

Use what you have

By Chris Drost

I believe it was Theodore Roosevelt who first said, "use what you have," although I can only imagine it was a common thought long before that. It is the underlying premise behind what those in the business of communities would call "asset-based community development." Simply said, it means building on the resources you already have in the community, people with skills and knowledge, infrastructure, the natural environment, the organizations and institutions that already exist, and the connections that are already in place between them. Two gentlemen, John Kretzmann and John McKnight, called it "Building Communities from the Inside-Out," and this is the name they gave to their book aimed at mobilizing communities to use their assets. I got thinking about this approach again last night after attending the 100+ Women Who Care event in Bancroft. One of the speakers shared how Bancroft Community Transit had developed partnerships with Care North Hastings and the North Hastings Community Cupboard to offer a food delivery program for those who could not get out to shop. This partnership of organizations is one of our assets. One of the other speakers at the 100+ Women Who Care event shared the story of the North Hastings Community Fish Hatchery, another example where one couple provided an asset they had, land, and others shared their expertise to build a grassroots fish hatchery facility in our community. Just this morning I came across a list of public input from an open house from 2013 while I was a member of Bancroft's now defunct Sustainable Bancroft committee. During this open house the community highlighted actions or priorities for making Bancroft more sustainable. I was happy to see that in subsequent years, a few of them have been addressed. The Town of Bancroft did finally do an economic development strategic plan, BCT has tackled public transportation, improved IT is resulting in more people being able to work from home and a new community hub and library is in the works for 2022. Some of the priorities on the list have yet to happen, expanding post secondary programs to include professional designations, transforming Bancroft into a "Trades and Apprentice Hub," capitalizing on wild crafting or non-traditional forest industry product development, developing a secondary wood industry in furniture making, supporting the growth of farmers markets and greenhouses and building on our extreme sports potential in such things as ice climbing and zip lines. If you look at this list of unrealized opportunities, we already have assets on which to accomplish them. We have people with expertise. We have underutilized buildings where training could take place, a long history of logging and lumber mills that could be the beginnings of a secondary forest industry, and we have a landscape that is a natural for extreme sports. Sometimes things are best achieved when there is a vision for it, something to work toward. Some communities have vision and are able to see the promise in a piece of property that is sitting idle but located in an ideal location. I am thinking of the Municipality of Highlands East and their vision for Herlihey Park. This seven-acre property was donated to the municipality a number of years ago. After a community consultation period, a master plan for the future of this property was developed, and accepted by council. This physical asset, located on the shores of Dark Lake in downtown Wilberforce is poised to have a network of walking trails, a beautiful beach, a picnic pavilion, a playground, volleyball court, and a large open area for community events. This is what can happen when you "use what you have" to its full potential.