

Efforts being made for heritage designation on West Humber

By Bill Rea

The West Humber River should have more recognition, and a Wildfield man is trying to get it.

Dan O'Reilly recently appeared before Caledon council promoting the idea, and asking the town to bring the matter up with Peel Region, City of Brampton and Toronto and Region Conservation Authority.

He said he put the idea before the Brampton Heritage Board in October seeking support for some sort of signage, or possible a pavilion.

?Such signage could possibly be erected on or near a new Mayfield Road bridge which will have to be erected when that road is expanded to four lanes in a few years,? he said, adding it could also be incorporated with Wildfield heritage sign near the intersection of Mayfield and The Gore Road.

The Humber is designated a Canadian Heritage River, but that's not the case with the western branch.

?I believe the case can be made that the West Humber does have heritage, natural and cultural value on a local, city, town and regional wide basis,? O'Reilly said.

He cited a 1997 report from what was then known as the Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority that stated there had been 53 archaeological sites discovered in the West Humber watershed, and he speculated more might have been found since that time.

?The West Humber is Wildfield's most natural feature and its presence would have been one of the factors which attracted settlers to the area in the early part of the 19th century, just as it attracted First Nations people before them,? he observed.

O'Reilly said the John's Agricultural School was just south of St. Patrick's Church in valley lands near the river from about 1859 to 1875. It taught farming and basic literary skills to local children, as well as orphans from Toronto. He said those orphans would have used the river for fishing, swimming or skating.

?The agricultural school would have served a large catchment area, extending into what is now Caledon,? he commented.

He also pointed out Hurricane Hazel washed out several bridges along the west Humber in 1954, including one on The Gore Road, just south of what is now Healey Road.

?As a boundary community, half in Caledon and half in Brampton, Wildfield would be the logical location for a West Humber River commemorative pavilion if space can be found, and I believe it can be,? he said.

Councillor Nick deBoer suggested referring the matter to Heritage Resource Officer Sally Drummond to see what can be done to assist the effort.

Mayor Allan Thompson commented there are efforts to have a heritage designation applied to the Credit River, so he said something similar could be done for the West Humber.