

GIVING BACK



ALICE LAM is building community by connecting people, whether through the creation of Volly, an app that pairs volunteers with the organizations that need them, her own volunteer work, or the management of the Tiggerstedt Flea Pop-Up Market.

When Alice Lam started Volly, a web-based platform that works as a sort of concierge service connecting volunteers and non-profits, she put into practice her desire for community building. Volly connects volunteers to causes they are passionate about, and volunteer opportunities that fit their schedule. Non-profit organizations also use the site to find people who care about the work they do and manage the logistics of coordinating multiple volunteers to achieve success in their projects. “I wanted to make it as easy as possible for people to find an emotional connection to a volunteer opportunity,” says Lam. “Whether it was working with seniors, immigrants or animals, volunteering is the most effective when they feel connected to the cause.”

What sets Volly apart from other volunteer assistance websites or apps is that although it’s an online platform, there is a human element to the interaction and users can email real people for advice. While anyone can browse the opportunities on the site, once they’ve registered, volunteers can build a profile by choosing from a dropdown menu that includes more than 30 types of non-profit causes such as LGBTQ+, youth or Indigenous causes. Potential volunteers can use an interactive map to find opportunities close to home or work and filter searches to events, ongoing groups and donation opportunities.

“People do not have a lot of time to do research on every organization in search of volunteers. I wanted to do that research for them and create a platform that people can easily use to find their next volunteer opportunity,” says Lam.

Lam was inspired to create Volly during her time working as a communications project manager with an educational consulting company in New York. That’s where she came across the New York Cares website, which connects New Yorkers interested in volunteering to causes and organizations of their choice. When Lam moved back to Calgary in 2014, she got to work building Volly with help from CivicTechYYC, a group that pairs those with technological expertise with people like Lam who have a great idea. Volly officially launched in 2018.

BETTER



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BY TRAVIS KLEMP PHOTOGRAPHY BY JARED SYCH CRAFTING BY TERESA JOHNSTON

Today, Volly has helped more than 2,000 Calgarians find causes to work with and has assisted over 80 non-profit organizations find the help they need.

Larry Mathieson, CEO of the Kerby Centre, a local seniors advocacy organization, says that when COVID-19 hit, many of the services they offer became much more complex, requiring more volunteers at a time when they were harder to find.

“We were in a position where we needed help immediately,” Mathieson says.

The Kerby Centre began delivering free meals to seniors in March when the city was just beginning to feel the intense impact of COVID-19. By August 7th, the centre had delivered 10,000 meals. According to Mathieson, none of that would have been possible without Volly. “Being in the non-profit world we definitely knew of Alice and the incredible work she has done and continues to do. We are so grateful for her and Volly and so are those who got their meals delivered. We needed 50 drivers — she got them to us,” says Mathieson.

Lam, a born and raised Calgarian whose parents moved to the city as Vietnamese refugees, is a methodical and intelligent speaker. When she talks about community building, her words carry a confidence driven by her passion for positively impacting her city.

As is the case for many young people, Lam’s first foray into volunteering was driven by how it would look on her university application. At the end of junior high school and throughout high school she volunteered at the public library helping immigrant children with their reading comprehension. “I learned very quickly that it was so much more than something to go on a transcript, it was an opportunity to interact with these kids who did not have a lot of adults in their lives, outside of their parents, who looked like them, who could speak their language and who they could trust,” she says.

While her volunteering may have helped get her into the University of Alberta, where

she completed a degree in economics, and then to a spot at the IÉSEG School of Management in France for a masters of science in management with a specialization in strategy, organization and human resources, that first opportunity opened Lam’s eyes to the importance of connecting with the community.

Lam now applies what she learned in university and her passion for citizen-led initiatives in the name of civic engagement to unite Calgarians. She has spent time working with the Creative Aging Calgary Society, Crescent Heights Community Association and the Calgary Immigrant Women’s Association (CIWA), among others.

According to those who have volunteered alongside her, Lam does not simply sit on the boards of these organizations, she leans in 100 per cent.

“[For Alice] this is not just about volunteerism,” says Shirley Turnbull, a former director on the CIWA board with Lam. “Alice is not in that class of do-gooders who sit on boards for an hour a month, satisfied with just managing problems. Alice wants to fix them. She is always looking for different ways to problem-solve. What I love most about Alice is that she is humble, and she is not afraid to ask for advice.”

In addition to managing Volly, Lam works as a commercial property manager with Certus Developments. It was her day job that led to one of the many other hats she wears as the founder of the Tigerstedt Flea Pop-Up Market in Crescent Heights.

The Tigerstedt Block is one of the only remaining unchanged commercial blocks in the city, and its initial construction in 1928 marked the beginning of development on Centre Street north of the river. It is now owned by Certus Developments, and in 2018, when Lam saw that one of the businesses on the block was folding, she jumped at the opportunity to build something for the Crescent Heights community.

For years beforehand, Lam and her friends had hosted pop-up markets for local artisans in community centres. They had always had great turnouts, so the opportunity to expand was intriguing.

Today, the Tigerstedt Flea Pop-Up Market has two permanent vendors, Prairie Bazaar and Strawberry Boots, and the remaining area is reserved for pop-up shops from local makers, scheduled flea markets and holiday markets. From jewellers to florists, doll-makers to fashion designers, the Tigerstedt Flea Pop-Up Market hosts some of the most unique artisans in the city and also sells products online through its website.

“I really wanted the block to survive and give local makers the opportunity to sell their goods at a lower price. We started the market to give artists and artisans a way to showcase their product but also to tell people to explore the whole block, grab a coffee, meet the great people,” says Lam.

Most recently, Lam has helped build the crowd-funded community fridge in Crescent Heights. The idea of a community fridge (which had already popped up in cities including Edmonton, Toronto, New York and Los Angeles) is to address food inequality by providing essential goods to those who don’t have access or cannot afford them.

The Calgary Community Fridge, located at the Tigerstedt Block, is stocked with fresh produce and perishable foods, as well as dry items and pantry essentials. It is open and free to use by anyone who needs it, no questions asked.

Lam has been part of communities of all sizes and scopes. She has travelled the world and learned from community builders in other countries. For Lam, the idea of community always comes back to connecting the people who build communities. Her greatest work, in that sense, has been in building and strengthening places where even more connections can be made by others. 



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MAY NG



**AT GORO + GUN THEY ARE DOING
IN-PERSON SUSHI-MAKING CLASSES
WITH SMALLER GROUPS SPLIT
ACROSS SEVERAL TABLES.**

Between a worldwide pandemic, increased unemployment that has exacerbated an economic downturn and restrictions on how we gather and with whom, this year's holiday party season is packed with challenges for Calgary restaurants and hotels.

You won't see many of the "closed for private booking" signs that usually hang on restaurant doors at this time of year, because with lower capacity numbers due to social-distancing regulations, for many venues private buyouts don't make sense economically.

But despite, or perhaps *because* of it all, Calgarians want to celebrate the season with friends, colleagues and clients, somehow.

"It's been a difficult year for everyone," says Hotel Arts general manager Mark Wilson. Even so, he says, "people still want to host safe and memorable celebrations."

So this year, it's all about the party pivot.

To answer the need for creative and strategic thinking to keep the holiday spirit alive for themselves and their clients, hotels and restaurants are tackling the party season with four main tactics.

CYBER CELEBRATIONS

With an internet connection and a package of tasty goodies, celebrating the holidays can be a virtual experience.

At this time of year, restaurant buyouts and corporate cocktail parties are usually the norm for Concorde Group, whose properties, such as Model Milk, Bridgette Bar and Goro + Gun, are typically booked up for the whole season.

Concorde's manager of business development Tifanee Po notes that bookings of smaller groups in-line with pandemic-enacted restaurant restrictions have been strong this year. But aside from that, Concorde is also offering virtual cooking classes, with a pre-recorded class and packaged ingredients, so people can then log in and follow along.

At Goro + Gun they are doing in-person sushi-making classes with smaller groups split across several tables as a chef guides them through the process, while some of the other Concorde restaurants will offer chef cooking demonstrations at their in-person events.