



At the Forks

The Magazine of the Friends of the Don East

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Issue 4

Snow Dump Pollution to Continue

by Jurgen Braunohler

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A City study is recommending that dumping of pollution-laden snow continue in the Don Valley for at least several more years.

The winter of 1999 featured lots of snow, including a 113 cm dump in January that paralyzed the city. To deal with the crisis, the authorities activated 18 disposal sites all over Toronto for the snow removed from the city's streets. Every site was filled to capacity, and it took three weeks to clear all the roads.

Near the end of June 1999, I visited

one of these snow dumpsites in the Don Valley near Pottery Road. Despite the summer's heat, there was still a huge snowpile. The melting process had left a dark layer of car oil, dirt and debris from the streets on top as the snowpile shrank. To convince myself I was looking at snow, I scraped away the filth with a stick until I saw ice.

That ice was melting in earnest, and ugly streams of slightly diluted pollution flowed straight into the river a few feet away. Where the snow had

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A Kennedy Comes to Town

by Brendan Flanagan



Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

On November 1st, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. addressed the Charles Sauriol Memorial Dinner in Toronto. The annual dinner raised funds for the Oak Ridges Moraine and the event was attended by 1,200 tree huggers and others, including me. Mr. Kennedy signed a copy of his book for me and shook my hand. I haven't washed it since.

He is a modest man. He told a story about how he is often stopped at social events and told: "You're Bobby's kid" or "You're Jack's nephew" or more recently "You're Kathleen's brother" (she's Lieutenant Governor of Maryland). He said he often visits Canada and two weeks before had visited a native children's

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"I began to see the environment not as a privilege that was part of my affluent background, but a right for everyone, that was being subverted by greedy, powerful and corrupt interests within our society" - RFK Jr.

30,000 Truckloads a Year Dumped in Valley

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completely melted, a moonscape of hardened mud and trash lay upon the greenery.

FODE published a photo of this mess on the front page of the Fall 1999 issue of *At the Forks*. We



The snow dump at Pottery Road beside the Don River in June 1999

noted that efforts to clean up the Don had already been going on for 10 years, and pointed out that if citizens had left this mess they would be charged with illegal dumping. We asked: "Why is this continuing to happen?"

Road salt is one of the biggest pollutants in the snow removed from city streets. It not only corrodes cars and building structures, but harms roadside vegetation and taints the water, harming aquatic life in the rivers and lake, and attracting wild animals to roadsides where they often get run over by vehicles.

Environment Canada released a report last year noting that large amounts of road salt are entering the environment, putting at risk plants, fish, animals and various aquatic ecosystems. As a consequence the federal government is in the process of designating road salt a toxic substance.

Meanwhile, a city-ordered "Snow Disposal Feasibility Study" has been underway since last July. A central issue was the dumping in Toronto's river valleys including 16,000 truckloads a year at the Pottery Road site and 14,000 truckloads on parkland at Bloor and Bayview.

The consultants have now issued their report. It doesn't offer much for the Don.

It concludes that "the impacts of snow disposal sites are not well understood in quantitative terms" and that "the justification for relocating or replacing the snow disposal sites located near rivers is not clearly established". More to the point the study concluded that "enhancements" to the valley sites can be done for \$1 million, while replacing them with new snow melters will cost \$7.7 million.

The enhancements, however, won't appear soon. The study recommends that the city design "major mitigation measures at the existing snow disposal sites" such as grading, low berms, sediment check dams and settlement ponds and that it reconsider "the issue of either enhancing or replacing the snow disposal sites located near rivers in several years time" when "the results of the recommended environmental monitoring are available" and the above-noted "site-specific designs and cost estimates" have been prepared.

FODE believes that the natural areas of the valley should not be dump sites for snow or other contaminated materials. This practice should be ended as quickly as possible. In the interim, the size of the snow dumping areas should be reduced and they must be properly buffered from the valley's waterways.

At the Forks

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Views expressed are those of the writers and do not necessarily represent the views of the editor or of the Board of Directors of Friends of the Don East.

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Kennedy Organization Sues Polluters

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school in Saskatchewan where one kid had asked: "You're Arnold's brother, right?"

He spoke eloquently about the birth and growth of the Riverkeeper movement of which he was a founding member and inspiration.

Riverkeepers are community-funded boat patrols which record violations of environmental protection laws and pass them to legal representatives who prosecute the public and private polluters – successfully.

The first Riverkeeper on the Hudson River in New York State has rescued this river from death as a habitat for fish. Kennedy noted that since the rehabilitation of the river through the efforts of the Riverkeeper, the Hudson is now the only major river flowing

into the Atlantic from

North America (including the St. Lawrence) or Europe which has all spawning stocks of its historical fish species.

Unfortunately, industrial pollution over many years has led to the accumulation of poisons in many Hudson River fish species which make them unfit for human consumption.

The Hudson

Riverkeeper, and more than 25 other waterkeeper programs since, rely on support from those who derive a living from commercial and recreational harvesting of fish and wildlife and related industries.

Riverkeepers are also supported by those who derive cultural, recreational, aesthetic and spiritual enrichment from our rivers, bays and lakes. Supporters may not share a common job, culture, history, language, race or religion but they share a strong tradition that the unique environmental features of their communities, such as rivers, are a

source of belonging and pride in their shared home.

Last year, a Lake Ontario Keeper boat and program were launched. In October it brought public attention to the pollution of the Humber River from an old landfill under King's Mills Park.

A related effort is also underway in Hamilton where citizens successfully charged the City with allowing PCBs and other toxic chemicals to flow into a local creek. The City was fined \$480,000 and required to implement a \$11 million remediation effort.

The citizen who laid the charges collected \$150,000 of the fine money under a 'bounty' clause in the federal *Fisheries Act* that provides the informant with 50% of the fines. The money is now being used to monitor sewer outfalls and other potential sources of public and private pollution.

**You can contact
the Lake Ontario
Keeper at (416)
964-9223 ext. 242
or by email
Keeper@e-p-r-f.org**



Highlighted quotes are excerpted from ***The Riverkeepers***, by John Cronin and Robert F. Kennedy Jr., published in 1997



"It is the poor and working people who are most burdened by environmental injury. They host the toxic dumps and incinerators and sewer plants, work in the factory fumes, pay for bottled water they can't afford, and suffer in stifling city apartments when public beaches are closed. Meanwhile the wealthy can cut and run - they can enrich themselves by polluting our rivers or felling our ancient timber, and then fly off to some private paradise behind a guarded driveway. The rest of humanity is left with contaminated and denuded landscapes".
- RFK Jr.

Making Your Own Soil: Community Compost

by Dagmar Baur

The Bain Co-op is an almost century-old housing complex right in the center of Riverdale between Withrow and Riverdale Parks.

About 500 people live in beautiful three-storied, red-brick buildings with balconies, porches and Tudor detailing that surround ten courtyards named after trees: the South and North Maples, Oaks and Lindens and the Pines, Cedars and Elms.

Some courtyards are large with 60 households, some are small with as few as six. Everyone shares the enjoyment and care of their courtyards: each green-space is unique and reflects individual input and community decision-making.

Several years ago Bain was proud to welcome 1,000 visitors for the "Secret Gardens of Riverdale" tour – an annual fund-raiser for the Woodgreen Community Centre. They came to admire our lush award-winning, permaculture and native gardens as well as our community composters. We held composting demonstrations on the day.

It took twenty-five years and the loving labour of many people to get to that tour. We started out with so little.



A community work-bee to move one of the three-bin composters at the Bain Street Co-op

In the seventies all the buildings were surrounded by asphalt. The courtyards were dustbowls; some had small beds of petunias in the centre and children were totally 'verboden.' To get soil we trudged to the convenience store on Logan and bought 10 lbs of dark stuff of uncertain provenance.

Bain started its composting initiatives in the seventies with a composting trench between the Elms and Pines that was run by good neighbours Warren Rice and Norman McKinney, our resident Druid. But what were the ingredients that brought the community-wide project together?

In retrospect it happened because of inspired members and with help of superb City and Metro programmes. Specifically: 1) the Recycling Council of Ontario's Master Composting Education Programme in which one of our dedicated people, Michelle Jennings, participated; 2) the City gave away free composters along with much good information; 3) then Rehab Co-ordinator, Linda Dickson, had a keen interest in environmental projects and seized the opportunity (or composters) for the community at the urging of Michelle and Christine Hoeldke.

Christine organized the initial member education and courtyard-by-courtyard acceptance of the project; and two other masters extraordinaire, Jayne Walker of Crow Compost and Mike Nevin, mulch-master, kept the project going through the years.

When our 3-bin composters arrived there was much discussion and some heated opposition. People were afraid of the smell and the possibility of attracting rats and other interested wildlife.

Consensus was finally reached and the composters were located in places that were equi-distant



The South Maples area of the Bain Street Co-op showing a composter (light area in lower centre of photo) camouflaged between the fence and the plant screen (which also includes a potting bench and tool storage area).

Where do I get clean soil? From your own kitchen waste and garden leaves. If you know what goes in, then you know what comes out.

Photos by Jayne Walker



y Composting at the Bain Co-op

Baur



-op showing a composter (light area
en the fence and the plant screen
h and tool storage area).

from our homes and close to the street. Some of the composters are now located closer to buildings, near windows and doors, and cause no concern. A well-maintained composter has no offensive smell.

Initially the most commonly heard complaint was that people didn't know what to use for scrap collection. Jayne Walker distributed free, well-designed buckets with lids to get the process started. We even gave buckets away as door prizes at community events to draw attention to our initiative.

Another important ingredient to success was education. We provided helpful information via our weekly Community Newsletter and with countless on-site demonstrations led by in-house gurus, Mike Nevin and Jayne Walker.

They acted as compost angels when things got too smelly (and it did occasionally get 'fragrant' when we ran out of leaves). You need all the

leaves you can store as cover for your contributions, i.e. 50% scraps and 50% leaves, straw, wood-chips or paper. A solid barrier of leaves prevents clouds of fruit flies and hides odours.

When we ran out of leaves, our homemade wood-chips filled the gap. (In the late eighties Jayne Walker had organized a committee to write a grant to Friends of the Environment for a Chipper-Shredder.)

The 3-bin composter system works like this: Bin #1 gets the fresh food scraps covered with leaves; Bin #2 is for resting and aging the compost when the first bin is full; the well-aged product from #2 is then screened into bin #3 and voila, finished compost. We did have to work out leaf storage issues and build an additional fourth bin to hold the leaves.

There are many benefits to acting as a community, sharing tools, and pooling resources to make good use of yard-waste and kitchen scraps. Our gardens took off exponentially after the composters were installed.

No one argues against composters now: they're a fact of our lives and we have many kinds: three-bins, one bin, wooden, plastic, worm-bins and rotating bins. Because of them we have healthy shade gardens, prairie and meadow gardens, fruit trees and shrubs, native gardens, vegetable patches to name but a few of the green pleasures that greet the eye in the courtyards and around the buildings. Children play happily everywhere and we involve them in many gardening activities. We've also recycled concrete from old sidewalks to enclose many of the beds.

Our system is fairly informal, yet we always seem to find someone to take responsibility for working the bins without too much difficulty. We have approximately 60% participation by the membership (it fluctuates) and 40% of our waste is diverted to compost and

Bringing Composting to your Community

For general information, check out the Recycling Council on the Internet at: www.rco.on.ca or the city at: <http://www.city.toronto.on.ca/compost/outlets.htm> or call the Composting Hotline at 416-392-4689

For specific composting information, training, vermiculture, contact Robin Tench, Composting Information Officer at 416-392-9804; e-mail: rtench@city.toronto.on.ca; or Mary Lovett, Co-ordinator, Toronto Environmental Volunteer Programme Tel: 416-392-4697; e-mail: lovett@metrodesk.metrotor.on.ca

To order a composter from the City call 416-392-9573. The small black one-bin composter costs \$15.00, with a \$5.00 delivery charge. Delivery takes 4-6 days. You can also get them for \$15.00 at neighbourhood Environment days. A 4-bin composter now costs \$305.00. (Market Cost is \$800.00)

Mike Nevin, Master Composter, 416-463-9163, is available to consult for on-site startup help or maintenance techniques. You can apply on-line for a grant from TD-Canada Trust Friends of the Environment at <http://www.fef.ca/>

other recycling initiatives.

We have a video about composting at Bain that has been shown worldwide and has brought inquiries and visitors from around the world. In 1996 the Recycling Council of Ontario gave the Bain Co-op "the Chair's Award" in recognition of the most significant overall achievement in the areas of waste reduction, reuse and recycling.

The story of Bain demonstrates that composting is feasible for large, urban communities and it serves as a how-to demonstration site. As such it may be useful inspiration to the many people in apartment buildings, co-ops, condo housing, who would like to compost together, but don't quite know how to organize in their particular place.

Residents of city-owned buildings are entitled to start a composting program and community garden on city-owned lands. To promote food security, Toronto City Council encourages the recycling of organic materials that nurture soil fertility and



Arrival at the Bain Co-op of the chipper-shredder equipment funded by the TD-Canada Trust Friends of the Environment Foundation.

community gardens that increase food self-reliance, improve fitness, contribute to a cleaner environment, and enhance community development.

Dagmar Baur is the Coordinator for Alex Wilson Community Garden and York Community Services Organic Garden. Contact her at dbgardens@100Bain.com.

Ecological Gardeners Honoured



Some of the 2001 award winners in the Another Yard for the Don Award ecological gardening program pose with honorary judge MPP Michael Prue and some of their prizes.

The awards program rewards residents who reduce pesticide use, plant native species and take other steps to make their yards and gardens environmentally friendly. More information about the program is available on the FODE website or by calling Erica Wilson at (416) 410-7153.



Dealing with Electricity Deregulation



Electricity is being deregulated in Ontario and you will have to choose who to buy your energy from. The salespeople have likely already been knocking on your door.

FODE has invited Jack Gibbons of the Ontario Clean Air Alliance to provide a clear explanation from an environmental perspective on

Thursday, February 21, at 7:30 pm in the 2nd floor seminar room at Carrot Common, 348 Danforth (just east of Chester subway). Info at 416-410-7153. Here's an opportunity to get a clear explanation of what your choices are, and what you can do to protect yourself financially, while also helping to improve the environment.

Naturalize Your Garden

Come to an evening of tips and pointers on avoiding pesticide and chemical use on your property. **Wednesday, March 27 at 7:30 pm at the Beaches Recreation Centre, 6 Williamson Road.** The guest speaker is Frank Kershaw, well-known naturalist and horticulturist. Sponsored by FODE and the Toronto Wildflower Society.

LEAF Supplies Trees

LEAF (*Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests*) is a non-profit group dedicated to improving Toronto's urban forest.



LEAF offers native tree plantings in backyards to Toronto homeowners at a subsidized price. By planting native trees and shrubs, we improve our air and water quality, reduce our household energy consumption, and create much needed urban wildlife habitat.

Cost to homeowners ranges from \$35 to \$75 per tree, and includes on-site advice and planting service. Trees are 4-6 feet when planted. Native shrubs are also available for delivery at a price of \$18. Contact LEAF at 416-413-9244, or visit www.leafontario.org for more information.

Spring Cleanup

Friends of the Don East and other groups are conducting litter cleanups in Don Valley parks this spring. Our annual effort at **Todmorden Mills Museum** will take place on **Saturday, April 6 from 10 am until noon.** The museum property is located on Pottery Road between Broadview and Bayview avenues. We will meet at the museum (lots of free parking) and enjoy a hotdog lunch afterwards. Info 416-410-7153.



Visit the website of Friends of the Don East at www.web.ca/

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at (416)**

410-7153

or email us at

fode@web.ca

Enclosed is my annual membership fee:
(Family \$20, Single: \$15, Low Income \$5)

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Donation: \$ _____

Total: \$ _____

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Public Moving Past Politicians

by Don McLean

While governments continue to pussyfoot around the issue, more and more Canadians have concluded that major changes must occur to reverse air pollution and other degradation of the environment. A recent Toronto poll found 75% believe existing air pollution is affecting their health.

Politicians are falling behind. Many continue to assume Canadians will never alter their way of life no matter how many heat alerts and smog days; no matter how many asthma attacks and premature deaths. The evidence is accumulating that they are wrong.

A real shift in public priorities was visible in last fall's debate over the scheme to widen the Don Valley Parkway by four lanes.

A private consortium, backed by Councillor Paul Sutherland and some of his colleagues, adopted the surest possible way to get support for their widening proposal. Rather than ask Council to vote for or against the scheme, they merely requested a "study", paid for entirely by the private consortium.

In addition, they promised to pay all the construction costs of the widening and even give money to the City -- collected by tolling the proposed four new lanes. They also painted their proposal in the "greenest" colours possible, claiming it would reduce air pollution, water pollution and noise pollution.

It didn't work. The standard argument that more road space will "reduce congestion" failed to sway an increasingly knowledgeable public.

One councillor who still believed this myth took the wise step of polling his constituents. They convinced him to change his vote. In addition, a public meeting in his ward voted 115 to 1 to oppose the widening proposal.

Most Torontonians now understand that road widening merely attracts more vehicles that produce more pollution and create more congestion. This is a big step. The driver stuck in traffic almost automatically wishes for a wider road. Road builders have relied on this knee-jerk response for decades.

But you can only fool people for so long. Bigger roads not only drive up taxes and reduce space for people; they have also completely failed to cure congestion. In Toronto this has become so obvious that one has to wonder what planet the remaining road-building advocates come from.

The public, including many of those still forced to drive, realizes there is a better way to overcome traffic jams. Instead of wider roads, the simple answer is fewer cars. More people switching to the TTC not only reduces congestion, but actually means that our existing roads can carry far more people faster and with far less pollution.

The small majority of City Councillors who rejected the DVP widening scheme appear to have understood this profound shift in public understanding.

The politicians who still count on the gullible vote will become an increasingly endangered species.

Rejection of DVP widening scheme illustrates increasing public demand for real environmental progress

Councillors who voted against widening the DVP:

Brian Ashton, Sandra Bussin, Raymond Cho, Olivia Chow, John Fillion, Suzan Hall, Anne Johnston, Irene Jones, Pam McConnel, Joe Mihevc, David Miller, Denzil Minnan-Wong, Howard Moscoe, Case Ootes, Joe Pantalone, Jane Pitfield, Kyle Rae, David Shiner, Mario Silva, Michael Walker

Councillors who voted to study widening the DVP:

Bas Balkissoon, Lorenzo Berardinetti, Frank Di Giorgio, Betty Disero, Brad Duguid, Mike Felman, Joanne Flint, Doug Holyday, Norm Kelly, Chris Korwyn-Kuczynski, Mayor Mel Lastman, Peter Li Preti, Gloria Lindsay Luby, Ron Moeser, Francis Nunziata, Paul Sutherland.

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