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Strategic voting campaigns ramp up

Voters weigh voting with head or heart; solid information often lacking

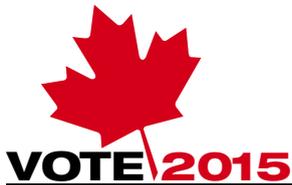
JANE SEYD

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With the federal election less than a week away, it's coming down to decision time for many North Shore voters. For some voters, whether to vote with the head or the heart – and whether that really

makes a difference – is one question that looms large.

This election, a number of “strategic voting” campaigns have targeted potential swing ridings, including all three on the North Shore. Campaigns like Vote Together, organized by the activist group Lead Now, are



upfront about their goal of defeating Conservative candidates by getting left-leaning voters in Liberal, NDP and Green Party camps to throw their support behind candidates they think

have the best chance of beating the Conservatives.

But some have criticized the campaigns as encouraging a cynical vote against something rather than for something voters truly believe in. Other critics just aren't sure it works.

From a rational perspective, choosing to vote strategically is “perfectly reasonable” if the goal is “getting the government you dislike least,” said Greg

Lyle, a pollster and political strategist with Innovative Research, who makes his home on the Sunshine Coast.

The scene for strategic voting is set only when several conditions are met, said Lyle: You have a clear preference but you don't think your party will win in your riding, you have another party you don't want to see win and an acceptable alternative to your first

choice.

About 18 per cent of the electorate are potential strategic voters, said Lyle. Most of those are soft supporters of the Liberals, NDP or Greens who would consider switching to one of the other camps. They are the voters currently being targeted by Lead Now's Vote Together campaign promoting strategic voting

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Grouse hiker rescued after head-first fall

BRENT RICHTER

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A local woman is probably counting herself thankful after being rescued from a life-threatening injury in the backcountry by North Shore Rescue volunteers over the Thanksgiving weekend.

The team got the call at 4 p.m. Sunday after the 30-year-old hiker fell head-first while on Goat Mountain, due north of Grouse Mountain.

“It's very steep and rocky on that side and she actually fell forward and tumbled 15 feet on the steep rock,” said Mike Danks, North Shore Rescue team leader.

The woman received significant facial trauma

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BOTTLE BRIGADE Handsworth students James Floe, Jiho Park and Glenn McLean promote their school music program's annual bottle drive fundraiser on Saturday, Oct. 24. Residents in the Handsworth catchment area are encouraged to leave their refundable bottles and cans in a location on their property that is visible from the street, but not at the curb, by 8 a.m. for pickup. Bottles can also be dropped off at the high school between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. that same day. For more information, email handsworthbottledrive@gmail.com. PHOTO CINDY GOODMAN



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TASTE

Slow-braised meats a specialty



Chris Dagenais
The Dish

To paraphrase the great Jack White, I said it once before but it bears repeating now: this is a fantastic job.

It's every bit as good as people imagine it to be. Dining out is one of life's greatest pleasures and dining out with purpose, to share with others what I learn, to consider an experience carefully, to understand its broader context, is simply sublime.

One element of this job that certainly never grows old is the fun of anonymity. For those who may not know, I never share my identity at a restaurant.

The whole point of this column is to report back on an experience that anyone else could replicate upon visiting the same place themselves. The obvious exceptions are when I am setting out to interview a chef or restaurateur in order to get a better handle on their business. In those cases I make arrangements in advance, but typically those columns are not focused on experiences that can be custom tailored or improved in any way to woo me as a reviewer; a bakery, a distillery, a brewery, a chocolatier – none of these businesses can alter their offerings



Ambleside Bistro owners Ava Atkinson and Omar Hash are serving up southern French Provence fare in their new West Vancouver eatery. PHOTO PAUL MCGRATH

ROMANCING THE STOVE

Angela Shellard presents recipes for slow cookers page 30

in order to heighten their chances of a good review. Our newspaper's photographers visit the restaurants I review on separate trips, never with me, and cannot confirm for the business whether I have already been there or if a visit is still pending.

My recent visit to Ambleside Bistro, a tiny new West Vancouver eatery with a big, big heart, reminded me yet again how much fun it is to simply blend into the background.

Co-owner Omar Hash was manning the fort alone when I arrived. Figuring the last customer of the

evening had come and gone already, he had the quiet bistro in the preliminary stages of winding down. Nevertheless, Hash graciously rebooted the place and engaged me in conversation about the culinary approach of the restaurant. At one point, Hash, referring to the newspaper's photographer Paul McGrath's visit a few days prior, said: "The North Shore News came by last week. Man, I really hope it's a good review." I nodded in sympathetic assent. "Yeah, I hope that works out for you. I'm sure at least the pictures will be

good!"

Omar, let me tell you this: the phenomenal aromas emanating from the slowly braised meats that are the specialty of your bistro, paired with your easy, enthusiastic hospitality, had already put you on the path to a good review. Then, the sigh-inducing deliciousness of the Brisket Provencal baguette sandwich sealed the deal.

The sandwich, packed with falling-to-pieces, slowly cooked brisket steeped in the wonderful herbes de Provence flavours of thyme, rosemary, and

savory, with Gouda cheese, lettuce, tomato, purple onion and, in an inspired bit of taste-enhancement, fresh mint leaves, was a treat, the perfect fall comfort combo. Hash explained that the thick, hearty brisket braising stock had proven so popular that he had patrons come back just for another taste of it. The stock is served in a ramekin on the side of the sandwich and, according to Hash, is best employed when it is poured, one dollop at a time, directly onto the next bite of the

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TASTE

Flavourful chicken ragout stars in baguette sandwich

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baguette. I have to concur, that stock is delicious, rich, deep, and thick with morsels of brisket.

While awaiting the second dish of my order, Provence-style Spaghetti Bolognese, Hash generously offered me samples of two more of Ambleside Bistro's core dishes, a thick and satisfying, housemade tomato bisque made with fresh Roma tomatoes and a spectacularly flavoursome chicken ragout, which is served as a baguette sandwich. The chicken, also fall-apart tender, revealed fragrant, round notes of what I suspect was bay leaf, celery and white wine. I cannot confirm these ingredients, mind, as the recipe is a closely guarded secret, a competitive business advantage. Hash positively brims with pride when he describes partner, head chef and co-owner Ava Atkinson's cooking. It is nice to see a restaurant owner so thoroughly moved by his business's own offerings; it inspires confidence in the diner.

The spaghetti was a hearty, generously portioned affair. Unlike a more traditional Italian Bolognese, Atkinson's Provence-inspired effort did not rely heavily on tomatoes, featuring rather a dense mixture of ground meat studded with carrots, celery, onion and a bold handful of southern French herbs. The result was a filling meal, more stew than pasta with sauce.

The interior of Ambleside Bistro is bright and minimalist,



A Brisket Provencal Baguette and Spaghetti Bolognese are on the menu at Ambleside Bistro. PHOTO PAUL MCGRATH

with just two communal tables and matching light beech flooring. Some large canvasses, featuring stylized cats in various poses, decorate the walls and add to a sense of playfulness that pervades the space. A couple of outdoor tables will likely find favour again in the spring, but I anticipate that this new addition to West Vancouver's dining scene is going to be popular for take-out, given its affordable rib-sticking fare and generous portions.

Indeed, Hash relayed to me that he had to close up shop early one recent Sunday due to a sudden

rush of parents raiding the joint following soccer practice. The onslaught cleaned the café out of food and may be a sign of trends to come.

My meal of a baguette sandwich and an order of spaghetti to go was \$22.

Ambleside Bistro is located at 105-1425 Marine Dr. 604-921-1340. amblesidebistro.com

Chris Dagenais served as a manager for several restaurants downtown and on the North Shore. A self-described wine fanatic, he earned his sommelier diploma in 2001. hungryontheshore@gmail.com.

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