



George Brown College Retirees' Association

Co-Chairs report 2021-22

Our year began with the November 30, 2021 Annual General Meeting. We presented a summary of a busy year with many events, received and approved the financial report and budget, and the proposed slate of directors was accepted. Once again, we were pleased that so many members attended and participated in the online AGM. The highlight of the meeting was a talk by GBCRA member Jo Soroichinsky about the process of researching and writing the family memoir *Dancing with my Father* that she had recently published.

At this time last year, we were optimistic about resuming more face-to-face activities while continuing to offer some events online. As we moved past the holidays and into the new year, it became apparent that we needed to continue with virtual events for the months ahead. Most people were hesitant about being in large gatherings and that, plus the winter weather, kept us meeting on-screen with a varied menu of events. Music-focused presentations included sessions on the rise of folk music, the “British Invasion” of English rock groups, Rogers and Hammerstein, and one on Mahalia Jackson. The visual arts were represented with presentations about Picasso and Rembrandt. We also had a presentation about the history and construction of crossword puzzles, which may have inspired some of our members to try their hand at developing crosswords of their own. As external constraints eased and members are less concerned about feeling isolated, we have gradually reduced our frequency of events and contacts with members to a pattern more similar to that of our pre-pandemic activities. We kicked off the academic year with an in-person gathering at the Cider House. This was followed by a live piano concert and lunch on November 18th. As we move into the months ahead, we expect to offer a mix of in-person and online events. This makes it easier for members who live at a distance to participate in GBCRA, including as members of the board, and also serves members who have restrictions due to mobility issues or competing responsibilities

Throughout the past year, the board of directors, the bridge club and the book club have met regularly. The bridge club has met most Mondays throughout the year, taking only a few short breaks. The book club took its usual break for July and August after selecting the books for the 22–23 year and resumed in September. The book club's April selection was Jo Soroichinsky's book and we were delighted that Jo was able to join us via Zoom to do some readings, talk about her book, and respond to questions and comments. This was the first time the book club has hosted a book's author, and there was a special invitation to all GBCRA members to join the book club members for this event, and several chose to do so.

In addition to other events, we held our third online auction this fall to increase our endowed scholarship with the GBC Foundation and fund our annual bursary. We are pleased to report that we raised over \$3400.00 and combined with other donations we have increased our bursaries by over \$4000.00. We are grateful to the many members who chose to support this initiative through participation in the auction and through direct donations. We will continue to raise funds to increase this endowment and our annual student bursary.

GBCRA has a set of by-laws which govern our operation. These were in need of updating and reorganization. A committee of board members took on this task in the spring. To ensure breadth of perspective, three members who are not on the board were asked to review the bylaws and provide comments and suggestions to the committee. Revising bylaws is a remarkably exacting and time-consuming task. We are grateful to the members who volunteered and who were so diligent in their work. The revised by-laws will be presented for adoption at the November 2022 AGM.

The board of directors also decided that it was time to do some broader strategic plan for the next few years. While we have continued to be actively in touch with our members, we wanted to ensure that we are aligned with members' preferences. A survey was created to assess this and over 70 members responded. The board held a strategic planning retreat, using the survey responses and other information as the basis for a SWOT analysis and identification of key priorities. While it is clear that our members are primarily interested in having social contact and sharing interesting activities with former colleagues, some items on the survey received stronger or weaker support than we might have anticipated, and this is very helpful for planning.

The relationship between GBCRA and the college has had some positive developments as well as some ongoing frustrations. The GBCRA executive met with Dr. Fearon twice and expects to meet with him again soon in the new year. We

asked and received a modest increase in the annual stipend from the college as well as the assurance this will continue. The GBCRA executive participated in a focus group that was part of the college's strategic planning process leading to the new strategic plan. We also have improved communication with Human Resources and have therefore been somewhat more successful in contacting retirees before they lose their George Brown email addresses. The loss of college email continues to be a pain point for retirees and we continue to advocate for this to be changed. We have a strong relationship with the GBC Foundation, which supports our initiatives in a variety of ways.

We thank the other members of the Board for their diligent work and involvement throughout the past year. We have been glad to see more GBCRA members participating, including some of the new retirees, and look forward to seeing one another in person as well as online in the months ahead.

Dianne and Georgia

Co-chairs