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## Day in the park(ing spot)

A dozen organizations transform street parking spaces for new uses Friday

By KATE DUBINSKI THE LONDON FREE PRESS

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**VIDEO: 12 parking spots in downtown London were taken over Friday by businesses, groups and individuals looking to make a statement.**

You could have learned to tap dance, tried your hand at disc golf or signed up for a library card.

Not your cup of tea? You also could have chilled out on a park bench, grass between your toes, done some yoga or shared your vision for London.

Metered parking spots in downtown London, most along Dundas and King streets, were transformed Friday into parks, play areas, reading nooks and thinking corners between 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

It was all part of Park(ing) Day, an international event organized for the first time in London by Kevin Van Lierop.

"Park(ing) Day is an opportunity to change on-street parking spaces into public multi-use spaces (and) it's also a way to have fun," Van Lierop said.

Park(ing) Day is held annually across the globe. It began in San Francisco in 2005 as an art project.

Londoners — groups, businesses and individuals — converted 12 metered parking spots into a variety of public-use spaces, including a parking spot for

bicycles across the street from the main branch of the London Public Library.

"This is a good way to showcase how much space a car takes up, because we take it for granted until we put something else into that space," said Jody Bailey, a citizen activist who rides his bicycle year-round in London.

"It highlights so many issues for the downtown core. It shows the benefits of what happens on car-free days," Bailey said.

He and friends supervised bicycles left at the bike racks he set up. About 15 bikes could fit into the parking space meant for one vehicle.

Across the street, the library set up a "book nook" where people could browse books about creative cities, green lifestyles and extreme weather. Passersby also could sign up for a library card or sign out a book, said librarian Patricia Sauve.

"We've had a lot of positive reactions from everybody about reclaiming parking space for the people," Sauve said.

Further down Dundas St., two women created a "diminutive dance studio," where music blared and they gave dancing lessons.

Jannaia Arthur and her friends set up a drumming circle. A group from the London Short Film Festival brought crates of costumes for people to play dress-up.

On Fullerton St., a web-design company set up an outdoor yoga studio. On King St., another web company set up a "Day in the Park," complete with plants, grass and a table and bench.

"People were a bit confused at first, but then they got into being involved in the alternative use of space," said Victor Harris, the manager of business development for Echidna Solutions Corp, which set up the Day in the Park.

Closer to the Covent Garden Market, Tanner Wituik, 11, was helping with the disc golf parking spot.

"When you're inside, there's no place to sit, like when you want to get a hot dog. People are always in a rush. You want people to slow down, sit down and have some fun," Wituik said.

Other spots included a Museum of Curiosities put on by City Lights Book Store, a Lego area and a food booth with heirloom vegetables.

At Vision Cafe, people could sit in a beanbag chair and share their ideas for the future of the city, put on by Emerging Leaders, a group that advocates for young professionals.

"A lot of people's vision has been that we become a community that celebrates the arts . . . and hosts more days like Park(ing) Day," said Lindsay Sage, a founders of Emerging Leaders.

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