

Building a future



By Nate Smelle

TAKING A WALK AROUND the new straw bale building in Riverside Park during the farewell celebration for the Sir Sandford Fleming College students who constructed it, I was enthused to see the diversity of individual flare expressed in the structure by each of the students. One of the assignments by the students in the Sustainable Building and Design program asked each of them to use their creative liberty to complete a project that improved the overall aesthetic and/or functionality of the building. Using their imaginations to re-purpose leftover building materials, dead trees and recycled bike parts, the students found ways to make use of scrap materials and found items that would otherwise be wasting space in the landfill. Looking around inside and outside the new canteen it was obvious that the crew took great time and care into designing and constructing their personal signature on the structure and site. Some of the students worked together to paint a Bancroft mineral-themed mural on the front straw bale wall of the facility. Others worked together to use up waste materials by creating art installations for interior walls. Hopefully the first of many sustainable buildings to join the downtown, the new canteen raises the bar for local builders; prompting them to learn how to adopt more sustainable and eco-efficient building practices that are beneficial for the home owner, the builder and the environment. With so many innovative and eco-friendly building technologies on display in one location, the canteen is an opportunity for sceptical contractors and building inspectors to investigate how things such as straw bale walls, earth plaster and solar hot water heating hold up against their conventional alternative. Riverside Park project coordinator Jane Mayberry walked me through the building and around the site explaining how the building would function when the construction is completely finished. With uncertainties still existing as to how exactly the building will be used, it was encouraging to hear that they are looking at creating more partnerships within the community to help use the space live up to its full potential. In order to increase the overall level of sustainability of the project Mayberry said they had been looking into creating partnerships with local food growers and farmers to stock the canteen with healthy food options for the children and visitors expected to frequent the facility. Merging the sustainable food movement with

the green building community could bring about a tsunami of benefits on all sorts of levels for the community and beyond if the relationship is nurtured properly. In her discussion with Bancroft This Week before her performance at the 4 R's Music Retreat, artist and sustainable food/anti-poverty activist Jen Chapin said "there is something very basic and good about people growing food in the community they live in. I believe in communities, whether they are made up of musicians, or communities of local farmers, eaters, [builders] or artists," she continued. "It's not just about getting whatever kind of calories you can to the poor starving people, it's about recognizing that people have answers in themselves, and have their own wisdom that can be amplified and empowered." Likewise to how Chapin has noticed that people who are poor and hungry possess their own wisdom and ability to help themselves and others out of poverty; the crew of student/green builders who have been working on the Riverside Park project since last April have also had to put their own knowledge and wisdom into action to help build a more sustainable and healthy community.