



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **West Island Community Shares Celebrates a New Beginning**

Under the theme of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, the first edition of the Cocktail en blanc raises \$144,000

**Pointe-Claire, June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022:** After two years of cancelled events, West Island Community Shares hosted its first in-person fundraising evening on Monday, June 6 to the delight of close to 250 guests. Business leaders, supporters & donors gathered for the first edition of the Cocktail en blanc, which raised \$144,000.

### **Honoring Diversity**

The many significant events of the past two years with respect to the BIPOC and LGBTQ2+ communities have encouraged us to take a step back and possibly reconsider some of the ways we do things and think. Many employers have joined in the thinking to create a more inclusive workplace that supports the success of all people.

Under the theme of diversity and inclusion, the first edition of the Cocktail en blanc highlighted the stories of exemplary individuals and their employers who are striving to improve inclusion and equity in the workplace. **National Bank of Canada, Pfizer Canada, Spinelli, RBC Royal Bank, Baylis Medical Technologies, Broccolini** and **TD Bank** are part of this shift and are embracing a paradigm in which diversity, in all its aspects and identities, is a priority.

“Change won’t happen overnight, but these individuals & their employers are taking huge strides on creating a workplace where everyone feels comfortable being themselves. We’re hoping that the community will be inspired by our honourees who lead the change, and will take their own actions to make their workplace a more inclusive environment.” – Sophie McCann, Executive Director, West Island Community Shares.

### **Honourees’ Quotes**

“I came to Canada 32 years ago. A country in which I have been able to build an extraordinary life and which offers a promising future for my children. That is why I strive to pay it forward, whether it is by getting involved in the community or by ensuring that other immigrants have the best possible conditions for success. This is my way of expressing my gratitude to my host country.” - **Tony Aksa**, Vice-President, Strategic Market Development, at National Bank.

“I wanted to help create a place where, regardless of your upbringing or your story, everybody felt comfortable.” – **Ranjita Banerjee**, Commercial Director at Pfizer Canada

“As a visible minority woman, I want to inspire young people to pursue a career where they will feel welcome and accepted just for who they are.” – **Kathia Benchetrit**, Regional Manager, RBC Royal Bank of Canada.

“I feel so fortunate to have moved to Canada five years ago and already found a workplace where I feel supported. I’m so happy to be here.” – **Julian F. Hernandez-Gama**, Graphic Designer, Les concessionnaires Spinelli.

“I always choose the best person for the job regardless of their religious belief, cultural background or sexual orientation. By making the right decision for the right reason, you automatically get a diverse group of employees.” – **Frank Baylis**, President, Baylis Medical Technologies.

“I feel I am an advocate for all our employees whose needs and ideas have historically been underrepresented. My goal is to make sure our leaders are making inclusive decisions so that our employees feel comfortable being themselves and giving the best of themselves.” – **Valerie Kim**, Director People & Culture, Broccolini

“I am a survivor of the gay purge in the Canadian public services. After years of silence and self-doubt, I have used my personal experience to become a staunch advocate for the LGBTQ2+ community inside and outside my workplace, to make sure that history doesn’t repeat itself.” – **Martine Roy**, Regional Manager, TD Bank.

Read full individual profiles [here](#).

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### **About West Island Community Shares**

West Island Community Shares is a unique charitable organization dedicated to building a strong, inclusive, peaceful and healthy community. We do this by raising crucial funds for over 40 local community groups which focus on developing strong and resilient children, creating bridges to support vulnerable populations, empowering women to reach their full potential for themselves and their families, and providing basic necessities to West Islanders in need. We focus our efforts in making sure that our community organizations have the resources they need to meet the increasing demand for their services.

### **To book an interview or for more information:**

#### **Nynke Wijnalda**

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