

Merlin's Hollow sculptures to find permanent homes in public places



Merlin's Hollow, the famed Aurora garden of landscape architect David Tomlinson and his wife, Dierdre, was a destination not only for garden aficionados but also art-lovers, with sculptures made of materials as varied as shovels and horseshoes almost as eye-catching as its vivid blooms.

David Tomlinson, who died September 8 at the age of 89, was remembered at a celebration of life held last week at the gazebo of the Aurora Community Arboretum, a popular local greenspace he was instrumental in bringing to life.

It was here that Arboretum lead Irene Clement relayed a message on behalf of Sara Tienkamp, Parks Director for the Town of Aurora, which stated the legacy of the famed gardens, now closed to the public following the sale of the property, would still be enjoyed by Aurora residents in the future.

"We at the Town are proud to be able to deliver his vision for the Nature Reserve and to look forward to its completion in 2024," said Tienkamp, referring to the David Tomlinson Nature Reserve, a large swath of land stretching from Wellington Street East in the south, stretching northward towards St. John's Sideroad, which was Tomlinson's passion project.

"It is a legacy project that will be enjoyed for generations to come," she continued. "Also, the Tomlinsons generously donated a couple of their garden sculptures to the Town and we are working on displaying them proudly."

Last Tuesday's candlelit celebration of life attracted more than 60 people who counted themselves among Tomlinson's friends and those who were impacted by his work.

Among the personal touches was a display of wildflowers collected from the Nature Reserve which now bears his name.

Nature Aurora's Lissa Dwyer led the speakers, sharing that she first met Tomlinson after seeing an ad in *The Auroran* for what was then called the Aurora Wildlife and Naturalization Group. They were seeking "citizen scientists" to help them with their projects and Dwyer said she "never looked back."

Sharing a quote from the Dalai Lama that, "If you think you're too small to make a difference, you haven't spent the night with a mosquito," she said it might be a philosophy that aligned with Tomlinson's.

"It's his legacy that we should all be the mosquito to keep his ideas alive and to keep others accountable," said Dwyer. "It surprises me how engaged we all became in his life in the last few years in Aurora. David felt a sense of urgency to make sure we all knew

what needed doing.?

Among his many cited accomplishments was the design and implementation of the Nature Reserve, his work in engaging students in building bird and bat boxes, the comprehensive work carried out by he and his team on the hundreds of bird species that call Aurora home, and so much more.

?I don't think he was as proud of his accomplishments as we were or his family was,? said Dwyer. ?He was very proud of a nephew who earned a doctorate [and made] a brand-new font that would make reading vastly easier for dyslexics like him. Both the Breeding Birds of Aurora and the Nature Reserve Management Guide were published in this font for the same reason. I guess if David hadn't become an award-winning landscape designer, he would have been an excellent teacher.

?He was really effusive in his appreciation that others would invest as heavily in him, spend the time to collect the data, show up for a meeting or a field trip, head out with him at dawn, even if it was cold and dark. He was quick with his praise for a job well done.?

Looking over the Arboretum, Clement said ?hundreds and hundreds? of the trees planted there were ?courtesy of David,? who, she noted, drew his plans by hand.

?They were works of art in themselves,? she said, recalling him poring over his droughting board in his Centre Crescent base. ?This 100-acres of Town park was David's Master Plan. It is something he left to the Town and all of us, and we have done our best to try and execute the plan as he droughted it. His 2017 Breeding Birds of Aurora is quite an amazing scientific study, 200 pages long, and it is amazing what he put together there. It's just an amazing contribution to the Town. We are indeed very thankful and lucky to have had him as part of our community.?

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