

Friends of Walker's Creek

A Neighbourhood Association



The Year 2012 in Review

A year to remember, a year of which to be proud, a year of innovation, progress, risk and a year of patient waiting. 2012 deserves appraisal and applause.

Building on community response, the five member Board of Directors chose to broaden the scope of the Community meetings. Moving into new areas of information sharing, saw better attended evening meetings deal with new computer and communication skills, Gardening sessions, planning of new major events and continued attempts to involve the neighbourhood residents in activities of special and broad interest. A new program in 2012, Walks In the Park where WCNA leadership shared their insights, knowledge and awareness of the Parks and its flora with increased numbers of interested folks, many of whom were visiting the Parks for the first time. This series of Walks was very well received and encouraged folks to consider broader commitments to using and enjoying the Parks and offering additional skills and support to the WCNA mandate. Partnering with Brock University's Conversation Cafe programs, evening meetings involving interested folks enjoyed discussion, exploration of ideas and sharing of opinions and views. These meetings also brought folks from many areas of the City to the WCNA Neighbourhood and allowed for increased awareness of what is possible in the nearby Parks.

<<< Della Trojan, WCNA Vice Chairperson, describes the need and purpose for the riparian barriers that border the Creek to some of a larger group on a Spring morning Walk. These areas of overgrown plant life filter and slow water running into the Creek decreasing fertilizer and undesirable litter. Encouraging questions, checking identification of trees and plants, discussing why certain areas are allowed to remain natural allows the WCNA to explain the Parks and their contents.

Working in cooperation with the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, a high quality booklet, entitled A Landowner Stewardship Guide, is presently in preparation for the distribution, dealing exclusively with the Walker's Creek water course and Parks. Bringing the expertise of the NPCA and the local knowledge of the WCNA, this Guide will be distributed to local residents, planned to happen in April, 2013.

Certainly dogs of many sizes and breeds enjoy the Parks as do their owners.

There is great glee as they enjoy the smells of the rabbits, the flights of the ducks from the water and the joy of meeting other dogs for chasing, running, rolling and stick carrying. Dog

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owners and walkers are to be congratulated as they closely observe the Poop and Scoop policy and deposit the refuse in one the many barrels throughout the Parks. The donation of a "Poop and Scoop" bag supply station by resident and real estate agent Karl Vanderkuip, with a constant re-supplying of bags, is most appropriate, supportive of this initiative and much appreciated.

The WCNA Parks are not leash-free dog walking areas, yet some folks, who know and trust their dogs to be obedient, do allow them to run, sure they will return and be put back on the leash as other people approach. This respectfulness of others is greatly appreciated. The retrievers who occasionally enjoy the cooling stream on hot days wonderfully express the joy of these green spaces and natural areas.

The WCNA is expanding its efforts to make these Parks as readily accessible as possible to folks who may face mobility challenges or other restrictive handicaps. A request to the City's Accessibility Committee by the WCNA, to survey all the Parks pathways and make recommendations on improvements or change, has begun. For those of us who are fortunate enough to manage the pathways as they are, this experience was a lesson in increased awareness of how small hazards can be barriers to folks in wheelchairs, using walkers or suffering from decreased sight. Not only slopes of significant angles but small bumps, loose gravel, erosion and wet trails hinder the enjoyment the WCNA wishes to encourage all to share in all the Parks. This will be a multi-year effort as once the reports and recommendations are received, the work to seek ways and means to implement the needed changes will require cooperation from the City and from possible private grant sources.

Requests to the Recreation and Community Services Department (RCS) to consider creating a pathway alongside the Creek from Grantham Street to Niagara Street, though the border of the old Arboretum was answered in grand style. This beautiful, curvy, shaded, well-constructed pathway now allows folks to take that shortcut between the two streets without having to go around the block and allows students of Laura Secord Secondary School to traverse the area keeping feet dry. This cooperative effort by RCS and the WCNA speaks highly of the value the City places on the Parks and the green spaces.

Monitoring the Parks and situations that arise or that need attention, or suggesting changes or improvements is a task that the WCNA and the members do extremely well. Whether notice of blockages in the Creek, issues needing clarification and direction as in grass clippings being dumped in bushes adjacent to the Creek, graffiti vandals leaving their tags and notes, or questioning possible encroachments into the Parks by adjacent property owners, reports to the appropriate City departments most often receive immediate and effective attention and remediation. The WCNA is most appreciative of the attention given our Parks by RCS crews and by the crews from the Lake Street Service centre, under the auspicious of the the Department of Engineering and Environment services (TES). Ongoing support by the RCS Community Development office and staff has provided significant assistance in making WCNA programs and initiatives made known across the City. Reports to the RCS Graffiti reporting service, who then contacts the Mainstream graffiti crews, contracted by the City to remove graffiti from within Parks and on some City facilities, and we see the tags and messages removed efficiently and effectively.

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The addition of over eighty new trees to the Parks in 2012 is most pleasing and encouraging and definitely a positive sign of the importance of the new Urban Forestry Policy implemented by the City. The WCNA would like to see only native Carolinian specie trees used for such plantings and is asking the appropriate City decision makers to consider planting native specimen trees in the Parks, allowing these additions to grow to their full potential in height and girth so that future generations can see and enjoy those species that are no longer appropriate for City medians or streetscapes due to overhead wires or underground infrastructure. Discussions on whether certain Lilac varieties qualify as native trees is now mute as these flowering varieties will be enjoyed by many for whom memories of their spring time beauty and aromas are favourites. Especially in the Park from Linwell to Parnell, these Lilac trees are sure to be enjoyed in the coming years. The replacement of the many trees that did not manage the very dry conditions this past summer is also much appreciated as these shade trees are most welcome cooling spots along the pathways. The Memorial trees that have been added during this past year are also welcome reminders of special people whose lifetime and legacy is now marked and will thrive and be admired for decades to come.

The WCNA is most pleased and encouraged as the City's Green Committee acts on rejuvenating the Arboretum off Niagara Street. These wonderful older specimen trees have been missing attention for some years and with renewal through pruning and trimming and replacement as necessary, this beautiful, cool, calm enjoyable site will be a continuing attraction adjacent to the Lester Pearson Park, Infinity Playground and new pool and library facility. With identification tagging of the Arboretum trees, as has been done on thirty native species within the WCNA Parks, folks will become familiar with and able to consider species that may not immediately come to mind for planting on private property.

In the past year, the WCNA has reached out to other community groups, seeking to become aware of opportunities to mutually support, encourage and broaden the base of people using and enjoying the Parks. With the very excellent leadership of the RCS Community Development staff, meetings of leaders from various Community groups have begun the process of sharing ideas, seeking assistance and dealing with common concerns. Even closer ties with Malcomson Eco-park activities and leaders have been mutually beneficial and the sharing of volunteer work parties is notable.

Malcomson and WCNA leadership met with Ward and Regional Councillors to consider the expansion of the Waterfront trail leading into these two Parks sometime in the future. The Niagara Horticultural Society has been a genuine asset as expert advice is sought and freely given. Active consideration of having the WCNA Parks become a greater focus for folks who enjoy GPS hunting and use has been shelved based on the advice given and accepted that this activity is best developed by those enthusiasts and not as a concerted focus of Park activity development. A small but encouraging expansion of a Parks Steward initiative now provides greater attention to areas that have been less well observed than some. These generous volunteers provide insight and awareness of needs that might be otherwise overlooked. Volunteers for work parties in the Parks, primarily looking at tasks that can be handled easily, as in mulch spreading, weed removal from the playground areas, litter removal, is an activity that seeks expansion.

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However, recent policy changes by the City, which raises health and safety concerns related to the use of volunteers is being researched and reviewed by the WCNA and the City's Graffiti and Clean City committees. Relying heavily on volunteers, while respecting the responsibility of the City for safety concerns is an issue that could curtail opportunities for interested individual and groups to improve and enhance our City and its landscapes. Having to deny offers by volunteer groups who could be major assets to tasks awaiting attention in the Parks, is disappointing and leaves such tasks to the few who willing offer their assistance. Willing hands make progress possible & many hands would be much appreciated !!

Initiated by the WCNA, individuals representing the Horticultural Society, Green Committee, Clean City and the Mayor's Graffiti Group came together to consider adding vines on the City side of the QEW sound barrier. This intended obstruction to graffiti vandals, along with a more attractive appearance of the barrier, which would also reduce the affect of exhaust emission from the traffic on the QEW, was considered, investigated, and planned. With funding from the Graffiti Group and the Green Committee, a plans to create a demonstration plot was finalized. However the new City policy affecting health and safety concerns, removed the volunteer component and City staff did an excellent job of adding four different species of vine to the barrier opposite the end of Scott Street. Evaluation of the success of these vines will determine future plantings, focusing first on the barrier areas that face residential housing. Varieties chosen will offer colour, texture and size to the blank wall that now encloses many City streets.

There are definite tasks that only City crews can correct and at the top of that list is two serious drainage issues within the lower Parks. In one location, water from even a moderate rainfall, floods the grassy area and also the gravel base of a climbing structure. This Playground is well used by youngsters, Moms and Grandmas and with the wetness, access to and enjoyment of the equipment is restricted. The other area is near the Butterfly Garden in Cherie Road Park where Spring melt and rain makes for a lake that requires a large detour off the gravel pathway and well into the grassy areas. Both these conditions have existed for some years and have been reviewed on each of the Strolls the WCNA organizes with Senior RCS and TES staff and Ward Councillors. The WCNA recognizes that budget restraints are a reality for a City undertaking major developments and we ask that these jobs be seriously considered in keeping with having the Parks available throughout for walkers, cyclists, runners, dog walkers and the increasing use by folks with handicaps.

Once again in 2012 the Annual WCNA Plant Sale in early June was a fine event and financial success. When one recognizes that all plants sold are from people who provide them as donations and when the variety varies from year to year, this annual sale brings gardeners looking for very locally grown plants for consideration as additions to their home gardens, Hostas remain a favourite with new species being brought forward and assorted other grown cover and background plants

in good supply. This year, for the first time, the WCNA Plant Sale provided over \$500 in new funds, all of which are earmarked for purchases that are used within the Parks. In the past, park benches, new and special trees, bushes that help define and provide erosion control on the Creek banks and identity tags that now are attached to 30 trees, have all been bought with Plant Sale funds. The WCNA Plant sale follows the Malcolmson Park plant sale and the early May Discount day at Rice Road Nursery available to members of the WCNA.

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Special events in the Parks are of particular interest as they bring event is begin presented. Once again the annual Star Gazing night, a regular September evening event was better attended than expected as weather and clear skies were somewhat doubtful as evening fell. However, for the hardy souls who stayed with the presenting members of the Niagara Branch of the Royal Astronomical Society, were gifted with clearing, lovely sightings of the Autumn skies and opportunities to view the heavens through a variety of personally owned telescopes. Very knowledgeable members of the Astronomical Society delight in sharing their interests and awareness of that which surrounds us at night and for this the WCNA is most appreciative.

The arrival of the Naval Reserve Band, on a lovely summer's evening was a much bigger success than anticipated. This fine Band, having presented their program in Ottawa, at the CNE, and at various locations throughout Ontario, entertained more folks that seen in one place in the Parks over the past few years. With the generous support and understanding of the nearby neighbours, the families, with younger children absolutely enjoying the nearby Playground and many with dogs on leashes, were entertained with a variety of familiar and different musical features. Based on the very positive response and post-concert comments, this very successful event has encouraged the Directors to seek additional such possibilities in the coming year.

Thanks to the City Heritage Committee, the WCNA has become overtly aware of a fine history of the area we now claim as the peaceful, natural, parks along the Walker's Creek in Grantham Ward. With the installation of the Darby Family Commemorative Plaque in Cindy Drive Park in 2011, we know more about one family that were early United Empire Loyalist settlers, who created profitable farms and who, in the tradition of rural life, developed family cemeteries on their property. Two such locations have now been recognized and memorial Heritage Committee markers placed appropriately. This activity has fostered an attempt to know much more about the very early use, settlement and development years of this area that is now a very fine, quiet, pleasant residential area. Early research has begun to seek the information that will allow consideration of a request to create a Cultural Landscape heritage designation for the Parks. Such a designation would be a first in St. Catharines.

The WCNA is an entirely volunteer Association of interested neighbours and residents who can only function with mutually cooperative and respect for the various City Departments and their Staff, with the ever present assistance of Grantham Ward Councilors, Bill Phillips and Dawn Dodge and the close attention of Greg Washuta of St. George's Ward for the Reach Eight Park. Staff of RCS provide balance, awareness of possibilities and important guidance as the WCNA seeks to achieve its vision and fulfill its mandate. Generous accessibility to the Grantham Lion's Club halls makes for easy and very affordable neighbourhood based locations for indoor Community meetings and meetings of the Directors. Dependent on fund raising activities and the \$10 yearly membership fee, the WCNA operates on a shoe-string and only through voluntary donations of money and time can so much be achieved by so few for the enjoyment of so many.

Ever ready assistance and cooperation with and by many Committees of City Council and Community groups, makes ideas become reality and appreciated guidance lessens our mistakes. Malcomson Park leaders, Clean City Committee members, Community Development staff, the local Horticultural Society and Master Gardener folks, Heritage and

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Green Committee members and the volunteer Park Stewards hopefully know how their help is much appreciated.

Finally and definitely of greatest importance are the WCNA members who accept the challenge to be Directors. Bringing their variety of interest and skills, willing to pitch in on many ventures and above all offering effective neighborhood based guidance with monthly Directors' meetings and participation at all Community events, are to be greatly appreciated. My personal respect and appreciation goes to Della Trojan, Nancy Williams, Mike Fancy, Mike Sullivan and Karen Hendle. We all look forward to 2013.

Respectfully submitted,

Ben Hannan

WCNA Chairperson

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