

New to the city? Get to know lots of people, because Hamilton is an interwoven community

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Hamilton Spectator | Nov 14, 2014

Alyssa Lai, 24

Years in Hamilton: Six

Neighbourhood: The North End

Favourite place: James Street North

Most "Hamilton" thing you can think of: The #HamOnt hashtag

Alyssa Lai is one of those people who seems to be at every community event, particularly if those events involve newcomers or young professionals. The McMaster University bachelor of arts graduate moved to this city from Ipoh, Malaysia six years ago.

After finishing her degree, she decided to stay, and has spent most of her time since working to help other newcomers enjoy their new home as much as she does.

"I was pleasantly surprised about how the community welcomed me upon my graduation," said Lai, who received a YWCA Woman of Distinction award for her first full-time job here, as the communications co-ordinator at the Immigrant Women's Centre. "I like the closeness and comfort I get from Hamilton. I do have some family here, but I've also found a whole community who really acts as my family."

Lai now works at Information Hamilton and volunteers with the Hamilton Media Guild and Global Hamilton Connects — a group that helps international students and young newcomers integrate into local culture.

What's the first tip she gives them? Get to know lots of people, because Hamilton is an interwoven sort of community, she says.

"The concept of networking was new to me when I first arrived here," says Lai, though one wouldn't know it from her busy schedule. "Since being in Hamilton, I've learned that ... if you're a person who's willing to listen and hear from others, it opens doors ... The collaborative spirit here makes so many different things possible."

When asked how she describes local culture, she lands on the word "potpourri."

"It's a lot of different kinds of flavours and smells and I really do mean it. If I walk on James North, I smell a whiff of Mexican food, then Mulberry's baked goods ... If you go to the harbour, you smell the grass. If you go to the factories, you smell some of the smoke. That is just like Hamilton as a city, a potpourri of cultures, flavours and culinary delights."



Alyssa Lai at one of her favourite spots, the intersection of James Street North and York Boulevard.