

Memorial Tree Planting by the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust

By Nancy Hopkinson and Susan Walmer

The warm and sunny weather was perfect for honouring advocates and champions of the Moraine. On Sunday Oct. 24, the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust honoured donors who had passed away in recent years by planting native oak and maple trees with family and friends on the private MapleCross Nature Reserve in King Township. Oak trees are a symbol of strength, endurance and knowledge – just like the champions that were being honoured. Susan Walmer, the CEO of the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust, honoured these donors and advocates of the Moraine: King's Tom Atkins who was the first board member of the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust. He was heralded as a hard-working advocate of the Trust and who walked 20 km a day on the ORM trails. His motto was always optimistic and enthusiasm with his favourite phrase being "Just to it!" Tom and his wife, Virginia, also recently placed a conservation easement on their lands to protect it forever. One of his daughters, Sara Atkins, spoke and said that the first meeting of the ORM Land Trust was in their house when she was a little girl. She is now working in the environmental field - Tom passed on his love of conservation to his family. King Councillor Debbie Schaefer spoke about Jane Underhill, who served King Township for three terms as a councillor, and how Jane consulted with experts about the Moraine and educated King citizens by publishing a column in the local newspaper. Debbie mentioned that there was opposition to protecting the Moraine, but Jane, who was very soft spoken but relentless in getting the protection, used, as her weapon of choice, facts! King's Dorothy Izzard was also remembered as one who advocated tirelessly for protection of the Moraine and was involved in several organizations including STORM. She reminded everyone that Steve Gilchrist, past ORMLT board member and current volunteer, was involved when the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan was passed with all parties in agreement. Susan told us that we need to remind the current Provincial Government of their past actions and stop the Ministers' Zoning Orders that undermine the Conservation Plan. Russ Powell, a land donor to the Land Trust and first Inaugural Chair of the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation in 2004. He was known for his leadership, dedication, passion and mentoring of others. He and his wife, Dawn donated a Conservation Easement on their 200-acre lands in Pontypool on the eastern section of the Oak Ridges to the ORMLT. Derek and Barbara Foulds also granted a Conservation Easement on their property in Uxbridge and replanted trees for over 50 years transforming it from a barren wasteland to a forest. When a landowner loves the beauty and ecological diversity of a piece of property and wants to protect it for future generations, Canada's Ecological Gifts Program provides a way for Canadians with ecologically sensitive land to protect nature, and leave a legacy for future generations with tax benefits. Organizations like the ORMLT become responsible for the conservation of the donated land's biodiversity and environmental heritage. This responsibility lasts forever. See <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/environmental-funding/ecological-gifts-program/overview.html> If you are interested in supporting the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust or have lands that you would like to protect, please contact Walmer at swalmer@oakridgesmoraine.org.