



[Pin it](#)

[g+1](#) [0](#)



MON APR 29, 2013

PLACES

How the hell is Cloverdale Mall still around?

BY: KIM HUGHES

Rare is the business that has operated continuously for 56 years. So behold Cloverdale Mall, that smallish, unremarkable but seemingly ever-lasting retail hub squished between the East Mall, Highway 427, and an ugly stretch of Dundas West where Etobicoke buys cars, fights traffic tickets, and bowls 24/7.

Cloverdale Mall is to GTA history what *Cinderella Man* is to movies: the scrappy-survivor story that would be completely improbable if it weren't true and staring you straight in the mug. Take for instance, the fact that Cloverdale began life in 1957 as an open-air mall. That is to say: a mall with no roof, just rows of side-by-side shops simulating a pedestrian block on a city street, but actually adrift in the middle of suburbia.

This being Canada, the open-air concept was faintly ridiculous even in the kaleidoscopic 1960s. That it remained unroofed until 1976—that's 19 freezing winters, 19 scorching summers, and countless rainy days while employing, according to mall lore, an environmentally hateful "outdoor climate control system for the winter months involving a complex series of wind baffles and overhead infra-red heaters"—says as much about the surrounding community's devotion to Cloverdale's oddball charm as anything it had on sale.

Today, Cloverdale Mall is a glorious hodgepodge of marquee retailers like Winners, Metro, Kitchen Stuff Plus and, most recently, Target, quaint regional indies like Hampton Row ladies wear, head-spinning throwbacks like Coles books, and sundry dental and medical providers.

In one stop, it's possible to renew your health card at Services Ontario, grab a bottle of chardonnay at the LCBO, bulk candy at Bulk 'n' Bits, and flip-flops at Ardene while getting your watch battery changed at Peoples Jewellers, and stocking up on rubber gloves at Dollarama.

True, Cloverdale lacks the sparkly fashion-forward splendour of nearby Sherway Gardens, oft-cited as its main competitor. But for its estimated 90,000 weekly shoppers trying to squeeze 10 errands into one outing between soccer practice and *Big Bang Theory*, it's damn convenient.

Indeed, Cloverdale is more akin to working-stiff Gerrard Square in the city's east end, or Dufferin

Mall—which also traces its history to the 1950s—than fancy-pants malls with guest services and valet parking. Its very ordinariness and prosaic mix of shops is precisely what makes it so valuable to its customers.

“Cloverdale has always been a part of the local community. It established itself as a community shopping centre and that keeps drawing people back to their roots,” offers general manager Justin Deknatel from the mall’s management offices.

“There’s a lot of people who’ve been shopping here for 30 years,” he continues. “People have grown up with the mall and the mall has grown up with the people. And we find that a lot of people who live in this neighbourhood have been here for a long, long time.

“As much as I’d like to give all the credit to Cloverdale, this community seems to be one where people stay for quite some time and that definitely has something to do with its success as well.”

Even those that leave the community feel an inexplicable attachment to the place. I know because I am one of those people. I vividly recall being dragged there as a kid by my grandparents who lived in the area and who would bribe me to behave with a gingerbread man from the awesome—and still-operating—Hot Oven Bakery as they browsed long-gone stalwarts like D’Allaird’s and Kresge.

Like its shoppers—among them, the Cloverdale Heartwalkers, who gather each morning before opening to stride the aisles to stay fit—many mall retailers are old-timers: the aforementioned Hot Oven Bakery and Laura Secord date back to the mall’s dawn. See also: Coles (formerly W.H. Smith), Metro (formerly Dominion), and Scotiabank (formerly Bank of Nova Scotia).

And menswear store Taylor Somers “has been here since the beginning,” confirms mall marketing director Jennifer Bolton, “and it’s remained in the same location. Several store renovations have happened over the years, but the location is the same.”

Before Target arrived this spring, the large space at the mall’s north end housed Morgan’s department store, which begat The Bay, which begat Zellers. Remember Big Boy Restaurant? Yup, Cloverdale had one of those, too.

And Cloverdale has always been in touch with its demographic. “We were, I think, one of the first centres to have a play structure for kids to play on,” notes Bolton, “so that’s a lot of the memories you’ll hear from customers that used to come here as kids. They remember the snail cement slide that was once here, the large wooden giraffe structure.”

Such scenes are depicted in clusters of vintage black-and-white photos lining the hallway leading to the mall washrooms, and grouped under titles like “Easter 1958,” “Spring and Fall Fashion Shows 1964-1965,” and “Auto Show 1962.”

“We’ve had customers come and identify themselves as some of the children we have in those photos,” Bolton says. “We had a customer identify a woman pictured in a go-cart as their mom. People remember being here, and seeing those pictures brings it all back.”

Yet adds general manager Deknatel, “Other than that, we have almost no historical documents, which is unfortunate but that’s often what happens when you have changes of ownership over the years; files get moved around and things disappear.

“Pre-internet, it was hard to preserve and archive the stories. But that makes it interesting when older people come up to our offices to share their stories, and to recall growing up in the mall.

“There really aren’t that many community-type centres left anymore that operate at this level,” Deknatel adds. And it’s true: under its Community Kiosk program, for instance, Cloverdale Mall offers free space to local non-profit/charitable organizations raising awareness and funds, such as Scouts Canada, Etobicoke EMS Services, and the Kiwanis Club of Islington.

And those 200-odd, mostly elderly registered Heartwalkers? The mall organizes activities and social events for them such as tai chi, square dancing, guest speakers, and an annual holiday party. Hard to imagine something like that being trumpeted by the fashionistas clip-clopping the halls over at Sherway (or Yorkdale or Square One).

“You can count on one hand the number of malls like this one that are left,” Deknatel says. “I think that’s a testament to the community and to the mall itself. It has stood a long time.”

Janet

I just love this mall! It has such a warm, family friendly feel to it and I'm so glad that it continues to thrive. I've become turned off of late by the 'upscale' Sherway Gardens. It's truly difficult to find anything I can afford to buy in that mall nowadays. Cloverdale Mall, on the other hand, is such a wonderfully reasonably priced place to shop. After all, not all of us earn \$90,000+ per year 😊

Cloverdale is a down-to-earth place to shop and I sincerely hope it lasts another 50+ years!

 3  0

2:59 pm on April 11, 2014

 Reply  Report

Alex

Since we're all waxing nostalgic here about Cloverdale, how about some of the great local bands that were affiliated with the mall and the neighbourhood...? I just checked out an awesome local band, Milo Hazoff. They're an eclectic funk/rock style, two-piece band of local, west Etobicoke guys. Here's my open request for the mall to again feature some of our local musical talent!

 2  0

8:47 am on October 2, 2013

 Reply  Report

Gonnieob

I remember taking my children to Cloverdale to play on that concrete slide. And those overhead heaters you mentioned – at the time we thought they were great.. Still love Cloverdale today and shop there regularly. Hope it's around for another 56 years!

 2  0

10:12 am on September 17, 2013

 Reply  Report

Pattio

"In one stop, it's possible to renew your health card at Services Ontario, grab a bottle of chardonnay at the LCBO, bulk candy at Bulk 'n' Bits, and flip-flops at Ardene while getting your watch battery

changed at Peoples Jewellers, and stocking up on rubber gloves at Dollarama.”

That's why Cloverdale is still around!!! You can always come home with something!

 4  0

12:40 pm on August 22, 2013

 Reply  Report

RCL

For some 1950's and 1960's historical photos...

[https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?](https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.3961045483927.1073741825.1814022886&type=1&l=ff32100d39)

[set=a.3961045483927.1073741825.1814022886&type=1&l=ff32100d39](https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.3961045483927.1073741825.1814022886&type=1&l=ff32100d39)

 2  0

5:38 am on July 2, 2013

 Reply  Report

Gwen Kelsall

Great article, Kim. Haven't been to Cloverdale in years, but remember everything you mentioned. Especially the concrete slide, of course. And chocolate milk at Kresge's. Too bad there weren't a few pictures!

 4  0

7:11 pm on May 22, 2013

 Reply  Report