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Danforth deli gets extreme makeover

Community association undertakes storefront reno to boost sales and neighbourhood at the same time

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RAVEENA AULAKH
STAFF REPORTER

A closed sign hung outside Michael's Meat and Deli on the Danforth yesterday. But inside bright lights were on, music played and almost a dozen people dressed in overalls worked through the day to give the store a complete makeover.



COLIN MCCONNELL/TORONTO STAR
Five-year-old Eric Wang helps marketing consultant Angela Match stir paint at Michael's Meat and Deli — now renamed The Plank Road Market — on the Danforth Jan. 4, 2009.

Some painted the walls — changing a dowdy grey to an inviting peach — others moved wood cabinets to make the store look spacious and yet others mopped the tiled floor.

"The (new) sign will be up soon," said an excited Ellen Long, who lives in the neighbourhood. "This store will be totally new."

The project is the first time Danforth East residents have taken gentrification into their own hands. They've teamed up with a store owner to renovate and rebrand the business — in the process also helping to overhaul the neighbourhood.

Usually, local business improvement groups do storefront improvement projects, using city money.

In this case, the year-old business group did not qualify for help, so residents initiated the project. Long, a member of the Danforth East Community Association, said members floated the idea a few months ago after hearing about similar renovations in Parkdale.

"They got money from the city but we couldn't, so we decided to pull together resources and help a store (that) wanted a new look," Long said. Roger Wang and Julie Liao, owners of Michael's Meats and Deli, knew they wanted changes but didn't know how to do it without spending thousands of dollars.

The association offered advice from professionals and free labour. Two graphic design professionals created a new sign, a professional stager gave them suggestions on how to use their space effectively and a business development professional offered advice on attracting new clientele.

Wang invested \$1,000 in paint, signage, tables and lighting.

The result will be unveiled today: As well as a new look, the deli has been renamed The Plank Road Market in honour of the company that originally built Danforth Ave.

While the store owners get a brand new place, the residents get a better neighbourhood.

"We love living here on the Danforth and want to make it a better place," Long said. "There are empty and rundown stores, but there's potential here."

The renovation will lead to more such projects, said Angela Match, a marketing consultant.

"The owners had good ideas but weren't able to project them in the right way.

"I helped them understand how they can play up their strengths," she said yesterday, as she moved cabinets to make the store look more roomy. The deli is well-known to shoppers seeking Italian cheeses and whole-wheat pastas, "but it just needed to show itself off more."

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Janet Davis, the area councillor, stopped by in the evening to see the transformation.

"I'm really excited by the project," she said. "It shows how local business and residents want to help each other to make the neighbourhood a better place."

The opening of a farmers' market in the summer, a coffee shop six months ago and Melanie's Bistro, a thriving restaurant, 10 months ago – all in a four-block radius on Danforth Ave. near Coxwell Ave. – were the first signs of the revitalization of the neighbourhood, Davis said. "I don't know how many such projects the association can do, but I know this won't be the last one."



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Nice

It's good to see people who live in a neighbourhood take an actual role in helping local business improve themselves in order to attract more clientele while keeping the locals happy.

Submitted by RandomNrg at 10:46 AM Monday, January 05 2009

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