

BY SUZANNE BARRETT

# TORONTO'S WATERFRONT TRAIL

## Creating a lasting treasure

**Do you like to go** down to the waterfront, feel the breeze on your face, listen to the waves lapping on the shore, fly a kite, stroll along a boardwalk and hear red-wing blackbirds calling from the cattails? You may think that you have to leave the city to enjoy these pleasures, but in fact they're all available at Toronto's doorstep—on Lake Ontario.

Toronto was founded on the forested

shores of Lake Ontario, but over the years the city has turned its back on the lake and become separated from it by railways, industry and the elevated Gardiner Expressway. We can't, as yet, take a very long walk enjoying the lake's blue waters. But do not despair. Improvements have been made over the past 20 years, and can continue with your help.

Some of Toronto's best-loved parks



**Toronto's waterfront will be part of a trail that eventually stretches 350 kilometres around Lake Ontario**

have been created on the shores of Lake Ontario. You can now enjoy Humber Bay Park, Sunnyside, the Music Garden, Leslie Street Spit and the Eastern Beaches. There are waterfront patios with live music, re-created marshes teeming with fish and wildlife, and boardwalks for a sunset stroll.

It's a good start, but we still have work to do. There are many, many places along the waterfront that remain ugly, polluted and disconnected. The 1,200-acre Portlands lie idle, with the soil contaminated by decades of industrial pollution, and lacking in transit and services. The Gardiner-Lakeshore corridor is a formidable barrier to anyone on foot, bike or rollerblades. High-rise condos and apartment buildings block views of the lake. Many of Toronto's beaches frequently feature signs warning people not to swim or play in the

water because of the risks of infection and illness. The Waterfront Trail is unfinished and fragmented, requiring cyclists and pedestrians to resort to busy streets to get from one park to the next.

Much work has already been done by the City of Toronto, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, Waterfront Regeneration Trust and numerous community groups, such as the Citizens for the Future of Etobicoke's Waterfront, Toronto Bay Initiative and Friends of the Spit. The Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation was recently established by all three levels of government with the focus on the downtown waterfront. Exciting new plans include re-naturalizing the mouth of the Don River, improving transit, removing the barrier effects of the Gardiner Expressway, creating live-work communities (including a high-technology district that would house film and recording studios), and adding new trails and parks. Most of these plans are still conceptual, and the next few years will be the real test of whether the "new" Toronto waterfront will be clean, green and accessible. This is where your voice can make a difference.

The downtown waterfront is important, but so are the areas to the west and east of it. Already there are new parklands at Colonel Samuel Smith Park and Humber Bay in former Etobicoke, and Bluffers Park and South Marine Drive in former Scarborough. And there are additional exciting projects being

## **Exciting new plans include re-naturalizing the mouth of the Don River**

planned, such as the Mimico Waterfront Linear Park and the Port Union Village waterfront. We must be vigilant that the current spotlight on the downtown waterfront does not hold back these important initiatives.

Toronto is not alone in improving its lakeshore. All around Lake Ontario, communities are in various stages of regaining



**Volunteers planting for the trail's future**

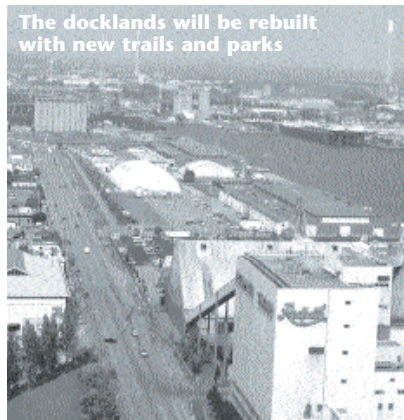
the use and beauty of their waterfronts. If you visit St. Catharines, Burlington, Cobourg or Belleville, for example, you will find new parks, trails, restaurants, restored wetlands, heritage architecture, festivals and more—all taking advantage

## **The next few years will be the real test of whether the new Toronto waterfront will be clean, green and accessible**

of the waterfront setting. Most importantly, there is a growing ethic of respect and stewardship for the waterfront—based on the work of David Crombie's Royal Commission on the Future of the Waterfront (1988-92)—that promotes integrated solutions to improving environmental health, community well-being and economic vitality.

The Waterfront Trail is a crucial ele-

ment in this wave of waterfront revitalization, acting as a catalyst for the broad range of improvements. The trail currently extends 350 kilometres around Lake Ontario, and when finished, will stretch a wonderful 650 kilometres, from Niagara-on-the-Lake to Kingston, connecting dozens of diverse communities—ranging from the intensely urban Toronto waterfront, to the suburbs of the GTA and the countryside of Niagara, Northumberland and the Bay of Quinte.



**The docklands will be rebuilt with new trails and parks**

Our waterfront could be one of Toronto's greatest assets and an important part of the Lake Ontario Waterfront Trail. And we have learned, both here and in other communities around the lake, that a beautiful waterfront pays huge dividends in terms of health, recreation, tourism and quality of life. But often communities only get what they fight for. Find out what has been done and what needs to be done by exploring your waterfront. You will be both pleased and dismayed by what you find, and inspired to take action. (By the way, if you travel from one end of the Waterfront Trail to the other, you can earn an "end-to-ender" pin and a Tilley hat, and have your story posted on the Waterfront Regeneration Trust website.)

Public support and involvement are essential to keep up the momentum. Get involved in building the trail. The result will be a better waterfront—one that we can all enjoy and that we will be proud to leave to our grandchildren. ■



More wildlife  
will live on  
Toronto's  
improved  
waterfront

# HOW YOU CAN HELP BUILD TORONTO'S WATERFRONT TRAIL

- Volunteer time to help a waterfront community group with clean-up, tree planting or wetland restoration activities. [www.city.toronto.on.ca/greentoronto/greengroups.htm](http://www.city.toronto.on.ca/greentoronto/greengroups.htm)
- Support the trail with a contribution to the Waterfront Regeneration Trust's Waterfront Fund.
- Get to know your waterfront. Buy the *Lake Ontario Waterfront Trail Mapbook* from bookstores carrying MapArt products or from the Waterfront Regeneration Trust.
- Explore the 2002 Summer's Journey of festivals and events posted on the Waterfront Regeneration Trust's website.
- Attend the City of Toronto's public consultations on the waterfront and water quality improvements and express your support.
- Ask the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority about opportunities to help create wildlife habitats or to get involved in discussions about future waterfront projects.
- Contact your municipal councillor, MPP, MP or community association to encourage action.

For addresses, telephone numbers and websites, see Waterfront Trail in "Who To Call," under City of Toronto, on page 57.