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LIVING

Heritage above our heads

Magnificent old trees carry reminders of the past and hope for the future

There is a colossal burr oak on Homewood Avenue in Peterborough that has many a story to tell. Estimated at 200 to 300 years old, it has witnessed no less than the entire history of our city, from the time of the first settlers to the present era. Before that, it would have also observed the comings and goings of native people who used this area for hunting and fishing. Its corky, fire-resistant bark would have allowed it to survive the grass fires that these same hunters and fishers set in order to keep the land clear.



Drew Monkman
OUR CHANGING SEASONS

This burr oak is a wonderful example of a heritage tree. Heritage trees are not only the oldest trees in an area, but they often have stories of historical significance associated with them. The Ontario Heritage Tree Alliance (OHTA) defines heritage trees as "those that are community landmarks because of their unique physical, cultural and historical significance and that may be at risk unless their importance is recognized." There are provincial guidelines provided by the OHTA, but the responsibility for heritage tree programs ultimately lies with each municipality to implement or not, and to decide what qualifies as a heritage tree for that municipality. Peterborough does not as of yet have a heritage tree program.

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Including trees in heritage designation programs not only provides some protection for the tree, but it benefits the property owner, too, in the form of municipal tax breaks or other economic benefits. If the removal of a tree with a heritage designation is deemed necessary for whatever reason, compensation would be required to allow for the planting of a number of new trees with the potential to eventually replace the canopy and ecological value of the lost tree.

For example, a black walnut was recently cut in downtown Peterborough to make room for the construction of a new building. The tree had a DBH (trunk diameter at breast height, or about 4.5 ft) of over one metre and would have qualified as a heritage tree according to the provincial guidelines. However, there was no protection available for this very significant tree, nor any recourse to impose financial compensation for the loss to the neighbourhood.

Peterborough is one of the few cities in Ontario that currently has no restrictions on tree felling, except on properties of five acres or more. Toronto, on the other hand, requires a permit for the removal of any tree of 30 cm DBH or greater.

Heritage tree programs are a way of building local pride and celebrating natural heritage while at the same time protecting neighbourhood property values and preserving the genetic material of the region's best trees. The oldest and healthiest trees in a community are often those that are best adapted to the local conditions. The trees, along with the genetic information contained in their seeds, need to be preserved for the



PETER BEALES Special to The Examiner

This huge black cherry tree (below) and white pine (right) are both in Pioneer Park, south of Hilliard Street and west of Water Street. The burr oak (above) at 550 Homewood Ave. is 30 metres tall, 200 to 300 years old, and might be the city's most significant heritage tree.



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future health of the urban forest.

According to Dr. Andy Kenney, professor of forestry at the University of Toronto, the benefits gained by a community from any tree increase exponentially with its leaf area. The leaf area is the total area covered by the leaves if they were all laid side-by-side on the ground. Mature trees have many layers of leaves in their crowns, and the larger the crown, the greater the total leaf area. The benefits include air purification, storm water mitigation, erosion control, wildlife habitat, increased property values, and summer cooling. All of these benefits increase exponentially with the number of large stature trees in a community.

Collecting seeds from heritage trees and propagating them in local nurseries is a further way of building a healthy urban forest that is more likely to withstand the rigours of local conditions. Currently, most of the trees sold in nurseries are cloned from trees that come from far away. These trees can either be incapable of withstanding our

climatic conditions (Japanese maple), or can spread so aggressively that they upset local ecological balances (Norway maple).

Peterborough Green-Up's centre for landscape and outdoor education, also known as Ecology Park, has been propagating trees from local seed for a number of years and has also recently started collecting seed from some potential heritage trees in the city.

Municipalities such as London, Oakville, Simcoe County, Elgin County and Centre Wellington have preceded a heritage tree program with some kind of community tree hunt. This helped to generate interest and awareness in the communities about their wonderful treasure of trees. Peterborough has launched its own tree contest this year. It is called "Peterborough's Treasured Tree Hunt." Trees can be nominated for their height, their girth, stories or memories associated with the tree, or for any other reason that makes the tree a "treasure" to the person nominating it. Any tree in Peterborough can be nomi-

nated. Tree photographs or stories about local trees can also be entered in the contest. However, the July 1 deadline is coming up quickly. Nomination forms are available on-line at www.treasuredtreehunt.com or can be picked up at the Peterborough Green-Up office at 378 Aylmer St. All entries will be evaluated during July and August by local judges, and prizes will be awarded during National Forest Week in September. The Treasured Tree Hunt will hopefully be a precursor to a heritage tree program in Peterborough.

In fact, one of the recommendations in the draft Urban Forest Strategic Plan for the city of Peterborough is to implement such a program. A public open house on the proposed plan will be held this evening, June 18, from 7 to 9 p.m. at the Peterborough Public Library. This is an opportunity for the public to review and provide input on the strategic objectives of the plan. Our municipal government needs to know that trees are important to the citizens of Peter-

Personal treasures you can share

I have assembled a personal list of some of the more significant trees in Peterborough that I've come across over the years or have learned about through friends. Some of these may one day become official heritage trees. Try to get to see as many of them as you can. They will give you a sense of the botanical richness Peterborough enjoys. We'll begin in the north end.

- an exceptionally large, old white ash at 1184 Royal Dr.
 - a huge sugar maple in Bears Creek Gardens Park near the corner of Royal Drive and Marina Boulevard.
 - towering white pines and a magnificent black cherry at Pioneer Park. Enter at Hilliard and Water streets or from Argyle street.
 - two gigantic, 30-metre tall burr oaks on the corner of Parkhill Road and Armour Road in Nicholls Oval park. From their height, they are most likely old forest trees and might pre-date European settlement of this area.
 - a very old ginkgo tree at 188 Douro St.
 - a particularly attractive American basswood at Charles St. and Engleburn Ave.
 - huge eastern cottonwoods at Lock 20 near the corner of Maria and Rogers streets.
 - majestic sugar maples at 115 Crescent St., just west of Lock Street.
 - a treasure trove of native and non-native trees in Little Lake Cemetery
 - a massive burr oak in St. Peter's Cemetery at Lansdowne Street and Monaghan Road and another at 640 Sherbrooke St., near Prince of Wales School
 - a very large black walnut at 646 Charlotte St.
 - a huge red oak (DBH 133 cm or 4.5 feet across!) located in Kawartha Heights Park in a hollow behind the catchment pond
 - beautiful stands of white pines and eastern hemlocks in Jackson Park
 - a gargantuan cottonwood at the corner of Parkhill Road and Donegal Street.
 - a pignut hickory (DBH 79 cm, height 23 metres) at 627 Walkerfield Ave. This is a very unusual tree for this area.
 - possibly our city's finest tree, the absolutely gigantic burr oak (DBH 143 cm, height 30 metres) at 550 Homewood Ave.
- There are also several trees in the Peterborough area which are already on the "Ontario Honour Roll of Trees." They include a balsam poplar along the Trent-Severn Waterway with a diameter of 140 cm, a white oak in Otonabee Township with a diameter of 191 cm, and a rock elm near Keene with a diameter of 63 cm. There was also an eastern hemlock in Mark S. Burnham Provincial Park which died within the past few years that was estimated to be more than 400 years old.

borough, so anyone with an interest is urged to attend. If you are unable to be there this evening, you may also email your comments to DManser@peterborough.ca

This Saturday at 1 p.m., there will also be a tree identification walk at Little Lake Cemetery put on by Peterborough Green-Up. The cemetery offers a wide selection of our common native trees as well as a few unusual exotics. This will be great opportunity for the beginner who wants to learn to recognize our native trees. It will be led by retired Ontario Parks tree enthusiast, Peter Beales.

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