



New Guelph Lake centre will bring nature to life

Foundation leading fund-raising effort for new facility

By Janet Baine
GRCA Communications Specialist

The Guelph Lake Nature Centre has welcomed nearly 400,000 visitors since it opened more than 30 years ago.

It is the busiest of the GRCA's nature centres with 20,000 visitors each year. It is in a converted house and portable classroom on the shore of Guelph Lake reservoir.

But now the house is showing its age and needs to be replaced with a bigger, more durable purpose-built facility.

Last year the Grand River

Conservation Foundation provided the money to hire the Ventin Group architectural firm to develop preliminary designs for a new centre. The project is expected to cost \$3 million. This year the Grand River Conservation Foundation decided to take this on as a fundraising project.

"The nature centre is going to become a very valuable part of the nature centre program and also valuable for the Guelph community. We are very excited about this project," said Crawford Reid, chair of the foundation.

The GRCF has always been a big supporter of outdoor education. It supported the construction of the Apps' Mill Nature Centre in Brantford 30 years ago thanks to a donation from S. C. Johnson and



Exterior rendering of the Guelph Nature Centre, design by +VG Architects

Son Ltd. More recently, it raised funds for the Toyota Living Roof on Laurel Creek Nature Centre in Waterloo. It also spearheaded the Living Classroom Campaign for Outdoor Education to keep students visiting the nature centres after the province cut back support.

If fundraising for Guelph Lake Nature Centre goes well, the GRCA hopes to have the new building completed by 2012 or 2013.

The new building will feature a range of teaching spaces, including a large multi-purpose room that can be used as an auditorium for larger events. It will also have many passive environmental features. These require less maintenance and are more energy-efficient than the existing facility.

Inspiring youth to enjoy nature

"At camp I enjoyed being away from the busy life in the city and I liked the slower pace of being in nature," says Garrison McCleary, who got hooked on nature at Guelph Lake at the tender age of seven. "In the nature centre programs, it's easier for kids to be comfortable and connect with nature, then to share their experiences with other kids and learn from the leaders."

At Guelph Lake Nature Centre, students of all ages experience a range of hands-on nature programs that help shape values that last a

lifetime. McCleary is now a teenager who worked at the Guelph Lake Nature Centre last summer.

"Without a strong connection with nature, we can't move forward as a conservation-minded people. Now I'm teaching children at Guelph Lake. I love that I have inspired and motivated children who, in 15 to 20 years, will be running the world and making it a better place," he said.

The nature centre is busy on school days, and also a hub of learning on weekends and during the summer.

"I went to a bunch of different

camps but this was my favourite and this is the one I stayed with every summer," says Lynsey Endicott, now a third year university student and outdoor lover who plans a career working with children.

A multi-year partnership with the Rotary Club of Guelph is providing additional learning opportunities for visiting students. By the year 2020, a 100-acre Rotary Forest will be nearby. Students and community members are helping to plant trees and create specialized outdoor learning areas.

Fundraising for the new nature centre is part of a larger conservation foundation campaign to raise \$12 million. This campaign will fund several environmental and land restoration project. It will also help maintain trails and nature areas, and refurbish four of the outdoor education centres.



Crawford Reid



Garrison McCleary: 'Without a strong connection with nature, we can't move forward as a conservation-minded people.'

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