

Town celebrates the official opening of Bancroft's Heart of the Park



By Nate Smelle

Representatives from the many partnering organizations who came together to transform Bancroft's Riverside Park gathered with members of the community to officially open the new strawbale canteen that has come to be known as the Heart of the Park. Built by the sustainable building class from Fleming College in 2014 the building will serve a wide variety of purposes for the community. It will house three different social enterprises: the Wattle and Daub Cafe, a rental facility providing a variety of recreational equipment and the Round Table Kitchen.

"We are committed to making this facility a training-grounds for our youth while being able to serve them still with the transportation services we provide," said Gwen Coish, director of operations for BCT.

"We have lots of things to offer in our community and we now have a new facility to offer people as well."

The plan is to keep the Heart of the Park open all year long, according to another of the project's partners Rebecca Malloy, program coordinator with North Hastings Youth in Action (NHYA). She said the project will employ five to six individuals in the beginning with the intention of creating more jobs and opportunities in the near future. A new place in town for people to meet, the Heart of the Park will provide the community with a workshop space to share their knowledge and their skills with others in the community. The Heart of the Park features a commercial-grade kitchen that can be rented out to members of the public interested in preserving, and possibly even selling their locally grown and produced food products.

"One of the greatest things about this building is its fantastic kitchen," Malloy said.

"That's why it's such a great opportunity for people who are into preserving food, canning and making jams. They can come here to do it and then it's certified and good to go. A lot of these skills from previous generations are being lost and we need them now more than ever. The Round Table Kitchen fits perfectly with the new gardens by Harvest the North."

Visitors to the Heart of the Park can rent canoes, mountain bikes, skateboards and a variety of other recreational equipment. The Heart of the Park gives the community a friendly public space for people of all ages to socialize. Bancroft Councillor Bill Kilpatrick said the Heart of the Park and Harvest the North are encouraging social sustainability on a whole new level in Bancroft. He is thrilled to see how the transformation of Riverside Park is bringing people in the community together.

"Social sustainability essentially occurs when all aspects of the community work towards supporting the capacity of current and future generations to create healthy and liveable communities," said Kilpatrick.

"Social sustainability in terms of the Riverside Project has both a material and a human aspect to it."

Ted Brandon, training officer at the Haliburton campus of Fleming College was another of the project's partners to speak during the celebration. Like Kilpatrick he also sees the Riverside project as a good example of social sustainability in action.

"While the students were in Bancroft they were treated so well by the business community, BCT and the Town staff," he said.

"I know it was a really positive experience for them to be here in Bancroft. We were actually in talks to do a second project here in Bancroft but the money wasn't readily available. We would certainly relish the opportunity to come back to Bancroft. It was a wonderful experience for our college, our students and our staff."