

Friends of the Spit

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from the Toronto Field Naturalist :

JACQUELINE COURVAL

"The Toronto environmental community was shocked and saddened in late July by the death of Jacqueline Courval, co-chair of Friends of the Spit. She was noted for her boundless energy and her dedication in preserving the Leslie St. Spit as an urban wilderness despite pressures to "improve" it. "

NEWSLETTER

AUTUMN 2006

Sadness, Success, and Lake Ontario Park

Sadness



Jacqueline Courval and Craig Mather, CAO, TRCA, at tree planting in 1998 to honour Friends of the Spit with a TRCA "Honour Roll" Award.

In Memoriam: Jacqueline Courval.

It is with great sadness that we at Friends of the Spit inform our membership-at-large of the passing in July of Jacqueline Courval. As you know, Jacqueline was Co-Chair of Friends of the Spit since the late 1980's. In her role as Co-Chair she was an expressive, energetic spokesperson for the Spit; a person who loved the Spit as it is, as a Public Urban Wilderness, and was able to clearly articulate that love to the various government agencies and jurisdictional staff Friends dealt with. We extend our condolences and sympathies to her partner John Chamberlin and to her relatives and friends.

From John Carley, Co-Chair, Friends of the Spit

I first met Jacqueline twenty years ago and, in the time since, got to know her very well. We prepared countless speeches and deputations together, and, as always, she was direct, perceptive, and full of energy. When we deputized at the City or at the Conservation Authority, Jacqueline loved being the "sweeper": that is, she would always try to be the final speaker so that she could rebut any of the fallacious arguments raised earlier, and wrap up the Friends' argument in an incisive manner. She was very skilled at this, and, as a consequence, Friends of the Spit was able to successfully direct the agenda for the preservation of the Spit.

Even though I knew her well, it still came as a surprise to find out some things from her past: she had a pilot's licence, she had met her partner at a gliding school, and she'd even parachute jumped!!! These risk-taking endeavors just didn't seem to equate with the Jacqueline I knew. I knew she loved her cats – they were very well looked after – and I knew she cared for community a great deal.

To give to your community, with no ulterior motive, is wonderful, and Jacqueline did in spades, over and over, time and time again. So, the next time you visit the Leslie Street Spit alone or with friends or family, stop somewhere way out on the peninsula, where there is only the sound of waves and wind and gulls and terns. Think of Jacqueline and thank her for all her efforts to keep the Spit the wonderful place we know and love. Thank her for giving so unselfishly of her time and energy to saving the Spit from development.

From Verna Higgins, a member of the Friends' Steering Committee...

I met Jackie in the early eighties when she helped to re-invigorate the Friends of the Spit at a time when the original founders of the group were beginning to move on to other important issues, new jobs or family duties. Soon, Jackie was co-chair of the Friends, and producer of our newsletter. For twenty plus years, Jackie continued these time-consuming efforts, approaching each new threat to the Spit with vigour, optimism and a plan based on well-researched information on the threat and the "players" involved. She, with co-chair John Carley, led many strategic and successful "battles" for the Friends. The mind boggles at the number of hours that Jackie committed to Friends of the Spit, but she never lost her enthusiasm or determination to keep the Spit a true urban wilderness. Few of us will hear the words "Let it be!" without remembering Jackie.

"Let It Be!"

Success: Discovery Centre Axed!!

This summer, John Campbell, CEO, Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation, received a letter from Mr. Alan Latourelle, CEO, Parks Canada, which informed the TWRC that "the project to develop a Discovery Centre in Lake Ontario Park will **NOT** proceed" [emphasis ours].

This announcement, seemingly out of the blue, is great cause for celebration! Friends of the Spit immediately issued a statement indicating how welcome this announcement was, and indicating our pleasure that Parks Canada finally recognized that the Spit was an inappropriate location for this structure.

Our release went on also to thank all our members, the allied groups, and many supporters who made their feelings and voices known to Parks Canada throughout the feasibility and planning study phases. We feel that the Spit is safer from development as a result of this announcement, and feel also that the various government and quasi-governmental organizations now understand even further the strength and commitment of our membership. **Thanks again to everyone who raised their voices against this proposed 30,000 square foot intrusion onto the Spit.**

Lake Ontario Park: Planning Begins.....

The Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation has engaged a team of consultants, led by *Field Operations* of New York City, to design the new Lake Ontario Park as a signature park for Toronto's waterfront. Geographically, Lake Ontario Park extends from Cherry Beach east to the R.C. Harris Filtration Plant. The Park itself will amalgamate and incorporate the existing parks in the Beach, Cherry Beach, the North Shore, and will bring the Spit into the overall Park planning framework.

A public meeting was held at Cherry Beach in June, and the consultants heard from members of the public. In a series of facilitated discussions, group after group reported that a contemporary waterfront park should be tranquil, should work with the environment, should emphasize the lakefront, should provide a rural space for the residents, should retain soft shorelines, keep wild areas wild, etc., etc., etc..... Presumably, the consultants got the picture.

From Friends of the Spit's perspective, the Spit is the crown jewel in this Park: it is a Public Urban Wilderness, it is functioning well. It provides a car-free experience, and it provides tranquility, so necessary in Toronto. To expand the Spit to link it through to the Don, within the stabilizing infrastructure of a new park (which will guarantee the Spit's boundaries) all seems quite desirable. A diversity of use is planned for Lake Ontario Park: Friends of the Spit advocates that in the Portlands, the most intense and active uses occur at the north and west with a gradual filter towards the passive more tranquil uses of the Baselands and Spit.

In early October, the consultant team reported to both the LOP Steering Committee (composed mostly of government officials of the various branches) and to the LOP Stakeholders Committee. Friends of the Spit has one representative on the Stakeholders Committee. Additionally, other organizations such as the Outer Harbour Sailing Federation, various aquatic clubs, the City Cycling Committee, etc. are represented.

At that time, the Committee was treated to the consultants' initial thoughts. A number were quite progressive, such as the reinstatement of the Fisherman's Isle barrier beach landform which stretches from Cherry Beach through the North Shore through to Leslie Street, a suggestion that Ashbridges' Bay and Coatsworth Cut might become a giant marsh, with the sailing clubs relocated elsewhere on the Ashbridges' Bay park arm, and a general sense of ecological awareness for the Park.

However, many problems were also apparent with these initial design proposals, including the fact that the existing Tommy Thompson Park Master Plan was essentially ignored. That Master Plan, agreed to in the early '90's with an Environmental Assessment completed in 1995, sets the framework for the Conservation Authority's management of the Park. A great deal of time and effort went into forging that Master Plan. Our position is that it must be maintained and respected.

The consultants' trial balloon of a canal (!!!) bisecting the Baselands and joining the Outer Harbour through to Lake Ontario at Ashbridges' Bay is being strongly and vociferously protested while other illogical ideas such as a camp for children out on the Spit are also meeting with surprise and disapproval (think of the car traffic for servicing the emergency facilities: simply the development to achieve the camp would ruin the very attributes it seeks to praise and witness!!)

The Stakeholders and Steering Committees' comments are being received by the consultants. The TWRC indicates the next meetings of those two committees will be in December. The mandated Public Meeting is scheduled for January 2007. This Public Meeting will present the design concepts to the public-at-large, and, in return, the consultants will receive the public's comments. Your input will be essential. We will notify you in advance of the meeting date. **Make your views known so that Lake Ontario Park remains unique, with the Spit as the crown jewel in that unique park.**

Let's have the "experts" enshrine the concept of "public urban wilderness" and "Let It Be" for the Spit and the Baselands. No fancy canals are needed, no fancy infrastructure: just secure boundaries and the will to have a natural wild park, without cars.