

Appreciating an urban forest

By Meghan Jean Low, The Suburban 2007-01-10 10:56:29

Angell Woods is a hot spot for dog walkers and nature lovers. On a typical day, dogs can be found chasing one another in the forest while people talk and walk with family and friends. The forest brings people together to share their passions for the outdoors.

Liam and Lina Dixon moved to Beaconsfield in 1983 and soon discovered the 200 acres of forest situated just north of the Beaurepaire train station. After exploring the woods on numerous occasions they decided to blaze a trail with garden clippers while being careful to respect nature. There is now four kilometres of trails through the woods.

Liam Dixon says making the trails has created a lot of awareness and people are becoming more connected to the land.

The land is mostly private property, therefore it is in danger of being developed. Presently the people who go there are trespassing. Dixon says, "We are there simply because owners have not enforced trespassing laws."

The Dixons are on the executive of the Association for the Protection of Angell Woods (APAW). Liam is the treasurer as well as the caretaker of the trails. "There are viable opportunities to save the land and this should be realized," he says.

APAW is trying to work out financial deals that do not require the city of Beaconsfield having to pay money to the four companies that own the property. When making these deals APAW works independently from the city of Beaconsfield. APAW has partnered with the Nature Conservancy of Canada, who can issue enticing tax breaks to owners who donate land. Dixon says more than half the woods can be saved through tax breaks alone.

"The majority of people think the forest is either already saved, or that it is lost. They are not aware of the work that is being done behind the scenes," says Dixon.

For now and while it is still possible, residents continue to enjoy the experience of walking through the woods.

Real Bilodeau, another Beaconsfield resident, has been coming to Angell Woods for several decades. When he was a child, Bilodeau once built a fort in the woods with his brother.

Today he comes through Angell Woods every morning with his dog Halley. The woods are soothing; it's a place to unwind and just "absorb the trees," says Bilodeau, who added that years ago he saw a Snowy Owl and both he and his dog were startled when they heard the sound of wings flapping.

Ray and Diane Paquet have been exploring the woods for the last 10 years. They often invite their family and friends to walk with them. "The people we bring are always amazed to see a forest so close to the city," says Ray.

They live in Kirkland and walk from their house to the woods with their two small dogs. "It's a good place for us to socialize with friends and reconnect with nature."

Heidi Young has only been to Angell Woods five times and she is already impressed by the area. Young says Angell Woods reminds her of "the good old days," because people are free to roam the woods with their dogs loose. She used to bring her dog to Terra Cotta in Pointe Claire, but they recently enforced a rule that restricts dogs to leashes.

Angell Woods is popular because there are limited places for citizens to enjoy a nature walk in the West Island since green space continues to disappear says Young. "Our family chose to live in the suburbs to be surrounded by forest, not so everything can be developed."