



the bentway

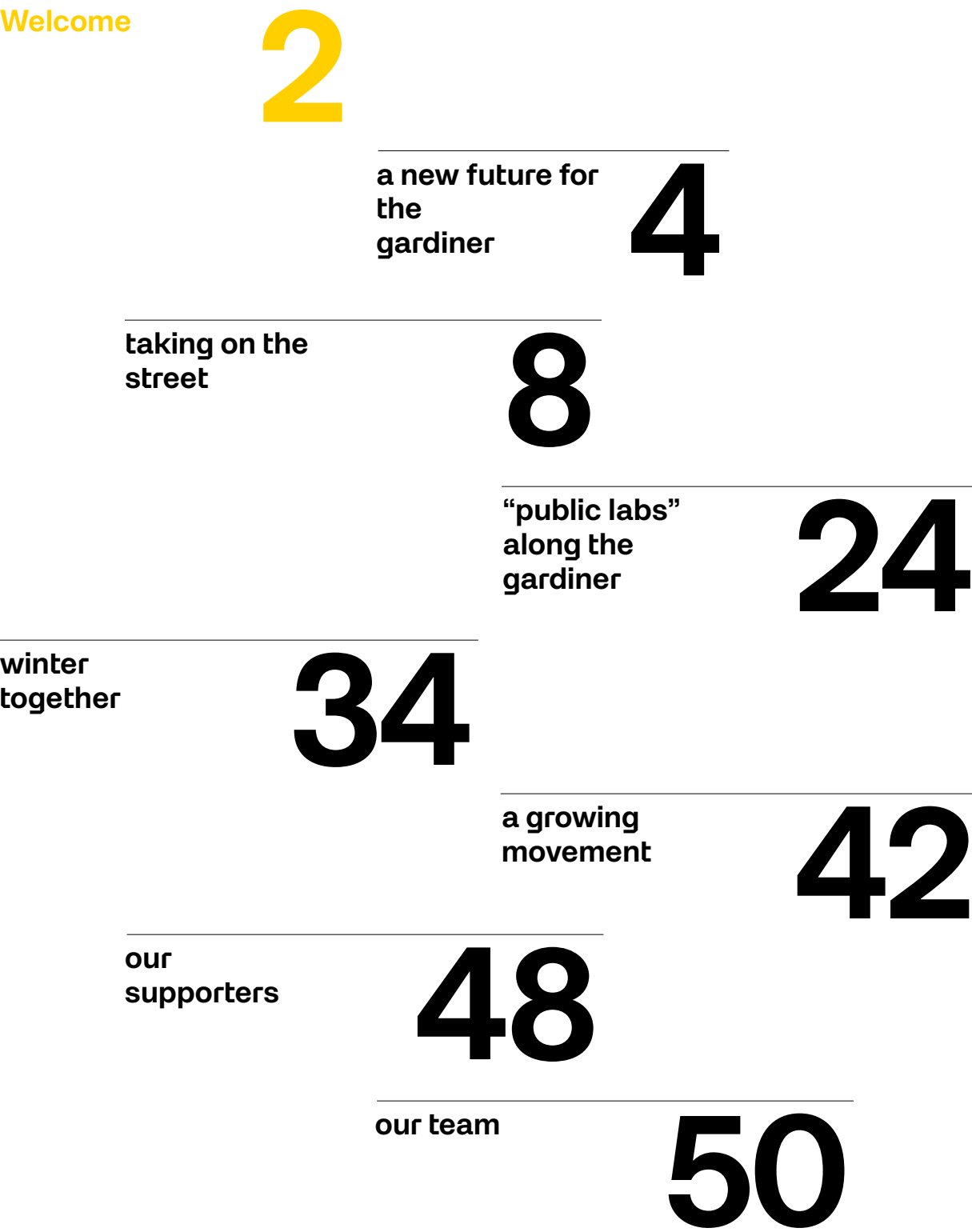
2022-23 Annual Report

urban
imagination

We acknowledge that we operate on the treaty lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit and the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat, the Haudenosaunee, the Métis, and many other Indigenous nations. Toronto is now home to many diverse Indigenous people. We recognize them as the past, present, and future caretakers of this land. We pay our respects to all who have gathered and will continue to gather in this place. We are grateful to have the opportunity to work together to care for The Bentway lands and act as stewards of the space.

The first phase of The Bentway is located on lands that are part of Fort York National Historic Site, recognized by the Government of Canada as being of national significance.

2022-23





Letter from our Board Chair and Co-Executive Directors

We kicked off 2023 by celebrating five incredible years of “igniting the urban imagination”.

In 2022-23, we played a leadership role in bringing Toronto’s Year of Public Art to life, firmly positioning artists’ voices at the centre of urban transformation. Local creatives like Shellie Zhang, Anne Bourne, Susan Blight, and Hayden King, alongside international talents Mimi Lien, Willi Dorner, Striped Canary, and many more, helped us see our city and its possibilities anew – and welcomed over 200,000 attendees under the Gardiner to participate in Bentway programming.

Together, we pushed past the same-old conversation and binary view about how our streets can function, and opened up these arteries for new civic use.

We believe that our shared infrastructure can be so much more than the concrete, traffic, and seemingly endless debates we’ve become so used to. The Bentway continues to prove out new ways that the Gardiner can better connect, perform, and inspire.

Our work is blooming, with many stories, achievements, and evolving plans to celebrate here in this report. Bentway Phase 1 was just the beginning - stay tuned for much, much more.

Thank you for being part of this exciting journey!



D. Shearer
Daniel Shearer
Board Chair
President, Cossette



Ilana Altman
Ilana Altman
Co-Executive
Director

D. Carey
David Carey
Co-Executive
Director

a new future for the gardener

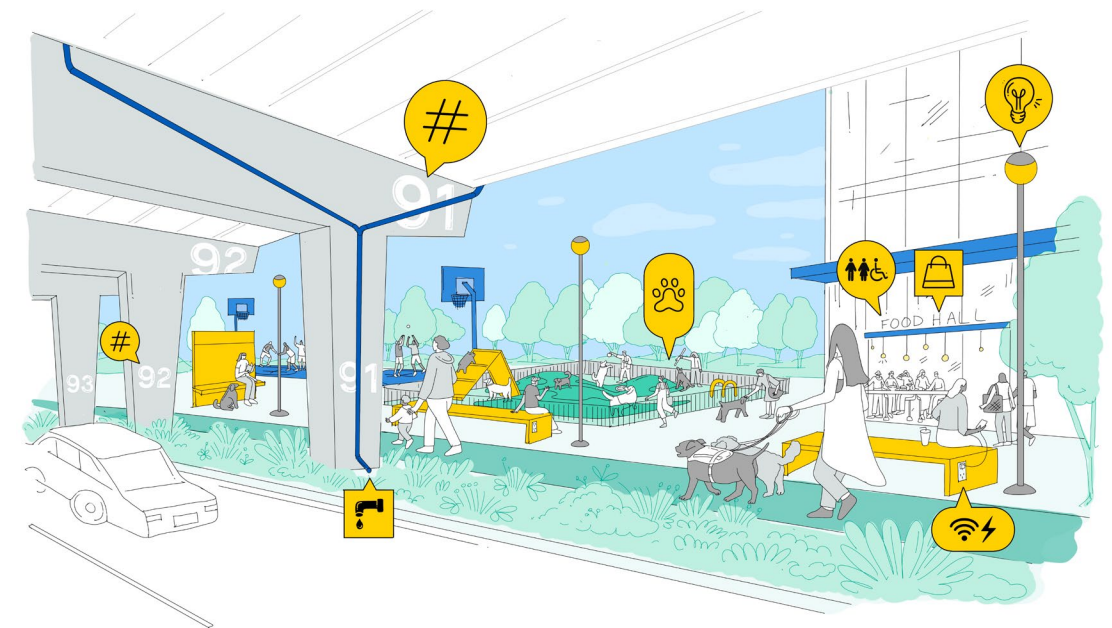
For the past 5 years, our spaces have served as proof-of-possibility, unlocking the Gardiner's potential. The Bentway has shown us how the Expressway can deliver concurrently on transportation goals as well as our goals for a connective and creative public realm.

The City of Toronto's once-in-a-generation reinvestment into the Expressway's state of good repair offers an unprecedented opportunity to rethink how this structure functions and for whom.

In partnership with the City of Toronto, The Bentway is developing the Under Gardiner Public Realm Plan (UGPRP) to outline how the many spaces under the Expressway can better serve our city.

Artistic vignettes illustrating the ideas and potential application of Under Gardiner Public Realm Plan recommendations

Above: Enhanced safety and place-making opportunities at key intersections under the Gardiner



Below: Prospective wayfinding, accessibility, and rainwater management improvements along a multi-use trail

Assembling the Under Gardiner Public Realm Plan is an inclusive process, involving multiple municipal and private stakeholders, and the public. As we advance the Plan, this year we were thrilled to invite folks into the Bentway Studio to share preliminary findings, opportunities, and emerging recommendations. An interactive exhibit helped further public consultation and our engagement with local stakeholders.



Attendees explore the Under Gardiner Public Realm Plan Open House sessions



This month-long Open House marked an exciting milestone, as we progressed collective discussions from ideas, hopes, and ambitions towards concrete improvements and specific amenities for the “under-Gardiner” corridor that can meet Toronto’s pressing needs.

These consultations facilitated thoughtful conversations with hundreds of people who offered their perspectives on both macro and micro scales. They also helped our team refine several recommendations, including “site specific opportunities” and a suite of proposed “new baseline” features to be tactically deployed across the corridor.

Over the coming months we will be working to integrate the feedback and priorities shared through consultation phases and provide a direction regarding potential implementation strategies.

As ever, our work under the Gardiner is a balancing act between forward-thinking ambition and grounded pragmatism. It’s a complex and multifaceted endeavour, and wouldn’t be possible without the City of Toronto, the participation of community members, and our supporters at the Balsam Foundation and Manulife.

Stay tuned for the plan’s release later this year!

taking on the street

The pandemic prompted cities across the world to reconsider the role of the street. These familiar routes, previously reserved for cars, became renewed sites for cultural improvisation, innovation, and action. We were all reminded why our streets were once called “the city’s most vital organs”.

The Bentway was founded on the idea that our shared roadways can and must do more.

Our Summer 2022 season continued this dialogue, welcoming 102,000 attendees to explore free programming both under the Gardiner and along roads, sidewalks, and public spaces in surrounding neighbourhoods.

How can we challenge the conventions of the street and imagine new civic uses for these arteries?

PARADE



Anchoring the season was The Bentway’s kinetic new commission from Tony Award-winning set designer and artist Mimi Lien.

Inspired by the dynamic convergences and events that take place on our streets, *PARADE* infused The Bentway’s Skate Trail with the ever-shifting variables of the streetscape. A 650-foot motorised conveyor-belt overhead became a secondary artery, soaring and looping around the bents above, carrying everyday signage and objects we might encounter on our morning commute, such as stop signs, traffic cones, and bike racks.

Under the flow of traffic above, *PARADE* offered a mesmerising piece of street theatre that deconstructed the street, upended our expectations, and revealed its possibilities anew.

anatomy of an installation



“

A place of gathering, a place that brings people together... It's like the playful, whimsical version of the hallway. You don't know what's around the corner.

”

Mimi Lien, artist

While developing *PARADE*, Mimi approached the Gardiner as a work of public infrastructure that had been transformed into a work of social infrastructure.

Mimi and our team worked with local conveyor-belt manufacturer, PACLINE, and their engineer Aswad Hashem, whose core clients usually include factory assembly lines and warehouse centres. Aswad told us,

“Traditionally, engineering and technology are thought to be on the opposite end of the spectrum from art, but an exhibition like this helps to connect the two together.”

This technical challenge would not have been possible without our incredible staff, including Steph Dudek (Production Manager), Pavneet Pal Singh (Producer), and Michael Award (Project Lead), who worked through a demanding installation schedule and challenging onsite conditions to bring *PARADE* to life. Their hard work paid off when they saw the public reaction to the piece. Steph reflects,

“There was a lot of wonder, and maybe a hint of incredulity that a project like this was put up in the neighbourhood.”

Many thanks to all who made *PARADE* possible, including supporters Eleanor & Francis Shen, the Government of Canada, Ontario Cultural Attractions Fund, and the Hal Jackman Foundation.



Mini Lien and Bentway staff at a shop visit with PACLINE.

STREET moments

Street Summit

We kicked off the summer by welcoming over 600 urbanists, designers, city-builders, and neighbours to a Street Summit; equal parts conference, workshop, and artistic intervention. Featured speakers included “The Hip Hop Architect” Michael Ford and Chicago’s Commissioner of Transportation, Gia Biagi.



The Bentway’s Sam Carter-Shamai moderates a panel at the 2022 Street Summit.



Weweni Bizindan (Listen Carefully)

Susan Blight and Hayden King invited us to listen to the Gardiner on new terms. With a tendency for the noun-dominant English language to perpetuate a view of the street as static and dead, the addition of Anishinaabemowin – a verb-based language that ascribes spirit to rocks and trees among many other animate things – gave new voice to the Expressway and asked what life exists amid the traffic, wind, concrete, and salt.



Moko Jumbie Mascamp

In celebration of Carnival's long relationship with the streets of Toronto, Michael Lee Poy brought together a team of artists who helped local youth discover Afro-Caribbean masquerade practices through workshops in costume-making, stilt-walking, and silk-dying. The program culminated in a jubilant community parade centering balance, regalia, and emancipation, circling Canoe Landing Park just north of the Gardiner.



Future Perfect

A collaboration with SummerWorks, artists Mia & Eric and Action Hero presented *Future Perfect*, a playful reimagining of the rules that govern our streets. City by-laws regulating behaviours in civic spaces (Toronto's Streets & Sidewalks Municipal Code) were cut up word-by-word and meticulously rearranged into a new set of prompts for a transitioning world. More than 600 public submissions fueled the creation of these "new rules" on billboards and signs at The Bentway and across the city.



bodies in urban spaces



To open the STREET season, Austrian artist Willi Dorner and a group of local dancers took to the streets with a unique piece of urban choreography, *Bodies in Urban Spaces*.

These enthralling performances saw a cohort of 20 local performers in brightly coloured clothing lead 600+ Torontonians through the Bentway neighbourhood to make “sculptural pit stops”, acrobatically inserting their bodies into the urban fabric. By playfully misusing city spaces, the performances invited us to reflect on our relationship to the public realm, and who and what it is for.

Attendees and bemused passers-by followed this chain of ephemeral interventions - on the run - to (re)discover the city’s streets and in-between spaces.



Audiences flow past performers on Wellington Street, where a local family volunteered use of their home’s facade.

anatomy of a performance

To prepare for *Bodies in Urban Spaces*, assistant choreographer Esther Baio embarked on a multi-day journey with Bentway staff and dancers to create unique choreography for 30+ different sites:

“

It was so great working next to so many capable, dedicated people... This project needs a lot of support from the inviting organisation for it to work, so really, the success of it depended a lot on your work as well!

”

Esther Baio, assistant choreographer



This project would not have been possible without the residents and businesses who graciously lent their spaces for these gravity-defying physical interventions, including local neighbour Christopher Cassidy. Since the performances, Chris looks at his home in a new way:

“We now see our house as an art installation where ‘climbing the walls’ has taken on new, joyful meaning.”

Performers like Mary Patsiatzis accomplished incredible physical feats of endurance and flexibility, maintaining poses for longer than they knew they were capable of:

“This show changed the way I see myself as an artist and performer... Art exists everywhere. Beside you, at your doorstep, where you least expect.”

Free performances of *Bodies in Urban Spaces* were enabled by support from many Bentway friends and champions, including Maxine Granovky Gluskin & Ira Gluskin and the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Performers rehearsing for *Bodies in Urban Spaces*





A dancer shows off moves at The Bentway Block Party

Supporters and staff celebrating and joining the parade during our STREET Party Gala



STREET celebrations

Block Party

This summer saw the return of the beloved Bentway Block Party for the first time since pre-COVID in 2019. And party we did!

Nearly 5,000 local residents joined us to enjoy a street fashion runway with Fashion Art Toronto, fiery performances by the Toronto Kiki Ballroom Alliance, DJ sets curated by Yohomo, and headliners The Illustrious Blacks and Priyanka.

A huge Bentway-sized thank you to the neighbourhood for helping to bring back this summer celebration and making this event such a wild success.



STREET Party Gala

Our 2022 signature supporters' event celebrated the theatre, energy, and delightful unpredictability of the street.

Attendees were welcomed to a seemingly-ordinary cocktail reception, which erupted into a surprise, processional parade. Yes, a gala in motion!

Together, we flamboyantly strolled, rolled, and vogued across The Bentway alongside paraders in Carnival regalia, lion dancers, drag queens, roller skaters, and musicians. At the parade's endpoint, guests enjoyed cocktail conversation, elevated "street food", and artworks in the STREET season.

“

Our Block Party has become a much-anticipated neighbourhood tradition, and the #1 best place to rediscover the joys of the city each summer.

”

Dave Carey, Co-Executive Director

“public labs” along the Gardiner

The Bentway Phase 1 site was just the beginning.

There’s still a lot to learn about the Expressway and its opportunities. We believe that ongoing short-term interventions and experiments can help build knowledge and momentum towards new uses for urban infrastructure.

Looking ahead, The Bentway is rolling out a series of creative “Public Labs” to test out new ideas, pilot new approaches, and engage public participation in continued transformation of future-Gardiner spaces.

connectivity



Confluence @ Exhibition Place

Located just west of The Bentway Phase 1 site are our neighbours at Exhibition Place, Toronto’s top destination for festivals, conventions, and trade shows – and the planned Ontario Line subway station next to the Gardiner.

The Bentway and Exhibition Place teamed up again in October 2022 to demonstrate the benefits of connectivity between our sites and to showcase new ways to enliven under-Gardiner spaces.

Artist duo Striped Canary created a large-scale public art project that invited audiences to flow from our site into ExPlace and discover a massive, hidden storage chamber under the Expressway.



***Confluence* asked us to reflect on the convergence of natural and human-made forces that have and continue to shape the under-Gardiner landscape.**

Using the picnic table, a universal symbol of public-ness, the artists reimagined this familiar form of outdoor furniture into a series of undulating rivers; twirling, cascading and cresting to evoke Toronto's buried, lost rivers.

As guests wandered the artwork's fluid streams, they were guided by an immersive sound field by Toronto composer Anne Bourne.



light and play



Boom Town @ York Street

One of two Waterfront ReConnect projects co-presented with the City and local business associations, our public lab project at York Street experiments with both light and playful humour.

The intersection is clad with an illuminating, vinyl treatment to capture environmental lighting and improve pedestrian safety and accessibility.

Boom Town is conceived by 5468796 Architecture and Office In Search Of. Inspired by the ubiquitous presence of equipment deployed to inspect and maintain the Gardiner, the project presents a theatrical reimagining of the familiar boom lift, transformed into a cast of playful characters to enliven the intersection. The project exposes the ongoing story of the Expressway's transformation and invites the public to join in the process.



scale and story

Pixel Story @ Simcoe Street

The Waterfront ReConnect lab project at Simcoe Street (just steps from Lake Ontario) highlights the collective stories of visitors and residents accessing Toronto's waterfront.

Referencing the many vantages, scales, and speeds from which we experience the Gardiner, Pixel Story uses colour and iconography to draw attention to the corridor as a cultural connector.

Led by O2 Planning & Design, and ENTUITIVE, the project improves the experience of accessing the waterfront by prioritising storytelling, pause and reflection, and community engagement.



water and planting



Staging Grounds (coming soon!) @ Dan Leckie Way

South of The Bentway Studio at Canoe Landing Park sits a bare, under-Gardiner space at Dan Leckie Way with incredible potential.

We're thrilled to be working with the City and the Waterfront BIA on a new lab project set to premiere later in 2023; created by Agency-Agency, SHEEEP Studio, Buro Happold, and Neil Donnelly Studio.

What can we learn about the Gardiner here to help drive forward this space's future transformation?

Opening in Fall 2023, *Staging Grounds* is a site for learning about local water systems and an active pilot to test new environmental design strategies.

This temporary architecture composed of interactive landscape features, expressive storm water management systems, and spaces for performance and gathering collectively demonstrate how infrastructure can support a multitude of cultural, social and educational functions.

Staging Grounds imbues this single-purpose mobility structure with renewed climatic performance and will serve as precedent for The Bentway's further development of the public realm along the Gardiner.





“

We believe in the power of testing ideas in real-time, with real live feedback from real residents. In The Bentway’s unique approach to planning, creative voices lead the way.

”

Ilana Altman, Co-Executive Director

winter together

Winter Skating at The Bentway returned for Year 5, back and bigger than ever:

- **57,400** winter attendees
- **12,100** pairs of skates rented
- **7,700** cups of hot chocolate served
- **2,400** skates sharpened
- **196 million** earned media impressions

Many Torontonians have fond memories of winter in the city - lacing up our skates; holding mittens under a magical snowfall; a friendly neighbour helping dig out our car. For newcomers to Canada, winters will include a series of “firsts”, with new memories to be made and treasured. Adding some extra warmth this year, we celebrated the experiences of newcomers encountering Toronto’s cold season for the first time.

In our “First Winter” program, we explored how experiences of winter can connect all of us, our stories, and our traditions.

favourite winter moments

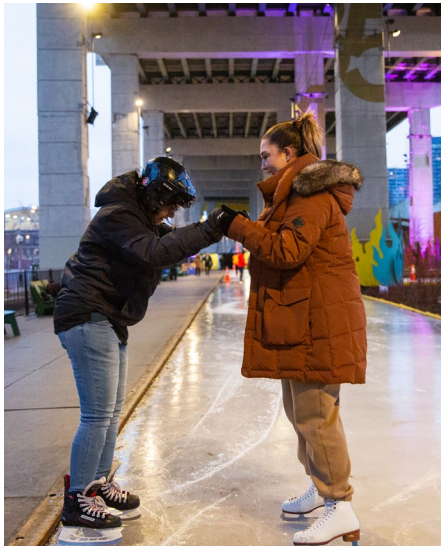


Beacons

Shellie Zhang’s sculptural light installation was inspired by her own experience arriving in Canada as a newcomer, and how efforts of collectives and friendly strangers helped brighten what otherwise felt like an endless, gloomy period of cold. *Beacons* glowed with the dusk and dawn-time colours of Toronto’s skyline, a reminder of the passage of time and the warmth we draw from our community during those dark, frozen months



Participants sharing their “First Winter” stories during our creative storytelling workshop



Skate lessons for newcomer community members

Newcomer Stories

The Bentway, Department of Imaginary Affairs, and Living Hyphen invited newcomers to share stories of their own “First Winters” through a variety of art-based methods like collage, drawing, writing, and embroidery. Experiences were shared through our website, on social media, and at a story wall next to the Skate Trail.

Newcomer Skate Lessons

Guided by professional skate instructors, newcomer community groups took to the ice for the first time as they learned one of Canada’s favourite winter pastimes. After four weeks of instructions, the program culminated in a three-course communal dinner prepared by Newcomer Kitchen.

Midwinter Concert

Co-presented with Small World Music, we transformed the Bentway Studio into an intimate concert space and delivered an enchanting evening of music and performance, featuring musicians from the newcomer artistic community: Roa Lee, Paula Sofia, and Fethi Nadjem.



anatomy of a skate trail

Our Facilities Supervisor, Stephan Lamoureux, is no stranger to the cold season. His love of the outdoors as well as years of playing hockey have prepared him for spending time on the ice operating the Zamboni during winter:

“

This winter we felt the entire site reactivated. It was also a reminder of what the Skate Trail was like pre-pandemic, and it feels like we are only scratching the surface on what magic can happen on ice every season.

”

Stephan Lamoureux, Facilities Supervisor at The Bentway



Above: Preparing our ice for skaters

Below: A visitor renting skates at our Skate Trail

Part of this magic is thanks to our amazing team of Skate Instructors, including Cristina Herraiz Lopez, herself a newcomer to Canada:

“[I’m] so grateful to have been part of the Bentway team in the winter season. They gave me the opportunity to work in an amazing environment, meet so many new people [while learning about] Canadian culture and [enjoying] the winter practising my favourite sport.”

Alongside enthusiastic staff like Stephan and Cristina, we need the support of community leaders like our local MPP Chris Glover, who is a proud champion (and next door neighbour) of The Bentway:

“For five years, The Bentway has brought the Spadina-Fort York community together. With unique and thought-provoking art installations to ice skating, there is something for everyone. I look forward to seeing what The Bentway has in store in the next five years!”

Another ambitious winter season was made possible by supporters like TD Bank Group, the Canada Council for the Arts, Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport, and the Government of Ontario.



“

Public spaces and programs such as The Bentway are especially needed for communities to develop relationships and care in their city.

We're fortunate to have The Bentway stewarded by a team invested in creating spaces for critical, thoughtful, and beautiful experiences.

”

Shellie Zhang, artist

a growing movement

We couldn't do it without you! The Bentway was proud to welcome many new friends, champions, and true-believers to this growing movement.

new supporters



We welcomed **Manulife** as a new supporter this year, which work with charities all across Canada to foster healthier, more equitable communities. Over the next 3 years, Manulife will help propel our continued work to unlock new greenspace and public space along the Gardiner.

Balsam Foundation also came on as a supporter this year to help us implement important community consultation, design, and planning on the Under Gardiner Public Realm Plan. Working to enable and galvanise the well-being and potential of our communities, the Foundation helps strengthen community assets with a focus on public spaces, play, and resilience.

As a key stakeholder in our neighbourhood, the **Toronto Downtown West Business Improvement Area** partnered with The Bentway on Waterfront ReConnect, including a national design competition. Through our work together, the BIA is helping transform key under-Gardiner intersections into safe, accessible, and vibrant gateways between the downtown core and the city's waterfront.

new senior volunteers

Mark Keil is Vice President & Chief Financial Officer at Burgundy Asset Management, a global investment manager for private clients, foundations, and family offices. Mark joins the Bentway Board after serving on our Finance & Audit Committee for several years, now as Committee Chair, ensuring the organization’s health and sustainability for a bright future.



Raja Khanna is Co-Founder and General Partner at FortyTwo Communities, a purpose-driven real estate company supporting community development through art, affordability, and sustainability; and the Co-Founder of tech companies like Dark Slope. As the incoming Chair of our Governance & Nominating Committee, Raja helps build the next generation of Bentway champions.

Drew Sinclair is the Founding Principal of SvN Architects + Planners, a dynamic cultural practice dedicated to resolving critical urban planning and design issues. In addition to serving as a new Bentway Board Member, Drew leads our Capital Projects & Neighbourhood Development Committee in shaping ongoing work along the under-Gardiner corridor, including future Bentway expansion.



new staff



Celeste Davis Meledath and **Ella Hough** bring a range of experiences to the team as our 2023 Public Space Fellows. Over the course of five months, the Fellows explored the intersection of sustainability and public space design, focusing on the ways in which the Bentway can minimise our carbon impact, adopt new ecological ways of working, and reinforce sustainable commitments.

Events Supervisor **Federico Cortés** can often be found working with clients and community groups to welcome them to Bentway spaces and supporting their event production needs. Last year, he worked with a range of partners, from film shoots, to art markets, to brand activations.



Our new Manager of Programming, **Alex Rand**, is a curator and creative producer who joined the team from Luminato Festival Toronto. Alex works with artists to support their visions and steward projects from original conception through to final presentation. A community-builder at heart, his work is guided by creativity, joy, and moments of magic.

our supporters

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our team

Current Staff

Dave Carey
Co-Executive Director

Ilana Altman
Co-Executive Director

Tessa Chan
Controller

Alex Rand
Manager, Programming

Alison Uttley
Senior Manager, Marketing & Communications

Anna Gallagher-Ross
Senior Manager, Programming

Federico Cortes
Supervisor, Events

Jessie Farewell
Manager, Fundraising & Partnerships

Josh Harskamp
Manager, Design

Michael Clarke
Manager, Facilities

Robert McKaye
Senior Manager, Planning & Design

Sam Carter-Shamai
Manager, Planning

Steph Dudek
Manager, Production

Stephan Lamoureux
Supervisor, Facilities

Alice Moores-Rodgerson
Coordinator, Fundraising & Partnerships

Breanna Stephenson
Coordinator, Programming

Celeste Davis Meledath
Public Space Fellow

Christie Shen
Coordinator, Marketing

Christopher Parker
Coordinator, Fundraising & Partnerships

Dylan Jackson
Urban Ranger

Ella Hough
Public Space Fellow

Isabel Tobon
Coordinator, Outreach

Jaime Meier
Coordinator, HR & Administration

Jane O'Brien Davis
Placemaking Intern

Jeremy Forsyth
Producer

Jess Misak
Coordinator, Design

Kirill Sakharov
Supervisor, Facilities

Kris Dearlove
Urban Ranger

Pavneet Pal Singh
Producer

Renee Castonguay
Associate, Programming



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Judy and Wilmot Matthews Foundation

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Founder, Barbara Macdonald Interior Design

Drew Sinclair
Principal, SvN Architects + Planners

Mark Keil
Vice President and CFO, Burgundy Asset Management

Dori Tunstall
Dean of Design, Ontario College of Art and Design University

Ann Bowman
Vice Chairman, Enterprise Strategic Client Group, RBC

Ken Greenberg (Emeritus Member)
Principal, Greenberg Consultants

Judy Matthews (Emeritus Member)
Judy and Wilmot Matthews Foundation



The Happy Dancing Group performing during our Lunar New Year celebration



A family dressed up for our annual Howl'oween pup parade and costume contest



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