

Aurora Community Arboretum celebrated by LSRCA with Watershed Heroes Award

For more than 20 years, the Aurora Community Arboretum, one of the Town's most expansive green spaces, has been maintained year in and year out by a dedicated, if unsung, group of volunteers.

But their work was trumpeted loud and clear recently when the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority (LSRCA) awarded the Arboretum and its team their 2023 Healthy Communities Award, part of their Watershed Heroes program.

"For over a decade, this exceptional group has organized numerous spring planting events and other community initiatives that have [had] a positive mark on both the community and our watershed," said the LSRCA at the awards ceremony held earlier this month. "Their partnership with the Conservation Authority has yielded an impressive tally of 29 community planting events, resulting in the transformation of an incredible 16.8 acres of land.

"To date, they have planted more than 12,000 native trees and shrubs. The impact of the efforts of the Aurora Community Arboretum extends beyond mere numbers. This group also promotes hands-on tree planting experiences that not only foster a profound connection with nature but underscore the importance of expanding our natural tree canopy. The Aurora Community Arboretum's commitment to the environment shines through their involvement in the Great Canadian Shoreline Clean-Up, by leading tree tours and walks, and their tireless efforts in managing and controlling invasive species in the community."

Following the ceremony, Arboretum Chair Irene Clement said the recognition "makes our volunteers feel like they are really doing something that makes a difference to others and the environment."

"The recognition for the Town of Aurora [in years past] has often been for volunteer hours, and we were awarded Aurora's Community Organization of the Year in 2013, which is more significant than just recognized volunteer hours. I think this award from the Conservation Authority, which looks after the whole watershed going into Lake Simcoe, means we're doing something that impacts directly on the health of Lake Simcoe. That recognition beyond the Town really makes you feel like you have accomplished something [broader] and that's really quite special for us.

"This raises our profile by being recognized by a group that is broader than the Town because what we're trying to do is get the word out that the Arboretum exists and it's a great place to come and enjoy nature. This recognition, I think, makes our volunteers feel like they are really doing something that makes a difference to others and really makes a difference to our environment. If you don't hear anything positive, sometimes you wonder if it is worth doing, but having this sort of recognition really brings home to us on the Board and to the volunteers that we're on the right track, we're making a positive difference, and that is really nice."

There are plenty of ways to get involved with the Aurora Community Arboretum as volunteers are always needed for a myriad of activities including community tree plantings, events to combat invasive species, and even this Saturday at 10 a.m. when volunteers will come together near the Arboretum's entrance off Hollandview Trail to plant more than 12,000 daffodil bulbs for their dazzling annual Field of Gold display in the springtime.

"Right now, we're winding down efforts for the season and we then take a little bit of time off around Christmas before getting right back into the swing of planning the new year in January," says Clement. "One thing we did this year was hire a summer student, a landscape architecture student, who had just finished her first year and she really did a lot of work this summer with us helping to get a lot more educational signs in place."

One such sign, set to be unveiled in the upcoming weeks and months, is in memory of Aurora resident Harry Lumsden, the man behind introducing the trumpeter swan back to Ontario, who played an instrumental role in the founding of the Arboretum.

"He made a significant contribution to the Town, the whole Province, and obviously to the Arboretum because we used to grow up

little trees in his back yard and plant them here,? says Clement.

For more information on the Aurora Community Arboretum, including volunteer opportunities, ways to get involved, and upcoming events such as this weekend's daffodil bulb planting, visit auroraarboretum.ca.

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