

## GHOST GARDEN COMES BACK TO LIFE

We are all familiar with ghost towns, communities that have been abandoned due to the collapse of the local economy. Once these towns have 'closed up shop' that's pretty much the end of the line.

A community garden is not unlike a town, which, when going well, bustles with enthusiasm and excitement. Given that, we might ask ourselves, would it be possible for a community garden to one day be branded with the unfortunate label of "Ghost Garden"?

Picture a community garden of 55 enthusiastic families coming together in May 2009 as everyone plants seeds in anticipation of a bountiful harvest at the recently relocated Aurora Community Garden (ACG). In June, a visit to the garden any day of the week, one would see families watering their seedlings and sharing in casual chit-chat with fellow gardeners.

All seemed to be right on track but not for long. It was in the month of July that things turned sour. In fact, things turned yellow. The leaves on the plants literally turned yellow. The gardeners stopped visiting. By August it was official. The Aurora Community Garden was a 'Ghost Garden'.

What went wrong? Pools of brown water were spotted in some areas of the garden; not a good sign. Brown water indicated that iron was being carried off by the water. Plant leaves deprived of iron turn yellow.

Not only does poor drainage put plants at risk of iron deficiency, a saturated root zone drowns the roots and makes the soil virtually uninhabitable for vital

organisms. We were certainly hard pressed to find worms and other signs of life in the soil.

In an effort to save the garden, we cranked up our soil amendment strategy a notch or two. Despite efforts to tackle the serious drainage problem the next season was nothing to brag about. A few gardeners had success stories in 2010, many did not. Poor drainage was still causing serious problems.



*Pole beans touch the sky at the ACG in 2011*

If the garden was going to be successful in 2011, two things needed to take place. First, weeping tiles needed to be installed in the low lying areas of the garden to remove excess water from the soil. Second, gardeners needed more time to repair the soil. Instead of limiting the garden season to less than 5 months, gardeners were able to visit their garden anytime throughout the year. This meant gardeners had plenty of time to amend the soil in late fall and again in early spring.

A new season began in May. Our most determined gardeners still came back to fight the good fight. We saw May and June

pass and the community garden was looking good. Knowing July was the real test our fingers were crossed. The month passed and the plant leaves stayed green. The community garden made the turn. The ACG, dubbed a 'ghost garden' in 2009, struggled to make a comeback, and it did. Not only were gardeners rewarded with a successful harvest this year, the unconventionally warm fall season granted us the opportunity to harvest our vegetables straight through to November. A much deserved reward for our dedicated gardeners.

**Catherine Cook, Program Coordinator**

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

I met a Newmarket resident last week who shared his story with me. He was homeless for seven years and spoke of the many cold nights he spent under the Queen Street bridge fighting to stay warm. Today, he has a place to call his own. Now he is making plans to donate to others in our community who are in need this holiday season.

This man's generosity is humbling. His goodwill sets an example for others to consider how they can share their good fortune. Choose wisely and give freely - there is no shortage of great causes.

In retrospect, the York Region Food Network (YRFN) Board and staff have had a very busy year. Currently we are preparing to re-locate our office and we are close to making a final decision. If anyone has looked for a new home you know how difficult it can be to get as many of the amenities that you regard as "must haves". Unfortunately, moving is also an expensive process and YRFN would greatly appreciate any donations toward our move. Skilled labour and materials are also appreciated so please contact us if this suits your donation budget.

The Board has also undertaken measures to strengthen the organization through the creation of a few new board sub-committees that address policies, human resources, fund-raising and social media. Anyone who has skills in any of these areas, and who would like to volunteer with us, please give us a call. The Board and staff have also welcomed a few new faces to the team and hopefully in the New Year you will see some new designs and information on our website. We are also on Facebook so go ahead and *like* our York Region Food Network page or follow us on Twitter @yrfoodnetwork.

The future of YRFN has many exciting changes in store. I encourage you to make a donation to help us secure a smooth transition into the New Year and further our vision of **Food for health – food for all**.

On behalf of the Board and staff,

Seasons Greetings!

*Tom Howard*  
Chair

### WELCOME BRONWEN!

I'm Bronwen and I'm excited to be working as a Program Coordinator at York Region Food Network. Here, I run the breakfast drop-in, reclamation and community kitchen programs, but I've been doing front line community work for the past 8 years.

I started working in homeless shelters and then moved on to harm reduction outreach work with the Halton Public Health needle exchange program. From there, I became a Street Outreach Worker at Streets to Homes in Toronto, helping homeless people in the downtown core find housing, healthcare and other supports.

Recently, I finished my Master in Environmental Studies degree at York University, in which I studied agriculture and food policy. I got to be completely immersed in the study of food, something I am very passionate about.

I'm looking forward to meeting everyone and promoting good food in York Region.



A friend of ours at the Network office, David Rogers, has released his first book of poetry, *The Dark Road*. The book, comprised of 40 poems including *The Tree*, below, eloquently captures the journey Dave has been on through his experiences on the streets and in recovery.

### *The Tree*

The willow tree  
It weeps for me  
It cries all night  
When I am running free.

The Pine tree  
It sheds its cones  
Waiting for me, to come home

The maple tree  
With its sugar so great  
Waits for me also  
Hoping along the way  
I have not met my fate.

The great oak tree  
With its great might  
Calls out to me  
In the middle of the night

Come home little one  
You're still welcome here  
I can hear it calling to me  
In the still air

For there is love in this house  
You are wanted here  
Just come home little one  
Just come home

*DL Rogers*

The *Dark Road* retails for \$10 with a portion of the proceeds going to support local charities. If you would like a copy of the book, contact Alexander Blake of the John Howard Society at [ablake@johnhoward.yorkregion.on.ca](mailto:ablake@johnhoward.yorkregion.on.ca) or call him at 905-895-9943. Or contact the author, Dave Rogers at [dllrogers180@gmail.com](mailto:dllrogers180@gmail.com)

## FOOD FOR CHANGE:

### BUILDING A FOOD CHARTER FOR YORK REGION

Food touches all of our lives in a variety of ways, several times each day. On November 9<sup>th</sup> at the Aurora Cultural Centre a conversation started that we hope will lead to a sustainable and

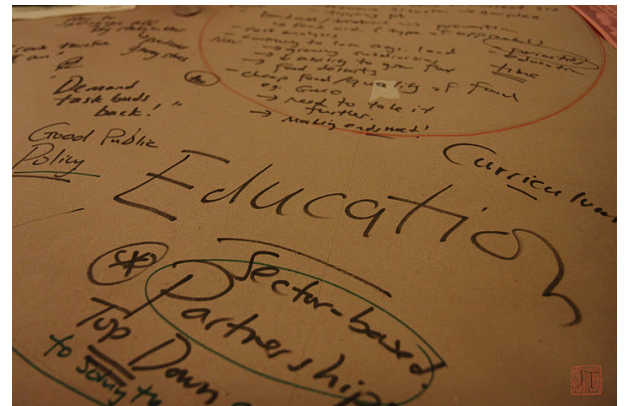


just food system that supports healthy communities. Participants envisioned a food system where local and healthy food is the

easy choice, where everyone has dignified access to good food, and we have a food economy that will lead the way to a vibrant, healthy, ecological and equitable community.

A food charter is a tool that links policy and community action. The journey towards a food charter in York Region will not only articulate the vision for our food system, it will engage community to cultivate a healthy food system. At our conversation café, groups discussed the various elements that are included in a charter: health and wellbeing, education, economic development and sustainability, environment and ecological health, equity and social justice, and culture and celebration.

The Food Charter Working Group is planning a follow-up visioning day and community consultations in the first



half of 2012. We will begin with a draft food charter based on input gleaned so far and flesh it out as we go. The objective is to have endorsements of the York Region Food Charter from all nine local municipalities and York Region Council. Links to examples of food charters from other jurisdictions across Canada can be found at [www.yrfn.ca/foodcharter](http://www.yrfn.ca/foodcharter).

To have your say or get involved, e-mail [foodcharter@yrfn.ca](mailto:foodcharter@yrfn.ca)  
*Joan Stonehocker, Executive Director*



**99.1** FM  
radio one



Join CBC on Thursday, December 15th, for their annual fundraiser for local food banks in the Greater Toronto Area.

Help them make this season one to celebrate by helping others.

For more information, go to [www.cbc.ca/toronto/community/sots.html](http://www.cbc.ca/toronto/community/sots.html)

### YRFN VIDEOS

#### Watch Now!

*It's Not Too Late to Change the World* at <http://yrfn.ca/issues/poverty-1/advocacy-awareness-to-action/>. This video talks about healthy communities and what you can do to help change the reality for the many York Region residents living in poverty.



Over the summer Sustain Ontario and Powerline Films partnered with 16 regions and organizations across the province creating "Ontario's Good Food Ideas" videos. Watch our website to see our two videos *Markham Community Garden* and *Good Food – A step away*.

### Join York Region Food Network's Fundraising Campaign

*I support YRFN's work to improve access to affordable, nutritious food for all people of York Region.*

I have enclosed my donation of:     \$20         \$50         \$100         Other

*Please make cheques payable to York Region Food Network.*

YRFN will issue a charitable tax receipt for all donations over \$20.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**To donate by credit card, visit our website at [www.yrfn.ca](http://www.yrfn.ca) and click on the link to CanadaHelps.org, a secure website where you can make a tax deductible credit card donation to YRFN.**

*Your privacy is important to us, and we are committed to protecting and safeguarding your personal information. We do not rent, sell or trademark our mailing list, but rather use it to keep you informed of York Region Food Network's activities, services and programs. Please contact our office to update your information or to be removed from the mailing list.*

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