

The site of the Dundas Roncesvalles Peace Garden (DRPG) was previously a concrete promontory jutting into a wide intersection of Dundas Street and Roncesvalles Avenue, two major streets in Toronto. Originally a military road, Dundas Street links the east and west ends of the city to the downtown core. Roncesvalles Avenue is the main business street of Roncesvalles Village also known as Roncy. The Dundas Roncesvalles intersection is the gateway to this eclectic and creative neighbourhood. The space was mostly vacant, with some street refuse bins. Laid across a wide right of way at a sharp angle turn on one of Toronto's oldest roads, its value was unexplored, unappreciated. There were no trees or planting beds at this wide intersection. The site was broadly disliked by pedestrians who often dashed, unsafely across the road to get away from blazing heat in the summer or windswept barrens in winter. Although the Roncesvalles Village Business Improvement Area (RVBIA) had identified improvement of the site within a recent strategic plan, its limited resources as a Business Improvement Area needed a boost from pro bono organizers and additional capital funding. The City of Toronto through the collaborative efforts of its Transportation Services Division, Public Realm Section; Economic Development & Culture Division, BIA Office; and City Planning, Heritage Preservation Section stepped up to provide additional support and funding. City programs provides capital funding for community improvements where a local organization has agreed to assume responsibility for ongoing maintenance. PLANT Architect Inc. was commissioned to transform this remnant parcel of land into a landmark community gathering and commemorative space to celebrate the Indigenous history of the land and the more than 200 years of friendship and peace between Canada and the United States.

Grass roots initiation and collaborations spear-headed by the Friends of DRPG, ignited community interest to improve the site, beginning in 2009. With the advent of approaching celebrations for commemoration of the Bicentennial of the War of 1812, organization began in earnest in 2011. The Roncesvalles Village Business Improvement Area (RVBIA) was alert to the value of engaged volunteers in cultural festivals because of a long-standing practice of supporting community interests. It cast its support in early, which gave great momentum to the project. The grass roots orientation made for a sense of mission that influenced the design process, created artistic features, and fostered cultural exchanges that continue today, with larger social and community impacts than the small footprint and small capital budget would have predicted. Volunteers continue today, by gardening, and by organizing cultural activities worthy of a Peace Garden. The urban area around the RVBIA and the Friends of DRPG is highly populated with artistic and progressive people, with a proactive sense of civic public interests. The development of the DRPG is a strong, positive reflection of the local residents and businesses. A broad spectrum of community associations and local residents, (Friends of DRPG) gave vitality to diverse, pro bono interests that added much value at little or no cost:

- A community maquette produced a set of design principles that were incorporated into a well written Request for Proposals.
- A local facilitator designed a community youth arts project that gave rise to the first joint arts project between a Toronto neighbourhood group and members of the Indigenous First Nation who hold treaty rights within Toronto, the "Peace Path" of paver designs which are embedded in the walkways of the Peace Garden. A community artist from the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation, (MNCFN) and a non-Indigenous artist from the Roncesvalles area, worked with young people in each community to create designs reflective of heritage stories delivered by a historian from each location.
- Community groups gave financial and in-kind supports.

- During the design phase, the diverse interest groups made engaged contributions to horticulture, environmental sustainability, architectural features, heritage commemoration, facilities, and social media communications.
- The community historian for the Friends of DRPG, in collaboration with the City's Heritage Preservation Services Section generated original research about the War of 1812 in local history, which is commemorated on site with a plaque.
- A program for local school children to plant and learn about "Tulips for Peace" established as an annual event.
- The community historian worked with a talented Indigenous artist to help her win a street art contest which enabled her to paint the City's first Indigenous StreetARToronto utility box, at the entrance to the Peace Garden.
- Peace Garden volunteers collaborate with volunteers of the RVBIA, "Roncy Works" to continually beautify street gardens. And, they actually sweep the sidewalks, regularly.

PLANT Architect Inc. designed and executed the work successfully integrating all components of project including the existing infrastructure, selection of low maintenance plants and materials and bringing the many stories of the area and its people to life. The deepest and most abiding joy of the project grew from creating friendships between local residents and Indigenous people, especially, the MNCFN. Partnered with them, the RVBIA produced the first shared project with a Toronto BIA, a historical plaque posted on site. Chief, Councillors, an Elder, musicians and members of the MNCFN added much to the Grand Opening of the Peace Garden. Their artistic performances at the DRPG's Grand Opening, manifested as the first fully Indigenous musical stage at a Toronto street festival. The DRPG became designated as a place of significant interest in their initiative, the "Moccasin Trail". Local Friends have travelled to their Reserve for pow-wow's, and cultural presentations. These relationships have continued through the planting of Indigenous plants such as the Three Sisters, and sacred tobacco. The Friends continue to present public seminars or workshops about cultural sharing and reconciliation efforts.

The RVBIA embraced a collaboration of community residents and associations to create a foundation of interests that ensured the spectrum was reflected in the design, features and embedded relationships that give the DRPG its unique identity today. Today the RVBIA manages the Peace Garden in collaboration with Friends of the Peace Garden. The RVBIA appreciates the vibrant attraction yet quiet welcoming that the Peace Garden affords pedestrians walking through the gateway to Roncesvalles. The circular space provides an intimate setting where friends can chat. The etchings and symbols within that space created by the students and artists involved give inspiration. The dedication of the Friends of the DRPG and their volunteer gardeners reflects the culture in this community, which is driven by the legacy we wish to leave future generations based on acquired wisdom and future sustainability.

The DRPG now marks the entranceway to the district covered by the RVBIA, inviting shoppers and the curious alike. Artistic features of the DRPG attract cultural visitors who give prominence and value to the area. Passersby pause and refresh themselves, thus encouraging walking in the area, and making the intersection safer. The Dundas Roncesvalles Peace Garden has become a meeting place for community walks and gatherings. The heritage plaque makes an important contribution to historical narratives of Toronto. The garden beds give opportunity to demonstrate native plantings and sharing of Indigenous horticulture. The Peace Tulips give rise to a teaching program with local school children. Through these initiatives, the RVBIA has distinguished itself as a proactive urban leader in renewing relations with Canada's Indigenous people.