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Store makeover spruces up Danforth store



Photo/DANIELLE MILLEY

Plank Road Market Road owner Roger Wang, left, and Danforth East Community Association (DECA) member Ellen Long get together at Wang's shop on Danforth Avenue Tuesday after a makeover at the shop, formerly known as Michael's Meats and Deli.

Danforth East Community Association adds expertise to project

By DANIELLE MILLEY
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Local residents kicked off the New Year by helping bring a little shine to a diamond in the rough on the Danforth's east end.

Volunteers from the Danforth East Community Association used some paint and elbow grease on Sunday to give a makeover to Michael's Meats and Deli.

The team has been meeting since October to brainstorm about a new look, a new logo and a new name for the store at 1810 Danforth Ave. The newly named Plank Road Market was selected as the first business on the suggestion of DECA member Ellen Long.

"I started realizing what a gem it is that just needed to be shone so the younger generation would recognize it," she said.

Long was a regular customer of the store and after several visits she could see beyond the drab white walls and over cluttered shelves to the value the store was providing to the community. When she joined DECA and heard they were looking for a store to makeover she immediately suggested the local grocer.

A team of professionals from the neighbourhood volunteered their time, including two graphic designers, a professional stager and a market researcher.

Owners Roger Wang and Julie Liao jumped at the opportunity when approached about the makeover.

"I was so excited because that was my dream. We didn't have time and we had ideas, but we didn't know what to do or how to do it," Liao said.

The volunteers painted the walls and added a blackboard behind the meat counter for writing the specials, they also helped reorganize the store to give it a more open feel.

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Long said the shelves were stacked too high, the shelves were a mishmash with baking items stocked with canned goods, and people couldn't see into the store from the street. That's all changed now.

"Essentially what the team did is it boiled down to a very simple thing - we helped them declutter," she said.

It's unusual for a group of residents to pitch in and share their expertise with store owners, but the volunteers wanted to do their part to help their community.

Catherine Porter, one of the founders of DECA and the current vice-chairperson, said when the group began meeting two years ago one of the biggest concerns was Danforth Avenue. (DECA covers the area from Coxwell to Woodbine avenues).

"The residential area here is just fabulous...It just needs a little more love on the commercial strip," she said.

The hope is that if they spruce up the commercial strip it will attract more businesses to enhance the strip and allow residents to shop locally more often.

"The hope is that if one smashed window can cause a neighbourhood to go down the drain, what would one smashing window do?" she said.

Wang and Liao said the response from customers has been positive.

"One lady told me she used to pass by all the time, but she never came in," Liao said.

She and Wang bought the business two and a half years ago. It's been a staple on the strip for 30 years. The couple came to Canada six years ago from China and this neighbourhood was where they first settled so they were happy to come back.

Wang said he was nervous about the changes at first as he didn't want to alienate the customers who'd been coming to the store for years. But as he attended the team meetings he got excited about the ideas.

"I'm a lucky guy," he said.

DECA plans to do make over one more business, but will likely go through some sort of formal application process.



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