

NEIGHBOURS OF

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# High Park & Roncesvalles

Tina Soldovieri and the Roncy Reducers are Leading the Charge in the War Against Single Use Plastics



L to R: Alison Jessamine, Tina Soldovieri, Debbie Green, and Sonya Gammal

## Tina Soldovieri and the Roncy Reducers are Leading the Charge in the War Against Single Use Plastics

By Patti McCabe • Photos by Chris Cabral

Over the past year I have noticed small green stickers had begun to appear on businesses and shops up and down Roncesvalles. Today, almost every restaurant and business along the Avenue is sporting a sticker that proudly announces that Roncy Reduces. Where had they come from and what did they mean? I decided to go right to the source.

Tina Soldovieri is a bespectacled, soft-spoken Mom who works as an environmental educator at High Park Nature Centre. You would never suspect that she is also a revolutionary soldier leading the charge in the war against single use plastics.

Born and raised in Germany, Tina earned her degree in North American Studies and Russian and was working in a museum when she met her husband-to-be, Stefan, an American Ph.D. student studying in Germany. They married and had their first child, Antonia, in Germany before Stefan was offered a position as a Professor of German Studies at Northwestern University near Chicago. In Chicago they had their second child, daughter Luca. Finally, in 2002, the family moved to Canada when Stefan was offered a position in the German Department at the University of Toronto. It was here that their son Pascal was born making the Soldovieri family a mini United Nations consisting of two Germans, two Americans and one Canadian!

The move to the Roncesvalles neighbourhood was no fluke, Tina had done her research and loved the community vibe of the west end





neighbourhood. She was also excited to be near nature with High Park steps away and Sunnyside Beach at the bottom of the street. The leafy residential neighbourhood behind Roncesvalles was the perfect place to continue raising her three kids.

While the kids were still young Tina began volunteering for the school garden programs at their school, Montview Alternative when it was on Keele St. and later at Keele St. Public School which included helping Montview Alternative/Keele Public earn their EcoSchools certification. She did this by organizing the weekly watering of forty trees on the newly renovated school property, and teaching kids and volunteer families how to care for the trees until the root system was established. She had always been interested in nature and the environment and while raising her kids she had become more and more acutely aware that the world her kids were growing up in was in crisis. She had already instilled in them a love of nature but she also wanted to communicate the need for action, without resorting to doomsday predictions and panic-inducing scenarios. She wanted to challenge the next generation to positive action. So, she went back to school and, in 2017, completed her Master of Education in Environmental Education.

With degree in hand, Tina got a job at High Park Nature Centre connecting children and adults with nature through such programs as Fox and Kits (6 months to 5 yrs), Waddlers (18 - 36 months), Knee-high Naturalists (3-5 yrs), and Raccoons (6-9 yrs). She also helps deliver special events such as the popular Owl Prowl, and leadership and professional development trips/ events including snow shoeing, fire skills & storytelling.

Then in 2017 Tina attended a lecture by Bea Johnson, author of *Zero Waste Home: The Ultimate Guide to Simplifying Your Life by Reducing Your Waste*. Tina was inspired and decided to try to reduce the waste in her own home. Using her own family as guinea pigs, she propped up a giant blackboard in the dining room and started to inventory everything that was brought into the house. Reducing waste, especially as a family of five with two cats, is not easy. You have to really think about it and plan ahead. The family jumped on the bandwagon but they soon discovered that even when the heart is willing the packaging is weak. Most of the food you buy at the grocery store is heavily packaged, take out food often comes in black plastic containers, and even pet food and litter come in thick plastic bags.

That's when the idea hit. Why couldn't she bring her own containers, bags, cups and jars to the grocery store and the coffee shop and the butcher and the fruit market? If she could reduce her use of the especially

prevalent single-use plastics such as plastic bags, coffee cups, straws and plastic food containers, couldn't others? She reached out to her friends and neighbours and was relieved to see that they shared her same passion for change. They just needed a plan to put into action. Tina came up with the simple, genius idea of a sticker. And thus was born Roncey Reduces – a community initiative.

Basically, the members of the group meet with local businesses and explain what they are trying to do and ask the owner if they would allow a Roncey Reduces sticker to be put on their door or in their window. The sticker, emblazoned with the letters BYO and the words Bring Your Own, lets the shopper know that it is OK to bring in your own reusable container that can be filled with coffee, produce, bread, pastries, meat, fish, cheese or anything that is for sale.



In the beginning it was a bit of a tough sell. There were a lot of logistics to be worked out and in the end the business owner would become a partner in the initiative, actively encouraging the BYO policy and devising creative ways that they as a business could also reduce waste. Pollocks Hardware, for example, has introduced a refill station for home and beauty products where you bring your own container. Roncesvalles Dental Centre will accept your hard to recycle dental products such as toothbrushes, floss cases, and even toothpaste tubes. Simply drop your dental recyclables into their Terracycle box and they will recycle them for you.

The idea was a hit and pretty soon businesses were coming to the Roncey Reducers asking to participate in the program. Word got out and now Tina spends much of her RR time helping other communities start their own waste reduction programs. There are new programs in the Beaches, Danforth, Leslieville, Cabbagetown, the Annex, Downtown, Etobicoke and Ottawa with interested groups calling each day from Parkdale, Little India, Mississauga, Markham, Seaton Village, London Ontario, and Orangeville. Clearly it is an idea whose time has come.

There is a groundswell of support and the grassroots initiative will eventually make its way to influence government policy. This is the positive action that Tina wished to model for her kids and the next generation. Bravo Tina, bravo!



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