

## Arboretum is always looking for volunteers



If you're looking to enjoy the colours of fall without venturing too far from home, consider taking a step into the Aurora Community Arboretum.

A volunteer-driven green space with thousands of native trees, the Aurora Community Arboretum is a large swath of land which runs from Wellington Street and John West Way in the south up to St. John's Sideroad and Industrial Parkway North, encompassing a stretch of the Nokiidaa Trail.

Always a popular destination for runners, walkers, joggers and cyclists, the Aurora Community Arboretum has seen something of a renaissance since the start of the global pandemic as people have turned to nature to get outside in a safe way, meet with neighbours, and find clever hiding places for hand-painted rocks, shells and other placemarkers designed to, once found, lift spirits at this challenging time.

"I think it is really heartening to hear from people that they enjoy the space, that they are using the space, and that they appreciate the space," says Irene Clement, long-time Chair of the Aurora Community Arboretum. "Our whole idea was to have a green oasis in Aurora that people could come and enjoy and do a lot of different things in."

Irene and her husband John Clement have been involved with the Arboretum as volunteers since 1997, a year after its inception. Irene has led the team for nearly 15 years. There are now between 7 and 10 active volunteers at any given time, including Membership Coordinator Marcia Wilson, who is now in her third year in the position.

"When I retired, I was involved with Nature Aurora and through Nature Aurora, I heard about the Arboretum needing a volunteer coordinator," she says. "It has been wonderful. I enjoyed coming to the Arboretum before I became the coordinator. I love grass trails and being amongst the trees, but now I really enjoy working with the new people who join up every year. There are people who are just so faithful and reliable coming out to volunteer and it is a pleasure working with them."

Volunteers, she says, range in age from 15 to 75 and when there is a particular planting day scheduled 80 individuals from across the Aurora community regularly turn out to help.

"People love to plant, but weeding and mulching is a bit more intensive," she says with a laugh. "We haven't had our planting events this year, for obvious reasons, but maybe in the fall; the more labour-intensive volunteer events, we get 10 to a dozen people per week, which is quite impressive, really."

They come out for various reasons, whether it is to get some exercise or just to give in to the pull of nature.

People often say, "This is such a wonderful asset to the town. What can I do to help?" says John. "It is a learning opportunity for people as well as an opportunity to get outside."

Case in point: George, a 40-year resident of Aurora, who has seen the area grow and develop with each passing year.

"I love nature," he says. "One day a week is fabulous to be able to get out and work with the trees, the lawns, the grass. There are quite a few people who come out to enjoy the trails with their bikes, their kids really love it, and all the time we experience people waving and smiling at us. This is such a unique resource in the GTA for the community and one that really adds to the attractiveness of the Town."

Adds fellow volunteer Brad: "There are a lot of regulars, but also a lot of first-time people. So many of the first-timers stop us, or we stop to talk to them, and they express their delight with the place. It's like, "I had no idea this was here, even though we live around it!" Not enough people participate, but it is rewarding for us as volunteers to see the reaction of the public when they discover it, but also the reactions of people who seem to come every day.

"All in all, it is just a good experience for everybody" so, come out when the weather is reasonable."

There are still a few "reasonable" chances to enjoy the Arboretum this season.

To plan your trip, or for further information on how to get involved, visit [aurorarboretum.ca](http://aurorarboretum.ca).

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