



Friends of the Saskatoon Afforestation Areas Inc.

<https://stbarbebaker.wordpress.com>

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COVID-19 COMMUNITY ARCHIVE

COVID-19 AND OUR ENVIRONMENTAL NON-PROFIT CHARITY?

Coming together for the benefit of Saskatoon and the greater Saskatoon area, the Friends of the Saskatoon Afforestation Areas Inc. formed as an environmental non-profit registered charity 777143876RR0001. As such we continue to take into account due considerations to protect the community and the preservation of biodiversity within the natural environment. We have stepped up to the challenges and opportunities to continue to provide and advocate for the health of the environment, and promote education and awareness for the ecosystems and biodiversity to increase education and awareness about the rich cultural, geological, historical, and natural heritage of these two Saskatoon afforestation areas, the 326-acre Richard St Barbe Baker Afforestation Area and the 148-acre George Genereux Urban Regional Park. In 1972, city council preserved the first 660 acres of afforestation areas in perpetuity. Throughout these weird times, getting out in nature serves as an amazing way to cope, decompress and comply with compliance measures while staying safe. A greater number of people are coming out as part of a local staycation to enjoy Richard St. Barbe Baker and George Genereux Parks and connect with these semi-wilderness habitat corridors.

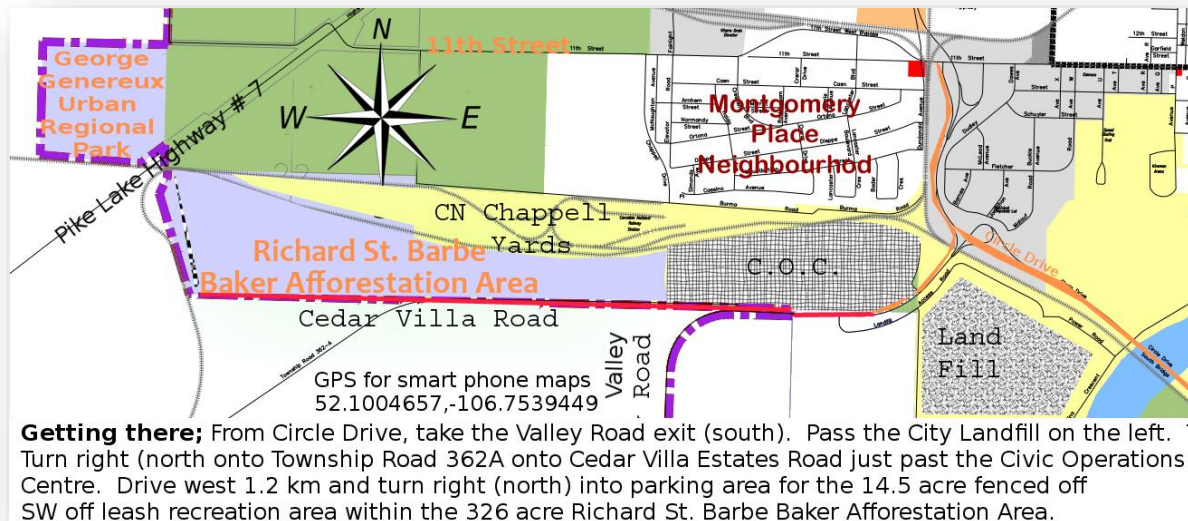




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COVID-19 OPPORTUNITIES AND POSTIVE SHIFTS

“In the end, we will conserve only what we love.

We will love only what we understand.

We will understand only what we are taught.” Baba Dioum

The impact of COVID-19 has created challenges and opportunities to move forward as a charitable organization. With a concern for safety previously planned activities in the urban regional parks have been postponed. However, we are working towards a sustainable future by engaging in research and training to increase our capacity for public education and virtual programs online. To further our shift online, the FRIENDS started an e-card site to raise funds for environmental protection rather than engaging in door to door fund-raising sales. By allowing members of the public to remain safe and follow COVID protocols, everyone can now send a greeting for [Father’s Day, Christmas, Mother’s Day, a thank you, or a birthday](#), placing the cost of the card, envelope and stamp towards the preservation of the afforestation areas, and to also save a tree from being chopped down to create a conventional paper card!

VINIECE JENNINGS states, “specifically we (1) explore connections between cultural ecosystem services and social determinants of health; (2) examine cultural ecosystem services as nature-based health amenities to promote social equity; and (3) recommend



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areas for future research examining links between urban green space and public health within the context of environmental justice.”

2020 RCE Sask Sustainability Award was granted by the by the Regional Centre of Expertise on Education and Sustainable Development upon the Friends of the Saskatoon Afforestation Areas Inc in recognition of the focus and work towards the United Nations sustainable development goals (SDGS).

To provide awareness for and an appreciation of the diversity, cultural, historical, geological, human geographical features that make up the Richard St. Barbe Baker Afforestation Area and George Genereux Urban Regional Park spaces periodical articles were submitted and published during this COVID pandemic.

Core operating grants, donations and sponsorship from the private and corporate sector provides the wherewithal for heritage and environmental advocacy. Environmental protections such as vehicle barriers protect the ecosystem, while interpretive signs enhance educational values, and widen knowledge, provide instruction, and advance education about plant and animal species, phenology and the eco-system as a whole. To this end, the FRIENDS are engaged with railway agreements, encroachment agreements with the utilities, and acquiring the necessary permits.

As a non-profit environmental charity we have developed not only [our 2020 Green Vision online](#), but have also brain-stormed towards our five year mission and vision.





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INNOVATIVE GROWTH AND IDEAS

Pre-COVID events were planned for the various Saskatoon festivals such as the WinterShines, Winterruption to celebrate the YXE WinterCity strategy, followed in the spring by the Jane's walk, and the Wild About Saskatoon NatureCity Festivals. Cancelled and post-poned events save lives. Transformative actions still take action to conserve greenspaces we care about deeply. Now, to respect the safety others we offer virtual tours, and a variety of webinar themes.

Social media, the internet, and virtual meetings have come together to provide a variety of natural and historic heritage education experiences. Indeed, the rich cultural, natural, and historic heritage offer stimulating new thoughts, ideas and creative expression. The afforestation areas provide interesting dynamic opportunities to draw attention to geology, history, flora and fauna. There are three namesakes at the afforestation areas; Richard St. Barbe Baker, Dr. George Genereux, and B.T. Chappell who were all city builders in their own unique way. Virtually, the FRIENDS engage in a wide variety of topics including discussion regarding ecological succession and regeneration, bird population counts, biodiversity including noxious invasive species, species at risk, exotic tree nursery plantings, and native species. The Saskatoon Afforestation Areas situated in the West Swale are relevant to the visitor experience highlighting local history and cultural heritage values as well as being appropriate to the greenspace. The West Swale wetland oasis, formed from the Yorath Island Pleistocene era spillway is nestled within the riparian woodlands provide a beautiful and spiritual landscape within the city of Saskatoon. Members of the public seeking to know more may contact the FRIENDS at friendsafforestation@gmail.com to partake in a virtual tour or webinar presentation as part of our COVID-19 strategy. The award-winning Green Survival Program, the tree nurseries, or perhaps the legacy of the designated heritage trail named "Old Bone Trail" are among the numerous topics heralded when speaking to these significant heritage sites. Rising to meet the challenge FRIENDS seek to increase knowledge and appreciation of the human, geological, and natural history of the Saskatoon Afforestation Areas virtually and comply with COVID protocols.

"Love is where attentiveness to nature starts, and responsibility towards one's home landscape is where it leads." – John Elder (1998)

There are benefits to delving into nature to discover the flora and fauna which exists in the afforestation areas. To this end, there is now established on the [smart phone app iNaturalist](#) the "[Baker Area Eco-Quest](#)" and the "[Genereux Park Eco-Quest.](#)" The FRIENDS provide an introductory pamphlet, and further follow up virtual connections for those park visitors who wish to take pictures of plants, animals, insects and mushrooms. This activity develops a baseline inventory of what is out at the afforestation areas to guide long-term ecological monitoring and the master plan. I-Naturalist therefore affords a valuable means to promote the benefits of the environment and highlights the variety



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of eco-systems in the afforestation areas. Due to the mix of exotic and native trees in the unique setting of the West Swale there are seen not only moist mixed grasslands native flora burgeoning in the area, but also species more congruent with the northern boreal forest. The FRIENDS have found that the afforestation areas provide an excellent outdoor classroom to study ecological succession, regeneration, and how the native animals of the prairie ecosystem have adapted to this one of a kind naturalized woodlands and wetlands greenspace. Whereas, there are native species of the moist mixed grasslands which are burgeoning in the afforestation area tree nurseries, the ecosystem also shows signs of the biome of the northern boreal parkland due to the unique mix of native and exotic tree species in areas of these greenspaces.



COMPLIANCE TO PUBLIC HEALTH PROTOCOLS

Social media, YouTube, Facebook and the internet web site has been a great means of communication between the FRIENDS and the community. Fund-raising initiatives and nominations for the FRIENDS have come through with support during this time. Those who are on Facebook who think to start a Facebook fundraiser for the Friends of the Saskatoon Afforestation Areas Inc. @FriendsAreas have shown a great means of collaboration during these weird times.

New members and volunteers are appreciated, even during COVID. We hold virtual board meetings generally on the second Wednesday of the month via ZOOM. Members come together to share discussions about the afforestation area urban regional parks. During COVID innovative plans are made for community engagement, events, grant writing, fundraising, virtual and self-guided tours, social media campaigns,



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heritage research, photography and so much more. There is much to do to take action on climate change and protect the environment safely adhering to COVID protocols! Ideas for growth and increased sustainable development arise along with exploring how afforestation areas -themselves being carbon sinks -take action on climate change. Members offer up different perspectives on environmental protections and virtual programming. This crisis brings to the forefront how members of the Saskatoon community come together for a common good!

For the first time ever, George Genereux Urban Regional Park received a volunteer clean up. This large 147.8-acre space provided ample opportunity to socially distance, and all volunteers who arrived did indeed comply to COVID protocols and either wore masks when close together lifting one item, or socially distanced and stayed within their own COVID bubble. The clean up remained safely within the provincial COVID protocols for outdoor group events, and there was plenty of COVID friendly individually wrapped refreshments, facemasks, gloves and hand sanitizer. All in all, there were three cleanups in total held in the autumn months, two of which were organized by the FRIENDS. Richard St. Barbe Baker Afforestation Area and George Genereux Urban Regional parks both benefitted. In total, 15.34 tonnes removed from the two afforestation areas. Though that was a lot of trash picked up, volunteers were appreciative towards the businesses and corporations who offered their trash bins to receive those items of trash which missed after the official clean up date had ended. Additionally the volunteers, and businesses providing trucks after the clean up date served an important aspect to environmental protections. Additionally, a few discarded tires were received by local businesses after the clean up date which was truly awesome! There were green groups such as SOS Trees Coalition who came out, sponsorship by many community businesses as posted online along with Ecofriendly Sask to help all the volunteers follow protocols and stay safe. Again, if COVID protocols allow, there will be additional clean ups until such time as motorized vehicle barriers and signage is installed. It is great to provide pollution control and prevention, health and animal protection in these semi-wilderness tracts of land.

The volunteers with the Friends of the Saskatoon Afforestation Areas Inc. cannot go door to door during these days of the pandemic as it is better to follow the safety protocols which are in place. However, the FRIENDS are grateful for all those people who are phoning and emailing to allow our non-profit charity to arrange a pick up of recycling done safely. Our charity had the capacity to sort recycling for SARCAN and store the bottles while SARCAN was closed assisting the members of the public who engaged in COVID cleanups of their home. Calling the FRIENDS for a recycling pick up helped the environment of the afforestation areas enormously. One of the first major projects to embark on is to erect park signs and motorized vehicle barriers to mitigate illegal trespass and illegal dumping. This action protects endangered species, and provides environmental preservation towards the forest, wetlands and grasslands. The



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FRIENDS sort the recycle donations, remove the bottle caps, stand outside in the cold in the line ups. Further to this, the FRIENDS are a charity, and are able to provide a charitable tax receipt, where anyone donating is able to receive 53% back from their donation on Canadian Income Taxes at tax time!!! The FRIENDS encourage anyone who wishes to partake in the virtual bottle drives to E-mail friendsafforestation@gmail.com or phone 306.380.5368 if they would like to get involved.



POSITIVE OUTCOMES

Within the 326-acre Richard St Barbe Baker Afforestation Area (includes the 14.5-acre South West off leash recreation area) and the 147.8-acre George Genereux Urban Regional Park park visitors are able to socially distance. Entering the south west off leash recreation area, there are signs reminding everyone of the value of social distancing creating a safe outdoor experience.

The [World Health Organisation](#) speaks to health and sustainability, “green spaces such as parks and sports fields as well as woods and natural meadows, wetlands or other ecosystems, represent a fundamental component of any urban ecosystem. Green urban areas facilitate physical activity and relaxation, and form a refuge from noise. Trees produce oxygen, and help filter out harmful air pollution, including airborne particulate matter. Water spots, from lakes to rivers and fountains, moderate temperatures.” Another benefit could be that people connecting with nature take refuge from the assaults of the COVID-19 pandemic.



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Whether getting out and about with their pet, having a leisurely walk or cycle or engaging in bird watching via e-Bird or nature studies on i-Naturalist the afforestation areas are beautiful places to explore in all seasons.



COVID RESPONSE

The FRIENDS express sympathy to everyone who have lost their loved ones to COVID-19. The FRIENDS extend peace and comfort to all those affected by the ravages of the pandemic.



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IN CONCLUSION

These are difficult times, and we are not alone. COVID-19 has brought out the best in our community where we embody and orchestrate new ways of showing love and appreciation for one another and the environment. It is a time to stop smell the roses, and appreciate those awesome things we take for granted to often;

- ✓ The benefits of trees, nature, flowers, and marshlands.
- ✓ Getting out into natural areas to celebrate the coming of spring, and the dazzling display of hoarfrost on the branches
- ✓ The beauty of sunrise and sunset glistening on snow drifts and on the dew drops
- ✓ The chatter of squirrels, black-capped chickadees, and yellow-headed black birds
- ✓ Embracing the fresh aromatic recharge to the senses that only a fresh meadow can provide

A local Nature Staycation is invigorating. Being aware of our surroundings calms the mind, and provides peace for the soul. COVID-19 has meant a swivel for the communication mechanism used by the FRIENDS. The pandemic has taught us that now during these difficult times, it is more important than ever before raise community awareness about the rich and diverse natural and historic heritage out at the afforestation areas and advocate for our local natural resources and sustainability initiatives for the benefit of the public. The FRIENDS wish everyone to take care and stay safe. During these unpredictable times the



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COVID protocols have allowed the opportunity to experience nature at Richard St. Barbe Baker Afforestation Area or out at the George Genereux Urban Regional Park. Getting out into nature in the afforestation areas replenishes your Vitamin D levels, provides benefits from Vitamin N. During these weird times it is great to appreciate our amazing planet, and these greenspaces in the City of Saskatoon

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