



East End shows its stuff

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR

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Eastenders can get their fill of holiday cheer when local shopkeepers and restaurateurs band together for Leslieville's Christmas festival Holiday Wanderlust.

Approximately 20 stores, galleries and eateries will devote Thursday evening to festivities that include food and wine served along a three-block strip of Queen St. E. between Pape and Jones Aves. The event, which takes place between 6 and 10 p.m., will raise funds for the Chum City Christmas Wish.

Andrew Wyatt, who runs <http://www.eastendnoise.com>, a neighbourhood website that helps promote the event, says one major benefit to doing holiday shopping in his part of town is that, "you ensure you'll have greater variety and a one-of-a-kind experience."

He makes the case for the "little guy" who runs his or her store in this trendy 'hood where evidence has been mounting that a developer has his eye and wallet on a stretch of Eastern Ave. to open a power centre.

The neighbourhood opposition has been huge, says Wyatt, and local businesses are rallying to the street's defence. The Holiday Wanderlust event will attempt to show that the intimacy of on-street shopping is superior to the frenzy of big box consumerism, particularly at this time of year.

Wyatt is also convinced the independent retailers have more variety in their offerings than big box centres. "By shopping locally you help keep the variety," he says.

He also suggests that neighbourhoods such as Leslieville, which are only now becoming gentrified, attract a more interesting category of artisan boutiques, trendy retailers and innovative restaurants.

Besides, says Wyatt, "how many people will open the exact same gift on Christmas morning, wrapped in the exact same paper, with the exact same greeting card ... purchased from a big box or chain store?"

No matter your stance on big chain stores, any opportunity to drink eggnog or mulled wine with your neighbours and get on first-name terms with your local proprietors can't be a bad idea.

Participating stores include Ethel, EyeSpy, G.U.F.F. and OK OK.

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