



## Whispering Signs: A Grand and Green Celebration

By Polly Lee Knowlton Cockett

On June 4th a diverse and extended community came together under showers and sunshine to celebrate the Grand Opening of Whispering Signs in Brentwood Heights. If you were recently enjoying your summer holidays, you may have missed the last Bugle, which highlighted the myriad collaborations and connections of this very special project.

Dr. E.W. Coffin School hosted 100s of students, parents, teachers, community members, and special guests in a truly Green Celebration of public environmental education. Of course, the interpretive signs themselves speak to the ecological complexities of our local environment, of which we are a part. Nature-based entertainment was provided by students in song, poetry, and musical ensembles, and by Storyteller Karen Gummo, who expanded on her "A Small Tale of Whispering Woods" found on the sign "Trembling Trees." All of the individual community and student artists and writers who par-

ticipated in the project were acknowledged at the end of the celebration.

Even the refreshments served at the Opening were environmentally friendly. Parent volunteers baked homemade cookies and handed them out, so no plates or napkins were needed. Students brought their own containers if they wanted drinks, and reusable cups were provided for visitors for Fair Trade coffee, juice or water. Tap water was served from pitchers, dairy creamer and sugar was provided from bulk containers, and reusable spoons were used for stirring; thus, no waste was created from stir sticks or individually packaged materials. Simple, and delicious.

Many thanks go to each of the guest speakers who spoke eloquently about community, education, and the environment: Ron Buchan, City of Calgary Natural Areas; David Stevenson, Calgary Board of Education, Deputy Mayor Brian Pincott, Calgary's City Council; Cheri



Macaulay, Brentwood Community Association; Linda Pushor for our Alberta MLA Harry Chase; and Corinne Craig, SEEDS Foundation. Ms. Craig recognized Dr. E.W. Coffin School's receipt of an Emerald 2 Level Award for Environmental Excellence. Already an Earth School in the SEEDS Green Schools program, students from Dr. Coffin have now completed over 1500 environmental projects since 1992.

Thanks also go to the members of School Council, chaired by Lisa Dobell, and all the many volunteers who helped make the event a success: the gardeners, the bakers, and refreshment providers. As well, thanks go to our External Photographer, Julia Millen, of SCIBerMENTOR at the University of Calgary, and to Videographer Pieter Aukes, UofC Environmental Science student and Bentwood resident. Please see [www.natureground.org](http://www.natureground.org) for additional acknowledgments and details on Whispering Signs and many other projects at Dr. Coffin School and in the wider Brentwood Community. Watch this website, designed by Rowan Cockett, UofC Environmental Science student and Dr. Coffin alumnus, for video, photo, and general updates as well.

Finally, the Whispering Signs committee from Dr. Coffin School must also be recognized for their years of dedicated involvement: Debbie Hall, Environment Committee Chair and Parent; Andrea Batchelor, Teacher; Donna Hamby, Teacher and Parent; Gisele Dumaine and Allen Innis, Parents; Doug Andrews, Community Member, Former Teacher, and Former Parent; Juane Priest, Principal; and Polly Knowlton Cockett, Project Manager, Former Parent, and Community Member.





## Whispered Thanks

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### Whispering Signs and Centennial Natureground, Prairie Amphitheatre and Whispering Woods

The Whispering Signs project and its celebration would never have become a reality without the substantial and generous support from so many sponsors and supporters. With unending thanks, we recognize:

#### The City of Calgary

- Natural Areas
- Parks
- Waterworks
- Council Strategic Initiatives Fund

#### Community

- Alberta Community Initiatives Program
- TD Friends of the Environment Foundation
- Parks Foundation, Calgary
- The Calgary Foundation
- Alberta Ecotrust Foundation
- Brentwood Community Association
- Grassroots NW Environmental Awareness Society

#### School

- Dr. E.W. Coffin School Council Environment Committee
- Dr. E.W. Coffin School
- Friends of Dr. E.W. Coffin Society
- Dr. E.W. Coffin School Council

#### In Kind

- Alberta Infrastructure
- Alberta Transportation
- Riparia Ltd.
- M2 Designs
- Tenorgeo
- Olds College
- Calgary Zoo
- Evergreen Foundation
- Calgary Board of Education
- Community Artists, Writers, Poets, Scientists
- Volunteers Extraordinaire

As well, we would like to recognize two of our Signage Artists, both Brentwood residents, for their heartfelt and generous contributions to Dr. Coffin School and the recently graduated Grade 6 students. Heather Erion donated her original "Owl in Spring" pastel on suede board



painting to be displayed in the school so everyone can visit 'Oliver the Owl' in person! Pat Fedkenheuer, of ALCLA Native Plants, presented each graduating student with a poster of the Whispering Signs. Pat and Heather's art can be viewed together on the "Owls and Oxeyes" sign near Whispering Grasses Walkway.

Thank you, on behalf of the Friends of Dr. E.W. Coffin Society, to all students and staff: Each and every student and teacher at Dr. Coffin School was invaluable in the creation of the signs. You may not know it, but there is something you said, or something you wrote, or drew, or investigated, or wondered about over the last few years that has been absorbed into the signs. Your voice is there, whispering back your ideas and your engagement in the spaces we have created together. The same holds true for so many community members as well: Thank you, all, for being an important part of the unique Whispering Signs project!

Please visit [www.natureground.org](http://www.natureground.org) to see what the posters look like, for more information about our signs and about the outdoor environmental education projects in Brentwood Heights. We hope you will come back to visit the signs in person!

#### Sponsor a Class Set of Posters!

Would you or your business like to Sponsor a Class Set of Posters? A charitable tax receipt for \$150/class can be arranged through the Calgary Board of Education. Your directed donation will ensure every student in a classroom will receive a copy of the high quality posters featuring images of every Whispering Sign. You are welcome to sponsor classrooms at any school.

Posters are available to the public for a minimum donation of \$5 each. All proceeds go to the Friends of Dr. E.W. Coffin Society in support of environmental education projects.

