In 2010, student resources were galvanized within the Strong Voices Strong Communities Project. Their involvement supported the delivery of programs and project activities such as the Older Adults Action Team (OAAT). The OAAT was a weekly social, recreational program for isolated seniors living within the Rivertowne Community.



The Riverdale Food Working Group (RFG) is comprised of local non-profit groups and residents who came together out of a common belief that access to affordable, nutritious and local food is a human right and is of particular importance to those who are most marginalized in Riverdale. Our 2010 students supported the activities of the group by creating and conducting a survey to determine resident interest in food justice, awareness-building, and education programmes.

In 2010, RTC undertook the process of redeveloping our roles as a neighbourhood centre and community hub. As a part of this process, students in concert with RTC staff developed the idea of a Hub Kitchen: a social and skills-building kitchen program focused on poverty reduction and community development. To ensure the idea was of interest and value to the community, students conducted outreach and determined the feasibility through a pilot-test. Within the kitchen students facilitated workshops on health and well-being and cooking on a budget.



RTC also encourages students to develop their skills in community development activities ranging from facilitation to advocacy. For example, this year one student created and facilitated "Coping with Conflict", a learning series for staff, students, and participants of RTC. Through the use of role-plays and case studies, participants developed skills in how to de-escalate conflict and anger.