



## News Feature

# Entertainment District: A Timeline

|By Enzo Di Matteo

**Early 1980s** Fashion and manufacturing, some theatre and not much else going on in the southern reaches of the area bounded by Simcoe, Spadina, Queen and the lake. Noteworthy: a reno of the Royal Alexandra Theatre and arrival of the House music phenomenon at the only club in the 'hood, the Twilight Zone.

**1989** SkyDome adds to the clutter of mass development on Front Street and brings with it 50,000-strong crowds to watch baseball games. Restaurants and bars spring up overnight.

**Early 1990s** The perfect storm: free trade kills fashion and manufacturing, the rave scene hiding in abandoned warehouses comes out from underground, and cheap rents allow the proliferation of huge dance clubs. The Entertainment District is born.

**1996** The city pegs the King-Spadina area for reinvestment, and unintended consequences follow. New, more "flexible" development rules unleash a tsunami of development, 70 per cent of it condos. Young professionals with money to burn start moving in in a big way.

**2001** Nightclubs begin to upset the balance of entertainment uses. The number of restaurants and nightspots exceeds 200, 40 per cent of which are clubs. Licensed capacity in the area hits 50,000, and the inevitable conflicts with locals begin in earnest.

**2004** The King-Spadina Residents Association (KSRA) is founded in response to the lawlessness spilling out of the clubs and onto the street in the wee hours. Toronto police also get caught in the club spotlight. Half a dozen officers, including the head of the police union, are charged in the biggest corruption scandal in the force's history for allegedly shaking down club owners in return for tips on liquor licence inspections.

**2005** The number of people living in the area balloons to 7,500.



**2006** The war in clubland is fully engaged. Council passes a raft of bylaws requiring club owners to submit noise and crowd control plans, take out liability insurance and use metal detectors to qualify for a business licence. The province's Alcohol and Gaming Commission (AGCO) enters the fray with a proposal to broaden background checks on those seeking club licences.

**2007** The heat arrives in a big way. Closed-circuit television cameras are installed in the District.

**2008** The Toronto Entertainment District Business Improvement Area is founded. The group sets up a "safe streets" committee and institutes a grading system for clubs.

At Raising The Bar: Summit On Nightlife, Drinking And Violence, Toronto police report tallying 2,600 Liquor Licence Act offences and 400 arrests in the District in 2008.

**2009** The city and Toronto Entertainment District BIA draft a far-reaching master plan for the area (see sidebar).

**2010** "For sale" and "For lease" signs dot the District in the shadow of huge billboards announcing the arrival of massive condos. The pieces of the puzzle continue to appear and disappear. Circa goes by the board. Moon rooftop closes. Runaway runs away. The former HQ for Embassy, Traffik and Home at 117 Peter is slated for a hotel and condo development.

