

Aurora Community Arboretum keeps on truckin? into 2017



By Brock Weir

For nearly 10 years, the Aurora Community Arboretum's passionate team of volunteers have been armed with the mission of beautifying Aurora ? and they have no intentions of slowing down now.

As the horizon on the first decade of their 10 year contract with the Town of Aurora nears in 2017, many of their plans are just ready to burst into fruition, but these horticulturalists ? professional and amateur ? are not content to rest on their laurels.

For their annual investment in the Arboretum, which cuts a green swath starting just north of Wellington Street East and John West Way, stretching northwest to St. John's Sideroad and Industrial Parkway North, Aurora gets a significant return on investment, said the Arboretum's Irene Clement, noting their efforts have added significant ?natural capital? to the area.

Since their formation, the Arboretum has planted 1,500 trees and shrubs of 630 different species and varieties. In last year alone, 223 flowering trees and shrubs were planted just in Flora Aurora, a stretch of the Arboretum behind the Aurora Family Leisure Complex that over the next year or two will form an annual burst of colour for all to enjoy.

?Our goal was to create Flora Aurora and I think we can say it is now completed,? said Ms. Clement. ?The core plantings were finished by the end of 2014 and that means from 2007 when we started this project to the end of last year, we planted 1,600 flowering trees and shrubs that make up 300 species or varieties. Hopefully we'll have a good show to put on. We don't know how the winter survival was because it was quite a long winter, but hopefully it survived well and we'll have our first show in another year or two.?

Outside of the Flora Aurora area, the number of plantings extended to 915. Their goal in recent years has been to stock growth in an economical way. They try to be cost effective in buying specimens when they're young and raising them in their nurseries until they are ready to plant. Currently, there are 888 examples of new stock just waiting for their time to shine.

As successful as they have been, however, Mother Nature has been slightly less cooperative. Invasive species continue to be a problem and maintenance projects will be ongoing into this year, with the help of specialists, to try and get rid of the vegetation choking the growth of many of its neighbours.

To get this, and other projects for 2015, off the ground, they hope to do so with a new dedicated utility vehicle at their disposal. Arboretum volunteers are currently limited to ?one or two? private vehicles available to them to do the work that needs to be done. A vehicle that meets all their criteria has been quoted at \$23,000.

?We're all volunteers, we love trees and nature, but the majority of us are not experts in these things,? said Ms. Clement on entering

into a \$40,000 contract with the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority for their expertise and services. ?The Arboretum has used local skills and leveraged our volunteer effort to enhance the value of this great natural resource in the heart of Aurora. Some of the specimen trees are growing very well, some are not. Some will benefit from some extra care. We need specialized extra help to assess the health and growth of our specimen trees and to do what needs to be done to assist them.

?This expert help will not only be hands-on, but will also train and help oversee our volunteers to do more value-added work. In addition, the contract will also help with outreach, ecotourism, and promotion by developing and doing more guided walks. It will help the Arboretum Board to plan for the future, help us envision the goals for the next 10 year contract.?