



SPRING BRINGS HOPE

The Rosehill Garden: Building Community

The Rosehill Garden is part of the David Balfour Park. The park traces its history to 1873 when the area became Toronto's first reservoir, part of the City's public water distribution system. Water was pumped from an intake pump on Toronto Island, right out of Lake Ontario into your home!

For years, the reservoir served as a meeting place for Summerhill residents as the pond became a natural attraction. But in the early 1960's, fear of pollution and radioactive contamination led to covering the reservoir which was then under renovation. That project included the creation of reflecting pools, fountains, and an area less exposed to sun and wind. The fenced-in playground area was left to accumulate weeds and debris.

Fortunately, a Summerhill resident, Kate Wilson, inspired by her European travels, dreamt of turning the abandoned area into a park within a park, where people could rest, safe from the bustle of the park, and enjoy the tranquillity of a private garden within a public garden. An organizer, she turned to others to help with her dream. She enlisted her architect husband to develop an initial

plan, as well as Mark Elmslie, a Parks Department Area Supervisor, and Ila Bossons, a neighbour and a former City Councillor, to move the project forward.

In February 2003, Kate and her Green Committee presented a draft design to Kyle Rae, local City Councillor, together with a request that the garden project be allotted a portion of the development charge from a condominium being developed at Yonge and Rosehill. The battle for City funding had begun. After three years of arm-wrestling with the City, \$90,000.00 of development charges (which by law had to go to a public amenity in a green space) was assigned to Kate's garden project.

Shortly thereafter, the late Estelle Craig, Avoca resident (1969-2019), called Mark Elmslie to complain about the disused playground. Elmslie arranged a meeting with Kate's committee at the park. Warmed with hot coffee and fresh croissants, they reviewed the plans. Estelle asked, "What is the hold up?" and wrote a cheque for \$50,000. The City established a charitable account for donations and the garden began to take on life. Additional funds were raised by selling the old wood benches scattered over the grassed areas in the garden.

On July 13, 2008, the garden was officially opened with speeches and champagne. The wrought iron fence provided protection from ball players and dogs, three pergolas gave support to climbing roses and vines, and pink stone walkways led visitors into the garden beds.

The garden has operated without financial support by the City. Many Avoca residents have contributed to its success through their financial donations.



I first became involved in the garden when I took a ladder and my secateurs over to deadhead the climbing roses. Caught in the act, I quickly became a volunteer. Much of the volunteer recruitment came from the Avoca and neighbouring condos and apartments. Garden maintenance was done on weekends, when fast friendships were formed and the sense of community broadened.

Rehabilitation of the reservoir required closing off the whole area occupied by the park and destroyed the garden we had laboured to develop. The garden had some species that are difficult to source so the Committee asked the City for permission to enlarge the two small gardens on Avoca Avenue to store some of our plant material. In exchange, we offered to maintain the garden beds.

This has resulted in an expansion of these gardens, removal of the weeds and a small haven for the neighbourhood while the park is closed. We plan to return some of the plant material to the replacement garden without detracting from the gardens on Avoca.

By Bill Toyne

