

Bolton Camp is still 'a place of dreams?

By Bill Rea

There's been a lot going on at the Bolton Camp property, and a large crowd was on the site recently to see what's in the works, and celebrate the past.

Roughly 250 acres that had basically been vacant and abandoned for years was a hive of activity over the summer, with young people trying to claim back what was allowed to let go.

The public got the chance to see the progress, under the auspices of the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA). The camp on the site was established in 1922 as a facility for mothers with small children from low-income families to get away for a time. The property was acquired a little more than three years ago by TRCA, with the support of Peel Region and the City of Toronto.

Danielle Scepanivic was one of the roughly 70 young people who were working on the site over the summer, recalling that young people had got together in design charrets to come up with ideas for the property. Matthew Pavusa, who along with Scepanivic was MC at the event, observed it provided summer jobs and also engaged young people in the project.

He also recalled there was a lot to be done, commenting the weeds were waste high when they started.

"It was a lot of hard work," he said, adding it was also rewarding.

Regional Chair Emil Kolb commented that he has many memories of the camp property, adding its purpose was to provide camping opportunities for people who might not otherwise have the chance.

Kolb, who sat on the Conservation Authority from 1974 to 1991, said there were several attempts to buy the site, but the necessary funds were always hard to come by. There was finally a meeting with the owner, and he said they were able to get the price down, with the help from Toronto and the Region.

"There's a lot of work that can be done here," he said, adding he hopes Toronto officials will continue to play a role.

Brian Denney, CEO of TRCA, commented that partnerships with municipalities are an important part of conservation authorities. He added the camp property is part of some 40,000 acres that make up the network of TRCA lands.

"This is a really significant addition to that network," he remarked.

He also thanked the two local school boards, as well as the students, for stepping up.

There is still a lot of work to be done, and Denney pointed out that will mean more productive experiences for young people in the summers to come. He said they have only scratched the surface.

"Keep thinking of what this place could be," he urged.

"The history of this place is absolutely magical," Denney added. "Please stay with us. This place is going to be absolutely magical."

Brian Porter of Family Service Toronto, said the camp was closed in 1999, after 77 years. He said it "was a place of dreams and magic."

Reflecting on the work being done, he said the property has a great future under TRCA. "You have an amazing future," he remarked.

"This place started as and will always remain a place of dreams," he added.



Part of the recent festivities included former campers getting on stage to sing the camp's song.