

THE MESSENGER MINUTE

DEC ISSUE #2 2006 Published every fortnight

Circulation 10,000

UPBEAT URBAN NEWS



VERITY, AN INSPIRATIONAL GIFT

I have worked in and around Bay Street for just this side of 20 years. During that time I have frequented many exclusive executive clubs, even held membership in some. I've made some good business contacts and met some great people, but at the end of the day, I'm not sure they were really for me. I realize it is one of those "it's not you, it's me" kind of relationship, provided I was having the kind of year I could justify belonging! So, when I was invited to Verity Women's Club for a working lunch last week, please forgive me if I raised my working class eyebrow at the suggestion.

Penny Simmons, owner of Penny Loafers Shoe Shine Company, greeted me in the foyer of Verity at 111d Queen Street East. We shook hands as she apologized for the remnant of shoe polish on her, as she had just been covering a shift for an employee at one of her locations. Not what I would have expected from a member of a haughty private girls club!

Lunch was filled with delightful interruptions from other Verity members as they passed our table, some even sat awhile. Sandy McMullen, Management Consultant and participant in Red Eye Studio Gallery in the Distillery District, provided me with some great ideas for a Graffiti Art Project I'm working on with youth in the city's east end.

As my preconceived ideas of a private club began to unravel, I wondered who was the mastermind behind this exquisite locale. A question easily answered as Penny promptly motioned Mary to our table. Mary Aitken is President, Owner, Financier and Visionary of Verity, just to name a few of her responsibilities.

Mary is every bit as enchanting as her well-appointed club, and for that matter, Penny and Sandy are as well. Mary began to share her vision for Verity by saying, "This is about women making connections. We need more women in senior positions, and for the last chapter of my life, I want to do something that has a positive, personal impact on women's lives." "Don't call us 'exclusive,'" Aitken said. "That's not what we're about. The standards of service of a private club are in place at Verity, but it's not about being haughty, it's the opposite. It's about making people feel welcome, about empowering women. And yes, we love men!"

At this point of the conversation Mary would be quite within her rights to boast about her distinguished clientele, including the likes of former Prime Minister Kim Campbell, Bay Street savvy KiKi Delaney or columnist and family doctor Jean Marmoreo (who, by the way, did a fine job delivering my daughter, Sunny), however, what



Mary Aitken, Verity's Managing Director & Founder

really made Mary come alive was not talking about the club itself, but rather the members' personal growth experiences, as well as, the impact Verity had on the community.

You see Verity is not solely interested in empowering professional women; it is equally as interested in empowering little girls as well, with The Verity Girls Club. Most of these girls, ages 8-11 years, are from the neighbouring community of Regent Park. Verity works closely with the division of the Salvation Army in identifying young girls who, as Mary put it, "are so vulnerable and without any support network." She said, "We need to get in early so these girls have a chance to grow into their teens strong. They need to have an opportunity to dream, to not be afraid." Verity's reach into the community does not stop with the girls, Sunday mornings at the spa are available for mentoring to the Mothers as well, the Verity "opportunity" is a way to celebrate personal growth or support special challenges. And on Christmas Day, the entire club gets involved in their "100 Friends at Christmas" where, again, 100 families are hand picked by the Sally Ann to celebrate a Christmas dinner which is provided by their adjoining restaurant, George, that would rival any other about town.

Thank you Mary, you just simplified my Christmas shopping. Yes, Verity Spa is open to the public, so if anyone in my family is reading this, surprise! Guess what you're getting this year, an inspirational day at the Verity Spa!

Verity girls young and young at heart, thank you for opening up your hearts, and your club, and inspiring us to think of others during the Christmas Season.

Happy Christmas Toronto!

The great philosopher Aristotle had this to say: "In the arena of human life the honours and rewards fall to those who show their good qualities." This column is reserved for such people, good people, good businesses, or just good news stories of Toronto. If you know of a Toronto the Good story, memory, or experience worth publishing please contact me at tom@messengerminute.ca



For more information or to advertise please contact Tom Sayliss at 416.365.0155 or email tom@messengerminute.ca

From \$6 Gift Certificates to Special Event services (golf tournaments, too), we will shine for you!

LOCATIONS
First Canadian Place
The Fairmont Royal York
Toronto-Dominion Centre

TEL: 416.203.7496
penny.simmons@pennyloafersshoeshine.com
www.pennyloafersshoeshine.com

Penny Loafers
SHOE SHINE COMPANY
EST. 1994



Tom Sayliss tom@messengerminute.ca