

## **Together, We Build Alta Vista**

*By Jeff Clement*

In 1943, American psychologist Abraham Maslow published a paper entitled “A Theory on Human Motivation”. In it, he describes a hierarchy of needs: a pyramid-shaped chart outlining what he believed to be the requirements for achieving the pinnacle of human existence: ‘self-actualization’.

To reach this ultimate potential, Maslow believed that human beings must fulfil the most basic of human needs - needs which can only be found within an active and thriving community. They are, Maslow claims, the need for safety, social belonging and ‘esteem’, (a term used here to refer to respect, both for oneself and others). As a recent graduate of Canterbury High School, and having roots in Alta Vista, I have seen myself and my peers thrive in the community. So what aspects of the community contribute to this success?

The Hierarchy of Needs works similarly to a ladder - before progressing to the top, one must successfully proceed past each tier. As such, Maslow placed the most primal of all human requirements at the base of his pyramid, the need for safety and security. Students are frequently at school much later than sundown, and yet I have never heard of anyone being unsafe or feeling unprotected. Canterbury fosters an inclusive and incredibly tolerant community, actively working against bullying and discrimination. Earlier this year, it became the first school in the OCDSB to raise the pride flag in support of LGBT individuals, marking a big achievement for not just Alta Vista, but the city as a whole. This feeling of security isn’t just for students - older residents of the area seem to feel comfortable and at ease using public transit or walking around the neighbourhood, whether it be to go for a casual walk through local gardens or to shop at Elmvale Mall. Young families with growing children are often seen, perhaps walking to school at Arch Street Public or going to play a game at Brian Kilrea Arena.

Alta Vista has a great number of community gathering spots and businesses, and it is in these places we can see the community truly come into its own. Local businesses like Three Sisters and Shawarma Rosana provide students and residents with fresh, local food they can feel good about buying. Resources like Brian Kilrea arena and the Canterbury Pool allow people of all ages to stay active while mingling with their neighbours. The many schools in the area give younger residents not only education, but also a community of their own, allowing children to learn to navigate the world in a supporting, comfortable and engaging way. These businesses and institutions help support a diverse, caring and creative community. I have seen shops engaging with local artists, community groups working to clean parks and common spaces, even families opening up their homes to support students who would otherwise be unable to live in the area. The social belonging encountered in Alta Vista allows those who are lucky enough to engage with it to advance one step closer to Maslow’s self-actualisation.

Finally, Maslow hypothesized about a need for esteem. This category is more personal, and I know I feel confident in saying Alta Vista provides a positive, supportive environment for those who operate within it. By being an open and supportive space, business owners have facilitated not only positive relationships with their customers, but also helped to foster artistic drives and entrepreneurship. Local theatre and music events at Canterbury, for instance, are always quite full not only with students and staff, but also with community members who come together to experience local arts. It’s not unusual for students to host concerts in local churches or to hear of coffee houses or poetry slams at Three Sisters. Events like these and those who attend them are what makes the area we inhabit so very special and unique.

In the end, achieving self-actualization is something that one must do independently; however when a community provides residents with tools to help individuals thrive it can result in something truly extraordinary. We live in a neighbourhood that provides residents and visitors alike with a unique taste of the best our city has to offer. By maintaining a safe, accepting and fostering neighbourhood, we allow residents a chance to find their creative spirit and motivation. We create opportunities for greatness and we foster these values for generations to come. Together, we build Alta Vista.

*Note: Author, Jeff Clement, winner of the 2017 Celine Tower Grant, will be attending Carleton University this fall. His program of study will be Public Affairs, Bachelor of Journalism, Journalism. We wish him well in his future endeavours.*