



Thursday » July  
3 » 2008

## The park where hope grows

A 'dramatic and bold' park dedicated to cancer survivors is designed to attract attention and offer inspiration, Maria Cook writes.

Ottawa Citizen

*Wednesday, July 02, 2008*

A bouquet of giant steel flowers, six or seven metres tall, has sprung up at one of Ottawa's busiest intersections, punctuating the streetscape with cheerful flashes of fuchsia, mauve, purple, blue and red.

The Richard and Annette Bloch Cancer Survivors Park, nearing completion at the corner of Riverside Drive, Industrial Avenue and Alta Vista Drive, is an unusual project.

A combination of a generous donor, city land, volunteer effort and creative landscape design has transformed an unpromising site into a beautiful place intended to offer inspiration to cancer survivors.

Located across from the Canada Post mail processing plant with roads on three sides, it is passed by 35,000 vehicles a day.

"Usually, when you're designing a park you look for an out-of-the way quiet place," says Ottawa landscape architect Steve Sunderland, who designed the park.

"Here's it's the opposite. We're trying to create a landmark that people recognize. It's not a subtle place. It's quite dramatic and bold."

The journey from vacant to verdant began in 2002 after Ottawa lawyer Charles Merovitz came across a similar park in Palm Springs, California.

"What struck me was the juxtaposition of the words cancer and survivor," recalls Mr. Merovitz, whose mother died of cancer. "I never thought of those two words going together."

The park he saw was sponsored by the late Richard Bloch, founder of the tax-preparation company H&R Block.

Diagnosed with terminal lung cancer in 1978 and given three months to live, he underwent aggressive therapy and went on to live until 2004. He died of heart failure at age 78. Mr. Bloch promised that if he survived, he would help others fight cancer.

Among various services, his family foundation has helped fund 22 survivor parks across North America, including Canada's first in Mississauga, which opened in 2006.

Mr. Merovitz and a team of volunteers submitted a proposal to the foundation, and in 2006 received a pledge of \$1.1 million in cash, art and plaques. To date, they have raised an additional \$400,000 toward the total \$2-million cost. This includes gifts of labour and materials from contractors, many involved for personal reasons.

"It's going to be a really nice place for people to reflect, get some hope," says Linda Eagen, head of the Ottawa Regional Cancer Foundation, which will manage the park. "It's going to be a landmark."

The Bloch family stipulated that the park be located in a highly visible area. "The park becomes a medium for the message," says Mr. Sunderland, whose own mother died of cancer last December.

It was a January when he first visited the site. "It wasn't a pleasant place to be. It was cold and windswept. I'm thinking 'How do you bring warmth to a place like that in the middle of winter?'"

He envisioned seven towering flowers lit at night. "Hopefully they bring a sense of joy to people."

The shape of the flowers was inspired by origami and all are a bit different. They are not daffodils, as some have wondered, because the yellow flowers are a proprietary symbol of the Canadian Cancer Society.

"We used a computer program similar to what the auto industry uses to design auto parts," explains Mr. Sunderland.

"Every part was generated by computer. The pieces all fit together like a jigsaw puzzle."

The park contains three fundamental elements required by the foundation: The Positive Mental Attitude Walk will have 14 plaques with messages on fighting cancer, while the Road to Recovery will have seven plaques on cancer knowledge and education.

These paths encircle a central terrace of grass and paving, and are surrounded by gardens, clusters of conifers and ornamental grasses.

"It looks amazing," says Mr. Merovitz. "I love it."

The organization will also provide a bronze sculpture called Cancer ... there's hope by Mexican sculptor Victor Salmones. It depicts eight life-size figures passing through a maze representing cancer treatment and success. It will be placed at the main entrance at Riverside Drive and Industrial Avenue.

Another sculpture called Shine, by British Columbia artists Mike Vandermeer and Cheryl Hamilton, will stand at the corner of Alta Vista Drive and Industrial Avenue. It features five stainless steel tapered columns about seven metres tall connected by a steel ribbon.

A stone wall extending to Riverside Drive announces the name of the park, while an oak tree in the middle symbolizes strength and longevity. Two curved stone walls covered with a trellis of steel ivy will be etched with the names of donors.

The city provided a 1.4-hectare parcel of land, which was used as a path to the Hurdman transit station, and is near hospitals. Commuters can now walk along walkways lined with trees and lighting.

Area Coun. Peter Hume says the project is an interesting new model for creating public space and that the city would be eager to co-operate with other private donors.

"We're creating a tremendous amount of community value without having to put much money in."

The park will be finished in about a month and will officially open on Sept. 24.

Ms. Eagen imagines it being used for fundraisers and other gatherings.

"My dad just finished his prostate cancer treatment," she says. "When he reaches the one-year mark, that's the place we're going to have a family picnic and celebrate."

© Ottawa Citizen 2008

**CLOSE WINDOW**

---

Copyright © 2008 CanWest Interactive, a division of CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.. All rights reserved.  
CanWest Interactive, a division of CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.. All rights reserved.