

McGill grad Sam Greene plays important role on Blue Jays coaching staff



Mike Cohen

TORONTO — When I attended a Toronto Blue Jays Major League Baseball game in the press box last week at Rogers Stadium, I naturally looked for a Montreal angle to share with readers of *The Suburban*. The media relations department was kind enough to give me on field access before the contest and a press pass.

So, are there any Jays players with a Montreal connection? Yes indeed, superstar Vladimir Guerrero Jr. is the son of the former Expos superstar of the same name. He was born on March 3, 1999 in Montreal. That was Vlad Sr's third full season with the Expos. He was at training camp when Riquelma Ramos gave birth to their little boy. Mom learned how to speak French while living here. In 2003, Vlad Sr. received a standing ovation during his final game for

the Expos at Olympic Stadium. Four-year-old Vladimir Jr. was there wearing an Expos uniform and many people have seen the photo of him taking off his helmet and waving to the crowd. I was unable to get an interview with Vlad Jr. Last April he signed a 14-year, \$500 million extension with the Blue Jays.

There is, however, another member of the Jays entourage with deeper Montreal ties. Twenty-seven year old Sam Greene was hired last winter as the team's assistant pitching coach. A native of Philadelphia, he graduated from McGill University with a Master's Degree from the Desautels Faculty of Management in Analytics. During his nearly five years in Montreal (2016 to 2021) he also played for the McGill varsity baseball team and was an intern for CIMA, a consulting and engineering firm. Oh yes, he also speaks fluent French. His mother Marie-France hails from Thetford Mines.



Sam Greene

"A large part of my family lives in Quebec," said Greene, whom I met before the game. "My mother also attended McGill, so it was an attractive option for me because of the baseball and statistics programs. Montreal is a beautiful city. It was a great place to study for four years."

Greene was initially associated with the Blue Jays in the player research and development department from 2021 to 2024. As for his current responsibilities, he said: "I'm more specialized in advanced statistics, using the data we get from every game. I help improve our pitchers by guiding them, for example, on pitch selection and suggesting ways to attack opposing hitters."

Although he never came close to reaching the major leagues as a pitcher, he still has some experience on the mound. At McGill, he played four seasons from 2016 to 2020, appearing in 31 games, including 15 starts.

"I think it gives the players a certain amount of confidence in me and helps me do my job," he said. "I can also pitch with the players every day."

I asked Greene whether he followed the efforts by local businessmen to bring the Expos back to Montreal. "I followed along as much as I could," he replied. "I was very supportive of their efforts and was hoping they could do what they set out to accomplish. Montreal is a great baseball city. I do feel as though the people would embrace a big-league team back in the city and 100 percent deserves one. I'd love to see that happen some day soon."

COHEN CHATTER: What are the odds? When I went for a bite at the Bay St. Kosher Deli concession on the second level at Rogers Centre, a group of Camp B'nai Brith of Montreal youngsters recognized me. I went up to the fifth level to meet their friends.

Have an item to share? Mike Cohen can be reached at mcohen@thesuburban.com.

MINDING YOUR BUSINESS – MEET THE CEO

A Q&A with the Old Brewery Mission's James Hughes



By Anthony Bonaparte
The Suburban

Born in Montreal, James Hughes spent his early years in Verdun before his family moved to the West Island. Upon graduating from Beaconsfield High School (Class of '82), the thought surely never crossed his mind that some 40 years later he would become the face of one of Montreal's most celebrated institutions that, for more than 135 years, has been working to break this city's cycle of homelessness. *The Suburban* recently spoke to Hughes, who since September 2020 has been the president and CEO of the Old Brewery Mission. The conversation has been edited for length and clarity. A more complete version can be found online at *The Suburban.com*.

The Suburban: What were your parents' occupations?
James Hughes: My father was a small businessman who ran a school supplies company. My mother was a teacher and then a travel agent.

The Suburban: What were your career plans in high school?

Hughes: I figured I would be like my father, a businessman. My brothers and I grew up working for my dad. We learned hard work, working summers in the warehouse, and learning all the features of a small business.

The Suburban: What came after high school?

Hughes: I went into the business program at John Abbott College before business school at Queen's University. Then I took a turn and ended up being a lawyer.

The Suburban: What prompted the turn?

Hughes: I was unsure at the end of business school if that was really my calling. I saw so many others in the program becoming accountants and going into finance and marketing and my stomach told me that wasn't for me. But I had been involved in student government at Queen's, as I had been in high school, and I really enjoyed that. I was really interested in, albeit on a very small scale, the social justice that government can bring. I think I went into law for the same reason.

The Suburban: What came after McGill law, class of '91?

Hughes: I practiced law for 10 years, then crossed into the nonprofit sector about 23 years ago. I ran a small nonprofit called Epoch Montreal, a fabulous employability organisation for young people needing training op-

portunities; in the early '90s I was one of the founders of YES (Youth Employment Services) Montreal. I was also involved in the original days of Share the Warmth in Pointe-Saint-Charles. And then the Old Brewery Mission (OBM) opportunity came. I was here from 2004 to 2008 as director general, and this is my second tour of duty.

The Suburban: Talk about that first stint?

Hughes: Being in the middle of a space that was providing basic humanitarian services to fellow Montrealers was quite eye opening, and quite shocking. The need was so extensive, even back in 2004. So, the big question we had was, "How can we be more than just witnesses to misery?" We were providing humanitarian services, but the same people just kept cycling in. We were managing homelessness. We weren't solving it. As a result, the organisation re-engineered itself to become much more solution oriented, which meant starting housing programs and hiring and training staff to accompany people on the journey to housing. To really start to think about our role as being profoundly different than just being a provider of basic humanitarian services — which we continue to do — but instead of it being the object of our organisation, it became the pretext. "Come on in, have a meal and have a bed. But let's get to know you and start to help you thinking about the possibilities that are ahead — that are not IN homelessness, but OUT of homelessness."

The Suburban: And now that you are president and CEO?

Hughes: I've been back here since the start of COVID and we've done another revolution. We have added a whole suite of services around prevention; programs for seniors at risk of homelessness in their private rental market dwellings; programs for people coming out of the prison system who are at risk of homelessness; programs to help people in low-income housing; and in on July 1, to find housing as opposed to homelessness.

The Suburban: What's the most discouraging and, conversely, the most uplifting part of what you do?

Hughes: The answer is almost the same. Because I work at our main campus — at the corner of St. Laurent and St. Antoine — I see so much distress here every day.



James Hughes, president and CEO of the Old Brewery Mission.

PHOTO: CHRISTIAN BLAIS

I see people who are just so sick and so disconnected from what their potential is that it's incredibly sad. But the contrary is also true. We see miracles happen where people who are facing the challenge of mental illness, of addiction and cognition problems, and what we call disaffiliation — where they've disconnected from families, from community, and from the economy in a total way — that we are able to get to know them and help them recover their sense of self and start to imagine a better future. And then to see them go into our housing network, or another organization's housing network, and start to become themselves is truly the job here — and it's just our proudest moment. ■

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