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Sunflowers grow community spirit in Mount Pleasant

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FOR THE FEDERATION OF
CALGARY COMMUNITIES

It's sometimes the simplest of things that bring people together. In the north west community of Mount Pleasant, beautiful sunflowers are brightening up the neighbourhood and cultivating a sense of community spirit.

"Sunflowers are just so damn happy looking," says Mount Pleasant community's special events coordinator, Jil Wolodarsky. "They have faces. They're so personable, like people."

Three years ago, Wolodarsky started a sunflower growing contest as a celebration of summer and a way of growing community. Donated seeds and peat pots full of soil were given away at an Easter event in the community, with instructions on how to grow a healthy sunflower.

"The idea didn't come from anywhere in particular but my head," she says. "I thought it would be a nice, colourful thing to do for summer."

The first year, residents were invited to

measure their tallest sunflowers and call in the exact height to the community centre. There wasn't a lot of action the first year. There was a little more involvement the second year. This year, seeds and peat pots were given out at the community's Mother's Day Brunch and happily, there are more families vying for the privilege of having Mount Pleasant's tallest sunflower in their garden.

"This year, they're personally going around and measuring the sunflowers," says Wolodarsky, who has turned the event over to the Green Initiatives team, who will announce the winner after Sept. 18.

Sunflowers, which are native to North America, can grow as tall as 10 feet, with the heads of some varieties as large as 11 inches in diameter. The faces of most sunflowers are turned towards the east at sunrise. Over the course of the day, they follow the sun from east to west, while at night they return to an eastward orientation making them a fascinating study for children. The seeds, peat pots and prizes for the contest have been provided by a local

gardening store, Plantation Garden Centre.

Green Initiatives committee member Julia Murphy believes the contest is a fun way to get kids involved and helps them develop an appreciation for the neighbourhood.

"I can't believe the momentum the project has. People are really excited about it," says Murphy, who is working with fellow board member Holly Drake on Green Initiatives in Mount Pleasant.

"It creates a sense of doing things together, which creates involvement which in turn brings strength to the community. My take on it is that it gives kids a sense of community, and if they feel that, they will feel they have a voice. Once they have a voice, they can make some decisions as to how their community will be."

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Sunflowers bring the neighbourhood together.

Photo courtesy Mount Pleasant Community Association

Community Profile: Mount Royal

During the early 1900s, Mount Royal was promoted by the C.P.R. as an exclusive neighbourhood for Calgary's affluent citizens.

The neighbourhood was originally known as American Hill, because of the large number of Americans who settled there. Later the area was formally named Mount Royal, after the Montreal community which was home to the then president of the C.P.R, William E. Van Horne.

Mount Royal developed rapidly between 1904 and 1914. Restrictive covenants were placed on the titles of properties which restricted development to single family dwellings and set minimum housing construction costs. The exclusive character of the community has been maintained over the years.

The Lower Mount Royal area was annexed to the City in 1907, and was part of the original C.P.R. subdivision of Mount Royal in 1909. Most of the houses in the area were constructed during Calgary's 1910-1912 building boom, and gained a reputation as an exclusive residential district.

It was the home of many of Calgary's elite, including Colonel

James Macleod, and the A.E. Cross family. Unlike the Mount Royal district, however, Lower Mount Royal was subdivided into fifty foot lots; and wood and stucco were the predominant building materials as compared to the brick and sandstone in Mount Royal. Many of the lots were further subdivided into twenty-five foot lots and developed with houses of wood frame construction, similar to those of the Beltline district.

The community has experienced dramatic changes in the last twenty years. Much of its residential, and an increasing proportion of its commercial areas have been redeveloped to accommodate Calgary's rapid growth.

The Area Redevelopment Plan encourages the continuation of this trend in a manner which reflects community and city-wide objectives, and fosters medium density residential and commercial development.

Schools

- Earl Grey Elementary School
- Mount Royal Junior High

Demographics-Lower Mount Royal

Located in Ward 8, Lower Mount

Royal has a population of 3,279 (2008 Civic Census) with approximately 25.8% comprising the immigrant population (Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada). A total of 155 families accounted for 220 children still living at home with 18.2% of these being 6-14 years old.

According to Stats Canada, 2001 Census of Canada the median household income for Lower Mount Royal in 2005 was \$45,713.

In addition, 62.3% of the population over 20 completed college, attended university or graduated university with a degree - an additional 5.6% graduated from Trade Schools (Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada).

There are a total of 2,085 occupied private dwellings in Lower Mount Royal with 1.2% being single detached dwellings (Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada).

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"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has"

- Margaret Mead