

# Ryerson to electrify Yonge St.

## New digital media school is future key

Expect 2009 to be the year of Ryerson.

Yes, Ryerson University. The school known as Rye High — or much worse — to past generations of Torontonians is a far different place these days.

Ryerson is now the most sought after undergrad university in Ontario, surpassing even the venerable Queen's.

Why? "Location, location, location," said Ryerson President Sheldon Levy.

And the school's not sitting on its laurels. This year will be transformational.

Ryerson is about to put its newly influential footprint squarely on Toronto itself — both on Yonge Street, and beyond.

Ryerson's \$23-million purchase of Sam the Record Man's landmark site will enable the school to build a new library and expand onto the city's most important street, while also revitalizing a dismal commercial strip in the heart of the city.

"Yonge Street here is the ugliest place I know," Levy said. "That is one of the most important places in the city, and the message (now) is second best is the best we can do."

"We are going to clean up Yonge Street," he said, noting skeptics doubt Ryerson can pull it off.

Levy's following a strategy used by the University of Philadelphia, a school that concluded unless they improved their West Philly neighbourhood, they'd be hurt. Schools in Phoenix, Chicago and Cincinnati have also followed the strategy, with great success.

The \$45-million cash infusion from the province to expand onto Yonge will help. (Keeping that cash out of the market when the bottom fell out didn't hurt, either.)

No site plan has yet been filed to the city, but the school has already started the demolition of the old record store.

The big scoop, Levy tells me, is Ryerson will announce it is teaming up with the University of Waterloo and

the University of Toronto to launch a new media school, right on Yonge Street.

Part of making Yonge the digital media capital of the country would be landing a store like Apple's landmark 5th Ave. shop in Manhattan.

"We want to bring the most exciting ideas in retail and higher education to that strip," Levy said.

Ryerson is also living by the mantra: "Don't build ugly."

Anyone who knows Ryerson knows it has built ugly in the past. A lot of ugly, in fact.

Area city councillor Kyle Rae is a huge fan of Ryerson's new vision.

"They're not thinking about themselves, they're thinking about the city," Rae said. "Ryerson is part of the guts of the city. The digital campus idea is amazing."

But that's just part of the news from the school.

"This year will also see Ryerson open the Black

Star Historical Black & White Photography Collection at the newly-redesigned Image Arts building on Gould Street, now under construction.



**Rob Granatstein**  
EDITOR

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Sheldon Levy, president of Ryerson University, takes down the last set of bulbs in the Sam the Record Man sign on Yonge St. last October.



KUWABARA PAYNE MCKENNA BLUMBERG ARCHITECTS

Artist's rendering of the new Yonge Street look for Ryerson University. The school bought four properties, including Sam the Record Man, and will redevelop the stretch into a front door for the downtown campus.

Levy is particularly excited about the collection, both for the university and as a city-building project. He believes it could become one of the most important cultural institutions in the country, with a phenomenal collection of photographs of JFK, Marilyn Monroe, and Martin Luther King among the 300,000 images. Basically if a photo appeared in Life or Look Magazine, it's in the archive.

"The collection is amazing," said Rae.

The money is in place and construction is well underway. The design by Donald Schmitt of Diamond and Schmitt architects includes a cafe on

Gould Street.

That's part of the remaking of Gould that, Levy says, will include closing the street to traffic this year, a major step to make the school feel more like a university campus, more pedestrian friendly.

Along with that, Ryerson will redo its look on Gould by reshaping the old, tired Kerr Hall building. And plans continue as Ryerson snaps up scraps of land in the area for future expansion.

### Bright future

A recent gift for the campus has been the Yonge-Dundas development, now called Toronto Life Square. It's handed Ryerson a free student centre, complete with 12 movie theatres that morph into classrooms until 1 p.m. (one prof gives a history of Hollywood lecture in the theatre — popcorn not included). All that came from Ryerson selling the air rights to its parking garage.

And it's paved the way for what looks like a bright future.

"Ryerson reflects the new Toronto of the youth, we're edgy," said Levy. "Students today are not happy with careers in government or at GM. They want to be a bit sharp-elbowed, not surrounded by ivy on the walls."

And the lure of studying in a revitalized, downtown Toronto, a digital hub, will make the school even more attractive for decades to come — as long as the school can keep up with the demand.

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