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Ira Gladstone, a.k.a. Mr. Fix-It, at his home workshop in New Richmond, 800 kilometres away on the Gaspé Peninsula. "People ship me things or I pick them up when I'm in Montreal and bring them back here to repair them," he says. PHOTO BY SYLVIE BABIN

Ira Gladstone shut his shop on Décarie and moved on — all the way to Gaspé — but years later, the phone keeps ringing with requests for repairs, **Mark Cardwell** reports.

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EXTRA

MR. FIX-IT'S SPIRIT
CAN'T BE BROKEN

Despite a traumatic move from Décarie shop, repairman continues to serve his customers in la métropole from his new home in the Gaspé

AT A GLANCE

To inquire about repair work, Ira Gladstone can be reached at 514-484-8332. The workshops at Ressourcerie Baie-Verte in Carleton-sur-Mer are held twice monthly on Saturdays from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Gladstone is on site between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. most days; drop-ins welcome. Visit ressourceriebaieverte.com/reparation.

MARK CARDWELL

The kids broke that gorgeous crystal vase you inherited.

That antique clock you paid big bucks for has stopped working.

Who you gonna call?

Ira Gladstone — a.k.a. Mr. Fix-It — has long been a go-to name for Montrealers in need of repairs for unique or vintage household or personal items with sentimental or commercial value, from old lamps and blenders to crystal figurines and chandeliers.

For decades, Gladstone did repairs at his family's store — also called Mr. Fix-It — on Décarie Blvd., near Queen Mary Rd.

The store's sign read: "Mr. Fix-It: We fix anything ... except broken hearts!"

Gladstone closed the store in 2015 but continued doing repair work by appointment in his apartment above the shop.

But after leaving Montreal in 2021 — forced out of his Décarie location, he says, by plans to redevelop the building — the eclectic repairman has continued to serve his customers in la métropole from his new home in New Richmond, 800 kilometres away on the south coast of the Gaspé Peninsula.

"It's a bit of a challenge," Gladstone said. "People ship me things or I pick them up when I'm in Montreal and bring them back here to repair them. But it's worth it because I love to fix the things people cherish."

Making people happy by being handy has been both a calling and a career for the 70-year-old Montreal native.

But things sure didn't start out that way.

Born and raised in a conservative Jewish family in the west end neighbourhood of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, near the Décarie, Gladstone went to a parochial Jewish public school and then the now-defunct Wagar High School in nearby Côte-St-Luc.

"I was a terrible student," he said. "The only thing I loved was sports."

Swimming was his particular passion. He joined a swim club in northeast Montreal and became a competitive swimmer in the breaststroke.

"I had to take two buses to get there and back, an hour each way," he said. "But I was very motivated."

By the time he enrolled in the science program at Sir George Williams University, which later merged with Loyola College to create Concordia University, Gladstone had morphed into a high-level water polo player.

He played defence on both provincial and national water polo teams, travelling often across Canada, the U.S. and even to Europe.

Gladstone failed, however, to get a college degree.

"I spent more time in the pool than the classroom," he said. "I had no drive to study."

Gladstone found a new sense of purpose working alongside his parents, Reuben and Dora, in the family business.

The business began in 1953, when Gladstone was born, as a giftware shop on Parc Ave. that also offered repair services to the shop's customers.

The store moved three times, ending up on Décarie, next to the Snowdon Theatre, as "Mr. Fix-It" in the late 1960s.

"We served the local neighbourhood," Gladstone said. "We fixed appliances and furniture and lighting — lots of lighting — like rewiring lamps."

Gladstone helped out at the store growing up and joined full time after leaving college.

"I'm mechanically inclined and I've always had a natural curiosity to discover what's inside things,



Ira Gladstone, a.k.a. Mr. Fix-It, hosts a free public "repair café" at the Ressourcerie BaieVerte in Gaspé's Carleton-sur-Mer twice monthly on Saturdays. "People can come in for repairs for anything from sunglasses to mom's old toaster," Gladstone says. "It's a fun event." SYLVIE BABIN

how they function," he said. "I enjoy taking things apart and fixing them."

In addition to repair work, the store also sold items — notably antiques, which were all the rage in the 1960s and '70s — that Reuben Gladstone bought and restored.

By the 1980s, when Gladstone was married with two kids (Josh, now a 37-year-old mechanical engineer and Rachel, 35, a nurse's aide at the Glen site of the MUHC), the store was also doing warranty work for all the big-name small appliance makers.

Around the time his father died in the 1980s, Gladstone added electronics repair work to the mix.

Business, he said, boomed from the get-go.

"Most days we had people lined up at the door," Gladstone said. "We had up to 15 employees. It got to the point where I was considering making it a 'round-the-clock business."

Gladstone also shared his repair knowledge as a regular guest on Chuck Phillips's weekday call-in radio show on CJAD.

Westmount resident Evelyn Schachter, whose parents, Bernard and Neri Bloomfield, were pillars in Montreal's Jewish community throughout the second half of the 20th century, remembers Mr. Fix-It as a busy, cluttered store that was always fun to visit.

"I'm big on reusing, not throwing things out, so I would bring things there to get them repaired," Schachter said. "It was like a dry-cleaning shop. There was a big counter in front and tons of shelves and cabinets filled with all kinds of old things, from soup to nuts."

Behind it, she said, employees were busy doing repair work.

"Ira was always there — and I

knew his mom," Schachter said. "They were warm, friendly people, always eager to help."

By the late 1990s, Gladstone's enthusiasm for repairing electronics declined with the rise of poor-quality devices that were flooding North American markets due to global free trade deals.

"Stuff was getting crappier and there was no more satisfaction in it for me," Gladstone said. "I decided to concentrate on fixing things that were more personally meaningful."

"Over time, my goal became to fix old things. Not to make them new again, but to give them new life and to bring joy to the owner."

Gladstone first bought a small

"We repaired it but couldn't save the signature," Gladstone said. "So I went to the Forum and someone there helped us get Lafleur to sign it again."

Mr. Fix-It also put a pair of porcelain dolls that were shattered like Humpty Dumpty back together again.

"The owner was so happy, there were tears in her eyes," Gladstone said. "So I changed Mr. Fix-It's motto to read, 'We fix anything ... even a broken heart!'"

Lise Jolicoeur, a longtime buyer for Birks Jewellers, began turning to Gladstone to repair crystal objects 30 years ago.

Most recently, Gladstone fixed a modern table lamp for her that had an electrical problem.

"I have only good things to say about Ira," Jolicoeur said. "Ira is able to fix or restore almost anything."

In 2015, after being successfully treated for colon cancer, Gladstone decided to close the store and continue working by appointment from his workshop on the second floor where he also lived with his wife, Sylvie Babin.

Babin, who comes from New Richmond, worked in a Montreal bank when she and Gladstone met 20 years ago. She later worked in Gladstone's store.

At the store's closing, Gladstone held a gala evening and silent auction of clocks, paintings and other antiques he'd collected over the years.

The event raised about \$25,000 for the C.A.R.E. Centre (carecentre.org), a charitable organization that operates a day program for adults with physical disabilities like cerebral palsy. Gladstone also donated the 300-gallon saltwater fish tank that had long been a feature in his

store to the centre, which is housed in his old high school.

In 2020, Gladstone's world was turned upside down when he learned the Société de transport de Montréal (STM) wanted to buy all the units in the once-vibrant strip mall that housed Mr. Fix-It and raze it to build both surface and underground facilities on the site.

Gladstone said an STM official made it clear to him he'd be expropriated if he didn't sell. "I felt like I had a gun to my head," he said. "I decided to sell instead of fighting a costly battle I couldn't win."

A spokesperson for the STM said Gladstone sold his unit voluntarily in January 2021.

"He was not expropriated," said STM spokesperson Amélie Régis, who also said a call for tenders to demolish the building, which has been boarded up and covered in graffiti for the past three years, will be issued "soon" by the STM.

On April 15, C.D.N.-N.D.G. Borough Mayor Gracia Kasoki Katahwaposted a message on X (formerly Twitter) indicating a collaboration between the city and the STM to replace the building with a temporary "urban green space."

Uprooted from Décarie and unable to find a suitable place to relocate in the city, Gladstone said he and Babin decided to move to her hometown in 2021. "I'm so glad we did. I love it here," he said.

But Gladstone is also glad he kept his Mr. Fix-It phone number in the 514 area code. "I get calls from people almost every day," he said.

He visits Montreal every few months to see his kids and meet clients at Atelier Daniel, a framing business in N.D.G. "I bring a bag of tools with me and can make small adjustments," Gladstone said. But mostly he takes work back to the Gaspé.

Gladstone also has a workshop at the Ressourcerie BaieVerte in nearby Carleton-sur-Mer, a second-hand shop that sells donated items — and broken things Gladstone fixes as a volunteer — to raise money for local charities, including a women's shelter.

Gladstone hosts a free public "repair café" at the shop, including one this Saturday.

"People can come in for repairs for anything from sunglasses to mom's old toaster," Gladstone said. "It's a fun event."

Among other ambitions, Gladstone hopes to find an apprentice to do crystal repair work. His eventual goal is to establish an antique crystal restoration studio at the Ressourcerie BaieVerte.

"I was sad to leave Montreal," Gladstone said. "But I'm blessed to be able to continue serving people there as well as here in my new home."

Special to the Montreal Gazette



A photo of Ira Gladstone published in The Gazette on June 18, 1981. "I'm mechanically inclined and I've always had a natural curiosity to discover what's inside things, how they function," Gladstone says. LEN SIDAWAY FILES