

Grand opening of Killaloe Pathways Park coming up Sept. 9



By **Mike Riley**

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Killaloe Pathways Park will be having its grand opening on Sept. 9 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., according to Chris Neff, community development coordinator with the Township of Killaloe, Hagarty, and Richards. The day will feature a free community barbecue, music, games, and tours of the newly created reading trail, fitness trail, greenhouse, community gardens and other park amenities. Neff comments on the grand opening to Bancroft This Week

Occupying the former Hoch Farm in Killaloe, Hagarty and Richards, this 18-acre property that is having its grand opening as Killaloe Pathways Park on Sept. 9 used to be a dairy farm and then the Hoch Museum for a time. Killaloe Pathways Park now joins Station Park and Sherry Boyle Park in the township to provide an abundance of recreational opportunities to residents and tourists alike.

Neff says that they have been planning Killaloe Pathways Park's grand opening since the spring of 2023, but some vandalism in the park caused them to delay it to this fall, as the summer was already packed with other events.

Killaloe Pathways Park started out with a snowshoe excursion Neff took with Cathy Lyons and her late husband Phil Godon back in the early winter of 2021. He says that Lyons and Godon approached him after the COVID-19 pandemic and its restrictions caused their long running annual event, the Killaloe Kids' Bookfest, to be cancelled, and they were looking for a way to keep children active in literacy.

?They had come up with an idea of a reading trail. This adventure in the woods was a scouting mission to determine the feasibility of a trail. This adventure would lead to many other discussions, eventually bringing in over a dozen partners, including the local elementary schools through our Junior Ranger Program,? he says.

The list of partners in the park so far is as follows; Healthy Communities Initiative (Government of Canada), Commenwell Insurance L.E.A.F. Program, Fed Dev Ontario Community Revitalization, Agri-food and Agriculture Canada Local Food Infrastructure Fund, Community Resource Centre, Friends of Killaloe Library, Killaloe Business Association, Killaloe Food Bank, Killaloe Heritage and Ecology Society, Killaloe and District Public Library, Killaloe Public School, St. Andrews' Public School,

Killaloe, Hagarty and Richards Township, Killaloe and Area Lions Club, Bonnechere Algonquin, Ontario Valley Community Arts, Redefine Arts Studio, Happy Trails, and Nature of Design.

Neff says there are three different trails at Killaloe Pathways Park; the reading trail, the fitness trail and the orchard trail. He says they wanted to have a multitude of trails to exhibit all of the wonderful amenities at the park.

?It of course would not be Pathways Park without a few trails. The idea came naturally as we developed off the main idea for the reading trail. We thought a reading trail might not be enough to attract funders so we added a few trails to make it more holistic and exciting to visitors and locals alike,? he says.

According to the park's website at www.killaloe-pathways-park.ca, the reading trail has 18 reading stations along the 600-metre path that features pages of an illustrated children's book as well as suggested activities to enhance literacy and learning and physical activity in nature. The books are changed regularly to encourage people to visit often and engage in new adventures in the park. The newest book featured on the trail is by Danielle Daniel Sometimes I Feel Like a Fox, winner of the Marilyn Baillie Picture Book Award and a Best 100 title at the New York Public Library.

A shorter 400 metre trail with up to 10 fitness stations called the fitness trail is also part of the park, as well as a picnic area and a myriad of signage including wayfinding, fitness, bulletin boards, signage encouraging visits to downtown Killaloe and signs for Algonquin content.

Bil Smith is the executive director of the Community Resource Centre Killaloe and says that the CRC has been a partner with the township in the development of the park since its inception and they're happy to see how far it's come.

?The children at our childcare centre use the reading trail and our youth programs have also utilized the space. We're harvesting our first produce from our greenhouse and garden and we're donating food back to the Killaloe food bank. We have plans to expand our gardens next year and to continue to look for ways to integrate time at the park into our programs. We look forward to seeing the park as it continues to develop and mature,? he says.

Neff says that people can expect a day full of celebration and excitement on Sept. 9 as they bring this amazing project to life.

?With over \$200,000 in grants and donations coming together to transform this old farmstead into a beautiful community greenspace, we are so excited to show people what we have been up to the last two years! The day will have music, free food, tours and exhibits to showcase how far we've come and where we hope to go!? he says.

The music will be provided by a local DJ, DJ Kitty Lonestar, and the tours will be given by the lead organizers of the trails, greenhouse, barn and other greenspaces. The barbecue will be put on by local volunteer groups who will be serving hamburgers, hot dogs and drinks, all free for attendees.

Neff told Bancroft This Week that he wanted to thank all the community partners for their dedication and enthusiasm toward the project.

?It's truly amazing what can be accomplished when we work together for a common goal and we feel like this project has truly resonated with the community. I would like to thank our grant funders for their kind donations and for sharing in our vision,? he says. ?I would also like to thank Killaloe Hagarty and Richards councils both past and present for supporting this dream and helping to make it become a reality!?