

ENVIRO NEWS

Our Bridge: Whispering Grasses Walkway

It's open! It's named! It's got artwork! It's OURS!

Well, okay, it's hasn't officially opened yet. And, yes, there are indeed a few details to sort out and complete, around pathways and landscaping and such...but our eagerly awaited pedestrian overpass to Nose Hill Park over John Laurie Boulevard N.W., between Brisebois and Charleswood Drives, is already in use by delighted locals.

"It's absolutely elegant," declares a local man out for a Sunday afternoon jaunt. "What a great place to watch a mountain sunset," enthused a woman, as she ambled along with her dog one evening.

"I no longer have heart palpitations from trying to cross through the busy, high speed traffic with my kids in order to take them for a nature walk in my own neighborhood," stated a relieved young mother.

"This is MY bridge," avowed a local senior with glee, tamping her tall, polished walking stick upon the path to emphasize the point. "I'm thrilled anew each time I walk over it. I've lived here since the '60s, right near this bridge. We fought for Nose Hill Park and we fought for this bridge and now I can't help but think of it as mine."

A Name for all Seasons

This gracefully arching safe passage between our suburban community and the natural grassland ecosystem on our doorstep now has an official name: Whispering Grasses Walkway. It is time to truly congratulate Shruti Madhusudan, a Grade 6 girl at Dr. E.W. Coffin Elementary School in Brentwood Heights, for coming up with such a captivating moniker.

"The Brentwood Community wishes to commend the students of Dr. E.W. Coffin School, their teachers and their adult advisers for the interest, enthusiasm and public spirit they have shown in implementing this project for a suggested name to the overpass." – Nose Hill Park Representative, Brentwood Community Association

"The fact that the name suggestions came from Dr. Coffin Elementary School, via their Environment Committee, is in keeping with the future of Nose Hill, which will require stewardship by these young people for future generations." – Friends of Nose Hill President

"Because of the avid interest, hard work, democratic process and outstanding creativity involved in arriving at this choice; I am in full support." – Alderman Druh Farrell

"The name reflects all of the imagery suggested by the students who voted for it and ties in nicely with the intended artwork and design of the overpass." – Alderman Bob Hawkesworth

Crenellated Habitat by Tony Bloom

Speaking of artwork, four beautifully sculpted, curved steel panels by Canmore artist Tony Bloom have been installed at the ends of Whispering Grasses Walkway.

Approaching the bridge from the community, the southeast panel welcomes you with a layered topographic view of hills and valleys, worn through by a meandering stream. On the southwest panel, a lone bison thunders away, trailing a pluming dust cloud in the wide prairie sky.

On the Nose Hill end, the northeast panel speaks to the cycle of life with a red-tailed hawk descending into a chaotic encounter with an unsuspecting mouse. The final northwest panel takes us below ground, with a cross-section of rocks and roots, warrens and waterways.

From whatever perspective you're viewing, watch these panels reflect colour variations throughout changing weather and progressing seasons. Though wide and welcoming embayments, using both crenellations and crenulations these notched and crinkled abutments also suggest the play of tension between natural and developed spaces in an urban setting.

Indeed, the opening in the fence to the supposed safe haven within, brings with it a renewed awareness of the many stresses due to overuse by an enthusiastic public, which also acts as a vector for the disturbing onslaught of invasive alien plant species into this precious grassland habitat.

However, by involving so many in the process of building, naming, adorning or simply using this bridge, we are together building in ownership for the continued stewardship of a very special park. Your park. My park. OUR park!

*Environmentally yours, Polly Lee Knowlton Cockett
282-2014 or plknowlton.cockett@shaw.ca*

