



TREE CANOPY

North York parklanders

One of Toronto's most invisible big parks is flourishing thanks to a community group you've never heard of: the East Don Parkland Partners.

The East Don Parklands stretches from Sheppard to Steeles along the west side of Leslie in North York, with paved paths along the Don River meandering through woodlands and meadows. Phil Goodwin stumbled upon it after moving from the west to the east side of Bayview Avenue in 1992. His shock at its low profile given its size and location led to annual path parties in the park for up to 400 of his closest friends. He met the local councillor at the time, Joan King, who introduced him to the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and the Don Watershed Regeneration Council's report *Forty Steps to a New Don*. The document opened his eyes to the tremendous amount of work required to rehabilitate the watershed.

"Why don't we do something like plant trees instead?" he remembers thinking. "Because there were some key issues there. One was riparian plantings, another was increasing the city's green canopy."

So in 1999, Phil and his path party associates founded the East Don Parkland Partners (EDPP), and the annual get-together was scrapped in favour of one fall and two spring plantings each year, all in line with the City's and TRCA's plans. To pay for plants, in 2000 they added the Quest for Chowder, an annual dinner fundraiser (complete with raffle contests), and shortly thereafter

organized Wildflower Walks for local residents. Since 1999, 10,000 trees have gone in the ground. While beavers have commandeered some, most are flourishing under the watchful eyes of their planters — some of whom have participated in every event since 1999. In Goodwin's words, EDPP group members return to the park regularly to "watch their babies grow up."

Kim Statham-Bray, a natural environment specialist at the City who works with the group to determine what species should be planted where, adds that the EDPP is "on the far range" of community groups. "I've seen their kids grow up and I know everyone by name," she says. "There's very few other groups that I know of that are as active."

How are the East Don Parkland Partners so active and effective without much of the infrastructure so many groups depend on — no website, no meetings, not even a Facebook group? "If there's a little passion, you just have to call the TRCA or the City and say, 'how can I help?'" says Goodwin. "If you think locally and act locally, you can make an impact locally." ↑

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