

CVC marks years of youth community service

Ten years of community service is a something local youth can be proud of.

Credit Valley Conservation (CVC) and Credit Valley Conservation Foundation (CVCF) marked the 10th anniversary of its Conservation Youth Corps program (CYC) recently in Mississauga. The event was held to celebrate 10 years of accomplishments and community support through the youth environmental program.

In attendance were members from the CVC and CVCF's Board of Directors, sponsors of the program, community partners and some of this year's CYC student volunteers.

“In 2006, at the urging of our former CAO, Rae Horst, we started the conversation with our partners about the need for youth programming,” CVC Deputy CAO and Director of Watershed Transformation Mike Puddister commented. “We were committed to connecting youth with the environment. Our goal was to offer an environmental learning experience for 200 students during the summer and plant 10,000 trees.”

The CYC program began in the summer of 2007 with the support of the Region of Peel. The program aligned with municipal and provincial government priorities for healthy communities.

It started with partners throughout the Credit River watershed who combined to provide community service, engage high school students looking for volunteer hours and address climate change.

Youth volunteers spend one week in the summer working in a crew of seven. They participate in various conservation activities such as tree plantings, trail maintenance, invasive species removal, stream restoration and electrofishing.

The program offers students an opportunity to earn volunteer hours, develop new and different life skills and network with other students.

The success of CYC led to two more CVC programs that encourage youth participation. Branch Out is a program that enhances science and geography curriculum and offers students the chance to participate in hands-on local environmental restoration. The Frontline program offers an opportunity for youth to develop leadership skills as environmental champions.

Nearly 2,200 students have joined the CYC week-long summer program, with another 10,000 volunteers participating in Branch Out. These students have contributed 84,000 hours of work through 1,800 workdays over the past decade. This is equal to five full-time staff each year the program has operated.

Through partnerships with landowners and supporters, these students planted more than 54,000 trees over the 10 years to help fight climate change. Students have also removed more than 1,000 bags of invasive species, like garlic mustard, honeysuckle and buckthorn. All this work has taken place on 149 different properties.

“Today we celebrate all the accomplishments and hard work achieved over the past 10 years through the dedication of our many partners, students and donors,” Puddister commented. “Of course this program would not be possible without the continued support and hard work from the CVC Foundation. We thank the Foundation Board and staff for all their support over the lifetime of this program.”

Each year CVCF commits to raise \$125,000 in support of CYC. Since 2006, they have contributed approximately \$1.1 million. CVCF has hosted 11 Conservation Galas and eight Canoe the Credit events in support of the CYC program.

“We are so proud of what has been accomplished over the past 10 years of the program,” CVCF Executive Director Terri LeRoux declared. “We have had the privilege of seeing students participate in meaningful work that is making a difference in our community. The support of our donors and sponsors has been the key to the success of the program. Without their continued support the program would not exist.”

The CYC program has been successful over the years due to the support of donors and sponsors which include the Region of Peel, Enersource, Shell Fuelling Change, TD FEF, Enbridge, CRH, Canon-Evergreen Take Root, George Weston Limited, RBC Foundation, Brampton and Caledon Community Foundation, ECHO Foundation, PPG Canada Inc., Pratt and Whitney Canada, Suncor Energy and Telus Corporation.