

Eagles Nest development funding granted

By Tony Pearson

For thousands of years, the Bancroft cliffs have impressed visitors and settlers. Now the story of the first of these visitors will be told, as trail and conservation groups partner with the Algonquin nation, locally and provincially, to tell 'The Algonquin Story' along the trails at Bancroft's Eagles Nest Park.

As previously reported in this paper, the Bancroft trails committee has been seeking funding to expand information and increase direct experience with the Eagles Nest. Last week, the funding was confirmed. MP Mike Bossio visited a meeting of Bancroft council to present a cheque for \$67,300 to the Bancroft Area Stewardship Council, which will spearhead the project.

The money will allow the group to hire an archaeologist to work with Kijicho Manitou Algonquin Nation and the Algonquins of Ontario in developing the stories of the area's original inhabitants, as well as on the natural history of the escarpment. With this material, the group will put it out to the public in the form of storyboards along the current hiking trails, as well as on a new website, and in educational brochures.

Also foreseen are interpretive trail walks where hikers can learn about the plants and animals and the geology along the trails, as well as the history and culture of its first peoples.

The committee has set itself a tight timeline. It plans to hold a grand opening of the enhanced trail network this coming October. The Canada 150 grant is obviously a major component of the development effort. Other major contributions have come from the town (\$7,000) and the Hilly Hundred bike tour (\$3,000). Other financial contributions have come from renowned cyclist Dr. Greg Cooper, as well as the Bancroft Lions.

But a major element is the volunteer input. For example, Freymond Lumber has pledged wood for the signs and kiosks. The Bancroft Field Naturalists, the North Hastings Heritage Committee, and people like Don Taylor and Chris Fouts are giving their time and energy doing needed research. The Bancroft Photography Club is providing graphic support, and Paul D'Aoust is translating.

A particularly notable contribution is coming from Pat Marcotte, former professor of environmental construction at Sir Sanford Fleming College, who was the driving force behind the Heart of the Park building in Riverside Park. He and his firm Havencraft Homes are doing the design work and construction plans for the enterprise. In addition, he plans to give a course this spring on timber framing, which will result in kiosk construction. A volunteer geologist and a graphic designer have also come forward. So like many a Bancroft project, the volunteer community input will be considerable. Bossio underlined this when he spoke about winning the grant.

'I was struck just by the number of people and organizations that came together to make this happen, as is always the case in Bancroft. I'm always blown away by the community involvement and engagement that people have. The love and passion they show for their community is really just outstanding.'

The town is also conscious of the economic potential in the project. The project committee expects to attract about 12,000 visitors to the refurbished trails. Mayor Bernice Jenkins noted the tie-ins with the Gem and Mineral Museum, the Gemboree, and the proposed Earth Science Centre, to make Bancroft a hub for geologic as well as cultural tourism.

Speaking further to the project's cultural dimension, Kijicho Manitou Mandaouskarini Chief Katherine Cannon underlined the traditional native connection to the earth: 'The Eagles Nest Project is rooted in the belief that all people are intrinsically connected to the surrounding landscape - a value that has been central to the Algonquin way of life since time immemorial. It will highlight the respect for nature and the responsibility we all hold in protecting our natural environment.'

Stephen Hunter stressed to Bancroft council that the project represented for local Algonquin people a regaining of contact with their heritage.

'There were a lot of years where we were cautious about openly presenting ourselves as native. Projects like this give us growing confidence in proclaiming our roots and sharing our past. Our community considers the Eagles Nest to be the embodiment of all things Algonquin. She speaks to our will to survive and our need to be seen, from ancient shoreline to modern day reconciliation,' said Hunter.

Emphasizing the point, elder Ada Tinney then led a smudge - a native cleansing ceremony - for council and audience members, while Dora Trimbee passed out small bags of medicinal herbs.

Bancroft trails committee chair Peter Whitehead added that while this phase of the project would protect and enhance the safety and educational aspects of the existing trails at the Eagles Nest, in the longer term the hope was to expand the trail network.

?Right now, we will have our hands full completing this visionary project. And when we're finished, the town can take real pride in the community effort by so many people to make it happen.?