

Felled tree transformed into a celebration of local wildlife



By Brock Weir

For most ancient trees, internal rot is the end of an enduring story. But, for one nearly 200 year old Bur Oak Tree, it is merely the turning of a chapter.

One of Aurora's 'oldest residents' near the banks of the creek running through the Aurora Community Arboretum faced the saw back in the spring of 2016, a painful but necessary call that had to be made by the Arboretum and the Town's Parks and Recreation Department when internal rot was found permeating its trunk.

Not content with just writing off the tree, however, they decided to get creative, leaving a 20 foot stump in place for artistic inspiration.

Their vision was to transform the stump into a carved signpost reflecting the rich ecological diversity of the arboretum, ranging from swans, chickadees and herons to maple and oaks and they turned their attention to artist Jeff Taylor.

Recent visitors to Lambert Willson Park may have seen Mr. Taylor, who was engaged with funds provided by both the Arboretum and the Parks Department, hard at work with his chisels, saws and other tools turning the stump into his artistic canvas, and now they are ready to make the finishing touches.

'The Bur Oak near Ball Diamond #1 was in poor health for the last number of years, had significant internal rot on the back side near the stream and it became a hazard as it was next to a highly used public trail,' says Arboretum chair Irene Clement, who, along with Sarah Tienkamp of the Parks Department, developed the idea of finding a silver lining in this particular cloud. 'We hoped a major part of the trunk could be saved and we could get a carving of some sort to make a 'sign post' in the valley. In 2016, we had the tree taken down and found good wood in the base. Costs [for Mr. Taylor's work] were split equally between the Town and the ACA (Aurora Community Arboretum) from its own funds.

'The ACA provide a list of animals, plants, trees, birds, and amphibians found in the East Holland River valley. The artist chose the ones that the oak stump wood suggested to him as he carved, thus, the strong remainder of a 185 year old Bur Oak, here before Canada even became a nation, is now a sign post honouring the plants and animals of the valley, recognizing Canada's 150th Anniversary.'

Now, as the project nears completion, Ms. Clement says they have only heard good things from Arboretum members, as well as members of the public who have seen it.

'It's amazing!' is a common statement heard,' says Ms. Clement. 'The ACA plans to add a sign about the project. The Arboretum wishes to thank Jeff Taylor for his artistry and the Town of Aurora Parks Department for sharing both the vision and the realization of this project.'

The Aurora Community Arboretum is maintained by a group of volunteers who are interested in trees and nature. They invite like-minded members of the community to join them through their website auroraarboretum.ca and to lend a hand in the planning and continued creation of this natural resource.

