

The great north end

This weekend's inaugural *Go North!* festival celebrates the art and history of north end Halifax. Two exhibitions—*The Right Thing to Do*, a multi-media installation, and the audio piece *Gone Missing*—highlight Gottingen Street's rich past

by Sue Carter Flinnby

...When artist Helen Verbanz started working on her audio piece *Gone Missing*, a soundscape of life around Gottingen Street, she decided she wanted to record the carillon of bells at the Fort Needham memorial to the Halifax Explosion. She went to the park several times over a two-week period, but the bells never played. She continued to go back at different times on the advice of different people—every 15 minutes, every half-hour, every hour, once a day to mark the time of the Halifax Explosion—but still, no bells. So Verbanz called the city, which sent an electrician to fix an apparently faulty switch.

"They weren't aware because they thought someone in the neighbourhood would tell them, but people in the neighbourhood were so used to hearing it, they didn't notice," says Verbanz. "It's ubiquitous to a lot of people, it's like it's not there. But when someone else points out they're not there, people are surprised."

Gone Missing also refers to another search —like *The Right Thing to Do*, Verbanz tackles a lack of knowledge about the area's rich history. "There are aspects I had to look for and search. The piece is a lot about things gone missing or things people don't know," she says.

The audio installation will be set up in the "in-between zone" outside of the A. McLaren Gallery, a small window space beside Eyelevel Gallery, and the gallery interior where paintings by Mitchell Wiebe will be on display. Verbanz explains that the exterior speakers' location and content will "make people react and ask questions, wondering where the sound comes from and prompt some questions about the community."

Verbanz recorded iconic sounds like the memorial bells and the foghorn, along with sounds of people she met, such as the man who loves to tap dance. A daily visitor to the North Halifax Library, he told Verbanz that whenever he used to meet up with Buddy Daye, the beloved champion boxer and community activist, Daye would join him in a little dance. There are sounds of singing from the churches and people greeting each other. She met another man who coached four generations of baseball teams who discussed how the decline of Gottingen businesses made it difficult to find local sponsors for things like team t-shirts and hats.

While much of her recording will be edited out or used to create a tonal expression or atmosphere that subtly addresses the area's environment and social conditions, many sounds are still distinct. "People have commented on what it's like to sit on Gottingen Street on their porch and hear the loud, loud buses go by, so they can't hear the people next to them because of the sound. That's



Artist Helen Verbanz rings a bell for the north end. photo Jamie Smith

something that people notice about their community," she says.

Verbanz doesn't live in the neighbourhood, but she's enthusiastic about what the experience brought her. "I'm so happy I got a chance to know it. I was lucky in meeting these people and that I was able to bear witness to their stories."

The Right Thing to Do: Our Neighbourhood in Words and Pictures, September 5-9, Halifax North Memorial Library, 2285 Gottingen. Gone Missing, September 9-22, A. McLaren Gallery, 2128 Gottingen.