

The Brentwood Mural: A Creation of Community Connections

Imagine you're drifting lazily up the Bow River Valley in a hot air balloon late on a hot midsummer's afternoon, just west of downtown Calgary. An air current eddies you northward over the University campus, and then over Northland Mall in Brentwood. It must be a Tuesday, judging by the bustling crowds below, and the scent of freshly baked goods wafting up from the Grassroots Northland Farmers' Market. Facing east, you can see Whispering Woods on your left, the only Natural Area Park wholly within Brentwood, and a tiny prairie remnant of nearby Nose Hill, the largest urban park in Canada. The trembling aspen groves, and the rough fescue and wild rose [our provincial grass and flower], are quaking, waving, and blooming gloriously. The curled fingertips of the prairie crocus leaves, its blossoms the treasured harbinger of a prairie spring, are snuggled deep below in the grassland cover.

Nose Hill, crowned by the brilliant blue sky, sweeps to the southeast across the horizon, dropping in the distance to our city skyline. Cyclists, runners, dog walkers, and kite fliers avail themselves of the local regional parks and pathway system for which Calgary is renowned. The much anticipated pedestrian overpass over John Laurie Boulevard finally allows safe passage between Nose Hill and the Triwood communities. Children are playing soccer on every available schoolground, and swapping notes on sightings of the Brentwood Bunny, also sighted by a resident bird of prey...

This pastoral scene, right in our urban midst, is just what you'll see on the NE corner of Brisebois and Northland Drives in NW Calgary. Dismayed by the recurrent graffiti and inspired by the possibility of a mural instead, local resident, Lee Hunt, contacted the Mayor. He directed her to the City's anti-graffiti program. Lee then tapped me for environmental support while we were both at the open house for the new pedestrian overpass. We met, we schemed, we asked questions, we fundraised, and we brainstormed.

We discovered amazing people and amazing energy and enthusiasm right here in Brentwood, and the project then seemed to lift off of its own accord. Kim Morrison and Urban Youth Worx provided the artistic passion, know how and expertise. Local artist, Cheri Macaulay took the community input to heart, researched local flora and fauna, took field trips and photographs, and created a delightful design incorporating these elements in such a way that local youth could successfully paint it with some guidance, whether or not they had artistic experience.

Dozens of local youth turned out of the summer woodwork to help with the painting, and local businesses and residents provided funds and food. Our city councillor's office provided outstanding support, not only with the eradication of other nearby graffiti, but by connecting us with the Roads department. Designs for the new overpass were provided to Cheri by their senior engineer! It will be a sleek line, seamlessly contouring from the bike path above Charleswood Heights directly into Nose Hill Park near Many Owls Valley. We eagerly await the real thing, previewed in the mural.

Extra special thanks are in order to Grassroots NW Environmental Awareness Society, not only for providing us space to host open houses at their Northland Farmers' Market, but by becoming our major community sponsor. We are all stewards of all aspects of our environment, whether it be an urban crossroads, or the intersection of suburban pathways and our precious wild spaces.

You can still treat yourself to the bounty of the season at this local Farmers' Market every Truly Fresh Tuesday, from 3:30 to 7:30 p.m., on the east side of Brentwood's Northland Mall in the NW. All proceeds from this unique market are returned to the community in support of environmental awareness and education programs. Do more with your money, and head to Northland.

And while you're in the area, do come to our Opening Celebration for the Brentwood Community Mural: Sunday, 19th September 2004, 2-4 p.m., on Brisebois at Northmount.

Environmentally yours,
Polly Lee Knowlton Cockett, plknowlton.cockett@shaw.ca