

# LAO NEWSLETTER

Volume 1, No 4 August 2025 Stronger Together  
Special Independence & Family Day Edition

## MESSAGE FROM LAO ADVISOR



I'm deeply inspired by the outpouring of volunteerism we witnessed during our last Independence Day celebration, and I invite every member to join us in our events and activities. Together, we can build a community that's not just resilient, but thriving. As Nelson Mandela once said, "The greatest glory in living lies in never falling, but in rising every time we fall." We are the embodiment of this spirit, and I have no doubt that together, we will continue to rise above challenges and achieve great things.

My one burning desire is to see a more vibrant women's movement, empowering the women who are the heart and driving force of our community. Let's harness our collective strength, creativity, and passion to create a brighter future for ourselves and for generations to come. Let's move forward together, united and unstoppable!

Dear Liberian Association of Ottawa Family:

I want to take a moment to celebrate the unwavering resilience and unrelenting community spirit that makes us who we are. Over the past few years, our community has grown stronger, enriched by the fresh perspectives and boundless energy of our newcomers. As we continue to evolve, we're committed to addressing the diverse needs of our community through initiatives like the Community Enhancement and Empowered program (CEEP).



## LAO 2025 Independence Gala-Best Ever

*"The Gala was a beautiful reflection of your leadership, unity, and deep love of our culture. From the vibrant atmosphere to the powerful sense of community—everything was top-notch."* — Denise Siele

Independence Day is one of Liberia's most cherished national holidays, celebrated annually on **July 26** with reverence, pride, and ceremony. For Liberians—both at home and abroad—the day not only marks freedom and liberty but also serves as a reminder of Liberia's contributions to the liberation of other African nations from colonial rule.

For many years, the **Liberian Association of Ottawa (LAO)** struggled to host Independence Day celebrations on the scale befitting such an important occasion. However, this year under the leadership of **Kelvin Nyaquoi Suah**, the association transformed that inactivity into a remarkable cultural, social, and financial success. The **178th Independence Gala and Dinner**, celebrated on **August 2, 2025**, is being remembered as one of LAO's best in recent history.

The evening was a true showcase of cultural pride. From electrifying Afro-Caribbean and Liberian music by the DJ to artistic performances, guests were immersed in a vibrant celebration of heritage. **Cora Doryan** and **Maima Akoiwala**, the charismatic Masters of Ceremony, kept the audience engaged with humor, energy, and professionalism. A moving highlight came when the duo carried both the **Liberian** and **Canadian** flags, symbolizing the enduring friendship and support between the two nations.



The audience was also treated to a mesmerizing drum performance by **Wandara Topzo (Eric Sarah)**, an artist and storyteller originally from the Central African Republic. His performance not only captivated the crowd but also deepened their understanding of the drum's spiritual and cultural significance in African traditions, particularly in worship and community celebrations.

The event further reflected LAO's growing partnerships with leaders and organizations across Ottawa. Dignitaries in attendance included **Councilor Rawlson King (Ward 13, Rideau-Rockcliffe)**, **Superintendent David Zackrias of the Ottawa Police Service**, and **Mr. John Adygea**, President of the African Canadian Association of Ottawa (ACAO). Their presence underscored the respect and recognition the Liberian community continues to build within the broader Canadian society.

While turnout was slightly lower than anticipated, this year's Gala exceeded expectations in several key areas. Attendance was higher compared to previous celebrations, and the event itself was more organized and impactful, reflecting lessons learned from past challenges. Importantly, fundraising through ticket sales and donations is expected to bring in significantly higher revenue.

President **Kelvin Suah**, in his remarks and post-event thank-you note, credited the event's success to the tireless work of LAO's volunteers: *"We've learned from our past mistakes. This celebration wouldn't have been possible without the dedicated volunteers who planned, coordinated, and hosted an event that made us proud as a community."*

The **2025 LAO Independence Day Gala and Dinner** was more than just a celebration—it was a testament to resilience, cultural pride, and unity. It set a new benchmark for the community and reaffirmed the importance of honoring Liberia's history while building lasting bridges in Canada.

## COMMUNITY NEWS & UPDATES

### Family Day Picnic: Celebrating Families, Building Community

Family plays a vital role in the strength and resilience of community associations. Recognizing this, the **Liberian Association of Ottawa (LAO)** places families at the heart of its mission by creating **family-friendly activities and events** that encourage participation, connection, and engagement. On **August 3, 2025**—just one day after the successful celebration of Liberia's **178th Independence Day**—the **LAO Women's Committee** organized the association's 2nd **Family Day Picnic** at the historic **Massey Vincent Park**.



The picnic was an evening filled with delicious food, lively music, and meaningful connections. It also created space for **newcomers** to Ottawa to meet, network, and build relationships with **longer-standing residents**. Beyond the fellowship, participants enjoyed the scenic beauty and modern conveniences of Vincent Park, which added to the festive atmosphere.



The Family Day Picnic was organized under the framework of the **Community Engagement and Empowerment Program (CEEP)**, launched by LAO in **June 2025**. The program was designed to strengthen training opportunities, community participation, and collective empowerment.

This initiative builds on support the association received in **April 2024** through the **City of Ottawa's Emerging Community Needs Program (ECNP)**, which funded settlement services and programs for **seniors, youth, and women**. The CEEP now serves as LAO's **signature community program**, ensuring that the goals of the ECNP are fully realized within the Liberian community in Ottawa.

The **2025 Family Day Picnic** marked an important milestone for LAO. It underscored the association's commitment not only to celebrating culture but also to building **family-centered spaces** where community members can thrive together.

For more information and photos of the Family Day Activities check the **LAO website**.

[LAO website](#)



### Prezo laments low Gala turnout

As is tradition, after every event, the LAO President extends sincere thanks to the community members who contributed to making the event a success. Following the recent LAO Gala, President Suah expressed his gratitude to all those who helped make the event memorable. However, he also voiced concern about the low attendance from our own community.

President Suah stated, "..... We had a full house in a 300-capacity hall for our gala, but Guests dominated attendance. This is something that ideally should not be the case. we need to do more to support and engage our own community"

## Celebrating Our Community Trailblazers

Every community has its trailblazers—and ours is no exception. In this edition, we highlight individuals whose accomplishments have left a lasting impact on our community and beyond.

Except for **Arthur Porte Jr.**, who was born and raised in Ottawa, the others arrived in Canada as **refugees of the Liberian civil conflicts**. Like many immigrants and refugees, they faced challenges but worked tirelessly to carve their own pathways, pursue their dreams, and achieve success.

Today, they remain among the most recognized and respected Liberians in our community, admired not only for their talents but also for their resilience and leadership. Their journeys stand as a powerful source of inspiration, reminding us all that with determination and perseverance, it is possible to overcome challenges and leave a meaningful legacy.



**Late Dr. John Elijah McCarthy**

Dr. John Elijah McCarty, the first Liberian in our Ottawa's community to earn a doctorate, is remembered for his resilience, dedication to education, and inspiring leadership legacy. After fleeing Liberia's civil war, he studied in Ghana and later at Carleton University in Canada, where he earned advanced degrees. Though his life was tragically cut short in a car accident, his achievements continue to inspire generations.



**Artist Del Hartley (aka Arthur Port, Jr)**

Del Harley (aka Arthur Porte Jr.) is an R&B/Soul artist and arguably the most popular Liberian in our community. On 19, 2025, Del Harley was among several local musical artists who performed to a sold-out crowd at the Candlelight Concert held at the historic First Baptist Church in Ottawa, near Parliament Hill. He also performed at the LAO Inauguration in June 2024, earning acclaim from the audience. Del's popularity and influence have helped bring attention to our community, both within Ottawa and across Canada.



**Korlu Soriba ( aka Fatuma Kou)**

Fatuma Kou, is a gifted Ottawa-based Liberian artist, writer, and yoga practitioner, known for her books—such as —and her cultural contributions through art and literature. Her passion for creativity has inspired many, and in June 2024 she delivered a powerful poem at the LAO inauguration, further cementing her role as a respected community voice.

## SPOTLIGHT

### Mary Tolbert- Lual



*The late Mary Tolbert-Lual with LAO current Constitution Committee Chairperson, Mr. Zanga J. Bright*



*Mary Tolbert being lay to rest at the Pinecrest Cemetery.*

In recognition of **Mary Tolbert-Lual's** invaluable contributions to our community, we dedicate this page to her memory. Mary Tolbert-Lual—affectionately known simply as *Mary*—was a beautiful soul who touched countless lives in both Liberia and Canada. She was the kind of person whose door was always open, whose kindness lifted others, and whose impact was unforgettable.

As a member of the **LAO Board of Directors**, Mary worked tirelessly to bring Liberians together under the association's umbrella. She volunteered on numerous projects and played a key role in laying the foundation for the **LAO Women's Committee**, which remains an integral part of the association today.

Mary was born in Liberia to the late **Hannah Forday** and **Joel N. Tolbert** (son of **William R. Tolbert Sr.**). In 1994, she immigrated to Canada with her children, where she continued to nurture, lead, and inspire her community.

She was the proud mother of **six children** and grandmother of **seven grandchildren**. But to the Liberian community in Ottawa, she was far more—she was a mother to all who lived in, came to, or visited the city. Mary Tolbert-Lual passed away on **April 12, 2017**, and was laid to rest on **May 13, 2017**, at **Pinecrest Cemetery** following prayer services at **St. Andrew's Church in Ottawa**.

Her legacy of service, compassion, and love for her community continues to inspire all who knew her.

*This spotlight was adapted from obituaries read during Mary Tolbert-Lual's funeral.*

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Grand Gedeh Association in Canada, Inc.**  
**LAUNCHING & INAUGURAL BALL**  
**MONTREAL, QUEBEC, CANADA**  
**AUGUST 29 - 31, 2025**

**HON. JACKSON SEO SR.** PRESIDENT - GGAC  
**MADAM EDITH T. PRAH** GUEST SPEAKER - IGAA NATIONAL PRESIDENT  
**MADAM EVA YIMBOTY** CHIEF LAUNCHER - BUSINESS WOMAN - USA  
**REP. JEREMIAH GARWO SIKAN** KEYNOTE SPEAKER - REP. DISTRICT 1, GRAND GEDEH COUNTY  
**HON. ALEXANDER YALLAH** CHIEF VICTORIAN

**HON. TARIYON NYENON** BOARD CHAIRMAN  
**MADAM JOANNA GBARDY** VICE PRESIDENT  
**MADAM JOE DICKSON** CHAIRLADY  
**MADAM KEHELE OJAH** SECRETARY  
**MR. CHRISTIAN KIBYIRYON** FINANCIAL SECRETARY  
**MR. JOHN BAYE** INVIGOR  
**MADAM OPELA ZAYZAY** CONVENTION CHAIR

**2721 JOLICOEUR ST**  
**MONTREAL, QUEBEC H4E1Y8**

**ADMISSION**  
**GENERAL: \$50**  
**VIP: \$100**

**MUSIC BY DJ LOVE JONES**

**LAO LIBERIAN ASSOCIATION OF OTTAWA**

You're invited to our upcoming Town Hall Meeting, where we'll come together to shape the future of our community. Be part of the conversation for progress—your voice matters!

**DATE:** 13 SEPTEMBER 2025 | **TIME:** 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM | **VENUE:** ZOOM

Agenda	
CALL TO ORDER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opening Prayers</li> <li>Roll call</li> </ul>
APPROVAL OF AGENDA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reading of agenda</li> <li>Motion to accept agenda</li> </ul>
INDEPENDENCE EVENTS REPORT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presentation of narrative report</li> <li>Presentation of financial report</li> <li>Discussion</li> </ul>
EVALUATION OF COMMUNITY'S PROGRESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What's working?</li> <li>What's not working?</li> <li>How can we make things better for our community?</li> </ul>
ANY OTHER BUSINESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Other issues emerging from the floor</li> <li>AOB will be subject to time</li> </ul>
ADJOURNMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Motion to adjourn</li> </ul>

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