

Land donation is a true Love story?

By Mark Pavilons



King's precious Happy Valley Forest, a rare jewel in the GTA, has grown by 90 acres, thanks to a generous donation by a local family.

With this donation, a project some 10 years in the making, generations to come can enjoy their trek to the Love Mountain Nature Reserve, thanks to the contribution and patience of David and Ann Love.

"We're lucky to be able to do," David said during a public ceremony and tour last week.

The official unveiling was attended by politicians, York Region staff and members of the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC), stewards of Happy Valley Forest.

James Duncan, regional vice-president of NCC, said the key to such things is partnerships and people.

"We do it for plants, animals and forests, but we do it through people," he said.

The scale and importance of Happy Valley Forest hasn't gone unnoticed. In fact, NCC received a \$225 million government grant in 2007 to carry out its important conservation work.

Part of an important headwater region, conservation projects in the Happy Valley Forest Natural Area – including Love Mountain – contribute to the protection of important water resources, and help to provide safe drinking water for residents as far away as Toronto. Trails within the Happy Valley Forest are open to visitors year round for walking and wildlife viewing.

Paul Calandra, MP for Oak Ridges–Markham, said many people talk about environmental protection but few are actively involved. Standing at the foot of Love Mountain, Calandra said it's obvious to see why such efforts are vitally important.

Additional funding for this project was generously provided by the federal government, York Region, and other foundations.

Calandra noted in these challenging economic times money isn't abundant, but the government is proud to do this.

It's a big commitment from the Love family and it lets others know this program exists and there are many ways to give and become local advocates.

He considers himself very lucky as an MP for the most beautiful riding in the country, bar none.

David Love noted he first saw the property and forest in 1946 when his family first became "enchanted" by the natural beauty. He admitted he grew up here, fell in love here and has raised children and now enjoys grandchildren who share a love of the forest.

The area provides him a "sense of place" and "is my family touchstone."

Ann shared some stories and captured moments, including the origins of the Sunny California pond and meadow and Green Leaf Lane. European settlers called the property "Sunny California" because, with a south facing slope, the lot was always several degrees warmer than anywhere else in King Township.

David said the "gift" really belongs to the earth. "Love Mountain and Happy Valley Forest are simply coming home," he said.

"We hope that our donation of the land that we love so much inspires those fortunate enough to consider doing the same in the Happy Valley Forest and beyond," the Loves added.

Erin Mahoney, commissioner of environmental services for York Region, said it's inspiring to hear and see the passion for the land. She was taken by seeing such partnerships in action and this donation supports the Region's greening strategy. "She praised the generous and educational gift the Loves bestowed.

"York Regional Council is actively engaged in the protection of our natural features through the Regional Greenlands Securement Strategy and partnerships with organizations such as the Nature Conservancy of Canada," said York Region chairman and CEO Bill Fisch. "The combined efforts of all parties to conserve Love Mountain in the Happy Valley protects this land for current and future

generations.?

‘The Love family is leaving a wonderful natural legacy that also honours their family legacy, and we are so pleased they chose NCC to receive this gift, and trust us to guard it,’ said Mark Stabb, NCC Ontario program manager. There are many parts to assembling the forest ‘puzzle’ and he stressed this particular donation involved a lot of work and patience.

He said the forest has to be experienced to be appreciated.

Duncan noted they need to increase the pace of conservation. ‘We can’t allow development to outpace conservation,’ he observed.

‘Our work is your work. We do it for everybody.’

Named for the ‘high mountains’ described by early settlers and travellers of the Toronto Carrying-Place Trail, which passed very near this area, Love Mountain is a tribute to both a cultural and a family history. The older-growth forest and wetland habitats of the property provide a haven for species at risk and other rare wildlife including Acadian flycatcher, Jefferson salamander, southern flying squirrel and snapping turtles.

Love Mountain’s kettle ponds, a prominent feature of the Oak Ridges Moraine, were formed during the end of the last ice age and are important habitat for many wetland animals.

David Love’s grandparents, Ellsworth Flavelle, an accomplished photographer, and his wife Muriel, founder of Kingcrafts Studios, first purchased land in the Happy Valley Forest in 1930.

The Happy Valley Forest is one of the largest remaining intact upland deciduous forests on the Oak Ridges Moraine.

The Happy Valley Forest is a special area that features all the elements necessary to achieve old-growth structure in the next 50 years. The forest area supports more than 110 breeding bird species.

NCC manages 521 acres (210 hectares) of conservation land within the Happy Valley Forest Natural Area. NCC and partners together have protected 630 acres (255 hectares).

If only Love Mountain could speak. Maybe she doesn’t have to. Fortunately, there will be many more generations of stories to tell. That’s love!