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Local art links community

Jennifer McDougall
for the Federation of
Calgary Communities

Connecting Varsity: People, Places, and Pathways is an inspiring program designed to encourage the 12,000 residents of the northwest community Varsity to get out and "enjoy the neighbourhood and enjoy their neighbours," says committee member Donna Fallon. Phase one of the program is the creation of five beautiful Gathering Places in area parks and a brochure mapping seven walking/cycling routes to link them all together.

Each Gathering Place was designed with a local activity theme in mind relating to its location — tobogganing, walking/dog walking, soccer, cycling, and community/people.

The landscaping and more practical aspects of each space, such as benches and garbage receptacles, will soon be artistically complimented by sculptures decorated by those living in the area.

Two residents have volunteered their time and expertise to build and install the triangular structures shaped to represent unity and incorporate the V in the community's name. Mounted onto these five structures are 2,200 tiles decorated by residents including school children from Kindergarten to Grade 8 under the guidance of local artist Tracy Franks.

"As a resident of the community myself, I can appreciate the esthetic this project will lend to the beauty of the surrounding community, while creating a sense of place and pride for local residents," says Franks.

"Every community strives to create a welcoming environment and this will be a wonderful legacy to leave behind."



Gathering Places in the community of Varsity provide a place for recreational activities and will soon incorporate artistic sculpturers into the landscape.

Photo courtesy FCC

Franks was contracted by the community to lead the artistic aspect of the project with the help of a grant from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. She has also offered many more hours as a volunteer.

Franks will host a workshop at the community centre this spring for seniors and other community residents who are interested in decorating the tiles. She will also spend time visiting five community schools in order to get children involved in the tile project.

Artistic expression can be seen downtown, but this may be the first public art to appear in a community, says Fallon. "Our city rep encouraged us to do an art project ... it is a creative way for the citizens to actively contribute."

Committee Chairperson Jan Geggie says the program has been seven years

in the making. The committee size has varied from five to 12 members over the years as the focus has evolved from fundraising to coordination activities.

Geggie says having a Community Recreation Coordinator from the North Area, Community and Neighbourhood Services devoting time as a member has been extremely valuable.

"They know who we need to speak to and how to get the answers we need."

"I am really passionate about my community and want to make it more beautiful. The Gathering Places have lent a sense of community. They are all located in our parks

and are comfortable and peaceful places to sit."

Brochures with pathway maps were delivered to every Varsity home along with a monthly newsletter last fall. Additional copies are available at the community centre. Route distances vary from 2.2km to 4.2 km.

Phase two of the project involves the creation of five entryways distinctively marking the boundaries of Varsity.

For further information about the program, please contact Jan Geggie at 403 286-9823.



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