

## Aurora Community Arboretum gears up for spring cleanup and planting season



**By Brock Weir**

The ice has melted, the sun is shining, and green blades of grass are starting to poke out from amongst their brown neighbours – and that signals the start of a very busy few months for the Aurora Community Arboretum.

After a very long winter, Arboretum volunteers will be dusting off their trowels and limbering up their limbs ahead of next Saturday's Community Planting Day on May 3. Not only is it a way to bring in some new growth, but it is also an open house to introduce neighbours to just what can be found in the large slash of land stretching from Wellington Street to the south to St. John's Sideroad.

‘A lot of people don't know the extent of the Arboretum and are surprised when they actually come along,’ says Arboretum President Irene Clement. ‘Anybody who wants to work outside and wants to learn more about trees, or just help to green this area of Aurora can be a part of it.’

Once you step through and get involved in the Arboretum, it is very hard to turn back, she says. People might come to learn, for instance, how to prune their own trees, hedges and shrubs. And, if they do it through the Arboretum, they learn through doing.

‘We will often have a class on pruning, and go pruning while we are teaching,’ says Ms. Clement. ‘It is a great way to get outside, get some physical activity, and get to know part of Aurora.’

Ms. Clement recently presented the game plan for the year ahead at the Arboretum's Annual General Meeting. In addition to their spring plantings, there is much maintenance work to do.

Flora Aurora, the Arboretum's project planting a variety of flowering trees, bushes, and shrubs to combine into an extended burst of annual colour is now complete as of the last season. Work will be carried out this year with replacement bushes and shrubs that might not have fared so heartily over this unusually inclement winter.

‘It started to get pretty good last year,’ says Ms. Clement of the blooms. ‘The area has been our main focus since 2007 and it will be really interesting to see what kind of a display we have this year. With such a cold winter, I don't know what effect it will have, but hopefully we will see a few more blossoms.’

The next big project is signage throughout the Arboretum to keep visitors informed, and volunteers actively carrying out research.

Significant plantings are also planned for their specimen tree areas, which serve as a living museum of trees from all over the world that are able to thrive in the Canadian climate. With many of these trees planted by individuals as commemoratives of important people and milestones in their lives, the Aurora Arboretum has a target of 1,000 different species and varieties when all is said and done ? and they are about 60 per cent of the way there.

?Every year we put in more and more,? says Ms. Clement. ?Here, we tend to have a lot of space around the trees so this is where you can go and see what a crab apple tree might look like in your back yard, or a tri-colour beech, and different types of maples. There is enough space around the trees so they grow individually and you can see the shape of them, what size they can get to and whether or not it would look good in your back yard.?

Before these plans get well and truly underway, however, the volunteers still need to get out there and do an assessment of any damage that might have been caused by the ice storm. A full view of the lay of the land won't be ready until things start to ?green up? and they are able to tell whether things are damaged beyond repair or if things can be salvaged.

Right now, however, things are looking up ? beyond some branches that might need to be trimmed.

?I encourage everyone to get out and walk through the arboretum, ride their bike or take their dog out for a walk,? says Ms. Clement. ?It is a great natural area, has a lot of trails, and will dry up from the winter before too long. It is 100 acres of Town park and I think people would be surprised with how much exploring they can do here!?