

*Learning from 100 Years of History  
Bringing Back Nature to William Burgess Elementary School*



**BRINGING  
BACK  
NATURE**  
**TO WILLIAM BURGESS E.S.**  
CELEBRATING 100 YEARS

# ***MEDIA KIT***



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# MEDIA ADVISORY

## AN EARTH DAY BIRTHDAY: 350 KIDS CELEBRATE THEIR SCHOOL'S 100<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATING THE LAUNCH OF A MASSIVE GREENING OF WBES' SCHOOL GROUNDS

**April 19, 2013, (Toronto)** When William Burgess Elementary School opened in 1913, the school provided garden plots for each of its students, grassy areas for play, an oak grove and other mature native trees. Today, its school grounds make up *the largest park space* in this area of East York. Many of the school's 350 students live in high-rise apartment buildings, and the schoolyard is the only green space they and their families have access to. The school grounds are an important community hub, shared by residents and recreational groups, who use the play ground and playing field outside of school hours and all summer long. But time has taken its toll on the health and "green-ness" of this community green space

To mark the school's 100th anniversary, members of the William Burgess Elementary School Grounds Committee (SGC) are working with the students, teachers and community volunteers to bring nature back to its grounds. Over the past two years, while the school developed environmental stewardship curriculum and with the **tremendous support of Live Green Toronto**, the SGC conducted consultations with every student in William Burgess' 17 classrooms, the Parent Council, community volunteers, advisors, financial supporters, and the Toronto District School Board. Together they have created a Master Plan that touches and transforms every inch of the school's outdoor space. Designed with the help of the very people who use it daily, the Plan will sustainably renew and naturalize the school grounds for this East York community – for the next 100 years!

On Earth Day (April 22nd), **sponsored by Live Green Toronto**, William Burgess Elementary School will formally unveil the Master Plan and launch its 2013-2014 activities, which include the creation of five teaching gardens, fruit trees and composters to improve the school's vegetable garden, and a native arboretum made up of several "mini-forests" throughout the grounds, all of which were made possible by the **financial support of Live Green Toronto**. Future plans include the installation of a natural playground, native habitats and recreational areas that will enhance the "playability" of grounds for students and the community alike.

William Burgess' Earth Day/Birthday will be a whole day of eco-themed activities. A ceremony, starting at **12:45 pm** with special guests including City Councillor Mary Fragedakis, representatives from **Live Green Toronto**, the Evergreen Foundation and others, will include a **tree dedication to Live Green Toronto** and student theatre and choir performances. The day is themed around "Unless" from Dr. Seuss' *The Lorax*.

**"Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not." — Dr. Seuss, The Lorax**

"William Burgess kids are really aware of their environment and how their actions make a difference," says school Principal Jennifer Zurba. "With our outdoor classrooms and teaching gardens, our students don't just learn about science, they learn *in the science*."

When completed, William Burgess' school grounds will include the first natural playground in the Toronto District School Board, the most accessible park in the immediate neighbourhood, an outstanding teaching area for students, and a wonderful recreational area for all members of the East York community.

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## Learning from 100 Years of History: Bringing Back Nature to William Burgess Elementary School

### Who we are

William Burgess Elementary School has been part of the East York community since 1913. In its early days, the school provided garden plots for each of its students, grassy areas for play, an oak grove and other mature native trees.

Today, the William Burgess school grounds make up the *largest park space* in the immediate neighbourhood. Many of our school's 350 students live in high-rise apartment buildings and do not have access to green space at their homes. For many families in our community, *the schoolyard is the only green space they visit* – and over the years the yard has become less green than it should be. Currently our playing field is surrounded by ailing 100 year-old maples, a mostly asphalt play yard for the daycare children, a rectangular grassy area at the front of the school, a vegetable and butterfly teaching garden we created in the spring of 2012, and a large asphalt area behind the school with two 18-20 year-old play structures and several aging ash trees that are suffering from the emerald ash borer.

The school grounds are an important community hub, fully accessible to families and groups who use the area for recreation outside of school hours and all summer long. There are no barriers to access, several access points, and the grounds are used by the community year-round. The school houses a YMCA day-care, is in close proximity to the East York Community Centre and library, and the grounds are used regularly by the East York Soccer Club and by The City of Toronto youth shelter's clients, who use the basketball hoops. And needless to say, the school itself -- with its active Parent Council, community events, and daily meetings of parents picking up their children and chatting while the kids run and play -- is deeply connected to its community.

Our East York community has been identified as one of the most culturally diverse neighbourhoods in Canada, and also one of the most economically challenged areas of Toronto (Wellesley Institute study <http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/>).

The William Burgess School Grounds Committee (SGC) is comprised of volunteers from the school's Parent Council and the wider community. Formed over two years ago to advocate for more green space for our community, the SGC has been working to develop partnerships and expertise to build the vision of a natural park and playground for our school and community. Having engaged the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), we have moved through several steps, including community and student consultations to define how the park and play grounds will be used, to develop a landscape architectural plan (our Master Plan, attached) that has been approved by the TDSB. This is a significant accomplishment, and the Master Plan is extensive, inspiring and -- most importantly -- realistic.

### Our vision

To mark the school's 100th anniversary, it is our goal to honour our community and the future of our children by restoring a natural environment that will see William Burgess Elementary School into its next century in East York. This vision includes bringing nature back to our school grounds, educating our students and community with hands-on environmental activities and installations, and enhancing the "playability" of our school grounds with the installation of a natural playground and recreational areas. Our plans touch every inch of the school's outdoor space with renewal, regeneration and restoration. And at each step, our students and community will become informed environmental stewards with personal investment in this community area.

### Our plan

The size and scope of the plan put us in mind of the question: How do you eat an elephant? And so we are proceeding one step at a time, in phased increments that are achievable and can easily stand alone, but which add environmental benefit and value to each other at each step.

We started with the educational curriculum, student and community consultations and involvement in the development of plans, the planting of gardens, and the start of a schoolyard arboretum (Phase I), and are building toward Phase II in 2013: the installation of several mini-forests and five gardens, which combine to create interdependent ecosystems with the capacity to nurture each other. In Phase III, we will create naturalized areas for people to walk and jog, picnic, explore, or simply relax, and a natural playground for all ages, replacing our concrete jungle with a safe and healthy place for our community's children and youth to play.



## Phase I, Spring 2012:

By building innovative partnerships with the TDSB, the City of Toronto (Live Green Toronto Community Investment Program), the Evergreen Foundation, our City Councillor, our School Trustee, Whole Foods Kids, and the Toronto Dollar Foundation, which included \$34,000 in financial support and many thousands more dollars of in kind value, we were able to achieve our Phase I goals:

- Led by school grounds transformation specialist Ann Coffey, we conducted consultations with every student in each of William Burgess' 17 classrooms, all of the school's teachers, the whole Parent Council and our School Grounds Committee (comprised of teachers, parents and grandparents) to determine and define our vision for greening our schoolyard.
- Using the results of these community-based consultations, we worked with the head of TDSB Grounds, a TDSB engineer, a surveyor (sponsored by TDSB), and Ken Hoyle and Associates (a landscape architectural firm contracted by TDSB) to develop a **Master Plan** for our school grounds, which has received TDSB approval.
- Developed environmental curriculum for every grade in the school. With the guidance of our garden consultant, Jane Hayes ("Garden Jane"), teachers were empowered with the skills and lesson plans necessary to take their students and curriculum outside to study nature in action.
- Involved all of our students and teachers and many community volunteers in transforming a portion of our grounds into a thriving vegetable and butterfly learning garden.
- Created an outdoor classroom around the vegetable and butterfly teaching garden, and planted two pear trees.
- Engaged a volunteer Summer Garden Club to care for the garden over the summer (which produced a bumper crop despite the challenging drought).
- We are developing a partnership with the Bethany Church Food Bank, to help maintain the garden and share the harvest of our school's vegetable garden.

**Phase II**, currently underway to be completed 2013. With the financial partnership of our Parent Council, and the generous in kind support of urban forester Steve Smith, we successfully leveraged the success of Phase I projects with our proposal to the City of Toronto's Live Green Toronto Capital Projects Fund, which has approved \$140,000 in funding to complete the following. Please see the Master Plan to help envision these projects.

### Area 1: Vegetable Garden

- Vegetable and Butterfly Garden renewal, with native and heritage plantings
- Planting 25 native berry bushes and six fruit trees
- Building a wooden gazebo to provide shade to the outdoor classroom and to double as a plant trellis (50% funded)
- Installation of a garden shed, rain barrels and compost bins

### Area 2: Front of School

- Creating a Shade Garden and a Pollinator Garden in the front of the school
- All costs of removing fencing to make the gardens at the front of the school possible

### Area 3: Field Area

- Creating a "Jungle Garden" (native trees and shrubs, with paths for children to explore)
- Planting 25 native deciduous trees in the field area

### Area 4: Hard Surface Play Area

- Creating three "mini-forests" consisting of grouped plantings of native trees, and a forest floor in the playground area
- Three stone planter boxes (50% funded)

Live Green Toronto Capital Projects Fund also provided 50% funding for an educational consultant to continue curriculum development and training students and teachers in the maintenance of a well-established multi-year garden.



**Phase II** projects, pending funding.

Area 1: Vegetable Garden

- Three semi-circular seating areas for community meetings and outdoor classes
- Three picnic benches
- A “living wall” with solar powered pump, to be installed on the school’s west wall
- A wooden gazebo to provide shade to the outdoor classroom and to double as a plant trellis (50% funding)

Area 2: Front of School

- Two stone seating areas for community and school use

Area 3: Hard Surface Play Area

- Three stone planter boxes (50% funding)

**Phase III** projects, which will commence in Spring 2013 and completed no later than Fall 2015

Area III: Field Area

- Installation of a Discovery Walk with dry stream/waterfall, and a native meadow
- Creation of a Naturalized Fitness Trail, with fitness stations (eg log balance beams), complete with signage describing uses and benefits

Area IV: Hard Surface Play Area

- Installation of a Natural Playground, with berm slides and structures made from natural materials
- For the youngest children, a Pencil Palisade free play area with access to loose parts play, and toadstool seating
- Tri-Arm basketball post and nets (basketball adapted for younger children) and Tri-Hoop basketball units for older children and teenagers
- Games for children painted on school walls and asphalt, and train car seating with a train track wall mural
- Ball hockey enclosure for all ages
- Removal of concrete and other materials, as required for new installations

Costs associated with all areas include an educational consultant (50% funding), a Coordinator of Project Implementation, and the development of architectural plans for project implementation.

Along with the benefits that William Burgess Elementary School and its community will receive, this project will help us identify the obstacles to greening. We will be working with School Trustee Cathy Dandy from a systems perspective to put together a “how to” guide to support other parent groups and schools with their greening plans. The engagement of the School Trustee and the TDSB in this project will make greening efforts at other schools easier in future.

When completed, our school grounds will include the first natural playground in the TDSB, the most complete and accessible park in our immediate neighbourhood, an outstanding teaching and play area for our students, and a wonderful learning and recreational area for all members of our community.





# GRANTS AND DONORS TO-DATE



In 2011, through the Live Green Community Investment Program, Live Green Toronto provided us with almost **\$22,000** in grant money. This grant money has enabled us to hire key consultants, purchase trees, plant material, seeds and gardening tools, organize educational materials for our upcoming Earth Day event and allowed us to purchase numerous other items for the Earth Day event and launch of our 100-year celebration.

In 2012, through the Live Green Capital Funds Program, Live Green Toronto has approved **\$140,000!** Some highlights of what this grant will make possible are:

- Shade and Pollinator Gardens in the front of the school
- "Jungle Garden" (trees and bushes with paths for children to explore) by the dome climber
- Vegetable and Butterfly Garden
- 31 Trees (25 Deciduous in the field area and 6 Fruit in the vegetable garden area)
- Creation of three "mini forests" and a forest floor
- Berry Bushes
- All costs of removal of fencing to make the gardens at the front of the school possible
- Garden Shed
- Rain Barrels and Compost Bins

We have also received commitment of partial funding (50%) for:

- Three Stone Planter Boxes that double as seating (these are like the big planter boxes seen in commercial areas such as the shopping complex at Laird and Eglinton)
- Educational Consultant
- Wooden Gazebo in the vegetable garden area to provide shade to the outdoor classroom and double as a plant trellis



Receiving **\$3,320** from the Toyota-Evergreen Grant has allowed us to fund the seating for the outdoor classroom, purchase plant material for the butterfly garden and allowed funding for two native trees. As well, we're working on putting some of that money towards a garden trellis



We have secured **\$2,000** from Whole Foods to use towards seeds, plants, tools and tool storage. You have seen this money put to good use already with the garden we planted in 2012!



Providing cultivator, soil and a landscape architect, the TDSB has shown full support to the William Burgess Public School School greening effort!



Helping us start the greening process for the school, William Burgess Parent Council provided **\$1,000** towards the 2011/2012 school year for trees, shrubs, mulch and compost materials and has now provided **\$16,000** towards the 2012/2013 school year for asphalt



See that logo with the trees and books at the top of the page? Blackjet advertising agency designed that for us in kind. You'll definitely see this logo around the school and on various communications over the next few years!





# BRINGING BACK NATURE... IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Acceptance of Toyota - Evergreen Learning Grounds Grant  
The Mirror - April 19, 2012, Page 20



## DOWNTOWN AUTO GROUP GIVES BACK

Berent Gee, director of marketing, Toyota (centre left) and Jenan Culic, general manager sales, Toyota (right), presented a cheque for \$3,300 to William Burgess Public School for their re-greening of the school grounds initiative and nature inclusive learning environment. (Left) Cam Collyer, program director at the Evergreen Foundation, Leigh Meraw and Alexandra Maric-James, co-chairs of the William Burgess School Grounds committee.

## Bringing Back Nature to William Burgess Mary Fragedakis Spring 2012 Newsletter



*The Bringing Back Nature to William Burgess School Project has been awarded more than \$20,000 in grants from Live Green Toronto – congratulations to Principal Jennifer Zurba, Alex Maric-Jones and their great team.*

# BRINGING BACK NATURE... IN THE SPOTLIGHT



## Dealer News

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES COAST-TO-COAST || SPRING-SUMMER 2012

### Toyota Communities

Jenan Culic and Berant Gee from Downtown Toyota recently presented William Burgess Public School, in Toronto's East York neighbourhood, with \$3,320 through the 2011-12 Toyota Evergreen Learning Grounds funding program. Downtown Toyota is no stranger to this program and has been matched with schools nine times since 2000!



From left: Berant Gee, Jenan Culic from Downtown Toyota, Leigh Meraw and Alexandra Maric-Jones from the William Burgess School Grounds Committee

William Burgess PS already has a well-developed School Grounds Committee, and has been working with city councilor, Mary Fregedakis, and Evergreen's Associate at the TDSB, Gail Bornstein, to come up with creative ways to green up their school yard. This particular project is a great example of how school ground greening projects are most successful when a diverse group of community members are involved.

Seeing this amount of support from a diversity of project partners is very inspiring and a great reminder that school ground greening projects serve more than the school's students and teachers. Involving many members of the community is also a great way to gain even more support for a project, not to mention media attention.

"The Toyota Dealership has been a very important partner in this process," said school grounds committee member Leigh Meraw, when asked about Downtown Toyota. "They have helped get the vision off the ground. This is huge in generating support from other groups. Together, with the William Burgess Parent Council, they have been 'the snowflakes in the snowball' in terms of financing our vision."

With the funding awarded through the Toyota Evergreen Learning Grounds funding program, the team at William Burgess School will continue to develop an interactive learning space that can be used by students, teachers and the community, including a food and butterfly garden in the courtyard and a shaded outdoor classroom.

Over the next few years, the school also plans to plant more native trees on the school grounds to create a mini arboretum at the school. The arboretum will be an educational resource for students and teachers, complementing the school's curriculum, and it will also help to increase green space in the neighbourhood.

In addition to presenting the school with a cheque and certificate at a recent event, Downtown Toyota offered to help with some of the school's transportation needs relating to this project. Leigh was quick to respond: "We will most likely be taking them up on this!"

DEALER NEWS || SPRING-SUMMER 2012





# WILLIAM BURGESS

## EARTH DAY POSTER CONTEST

# ANNOUNCING...

# THE WINNERS!!

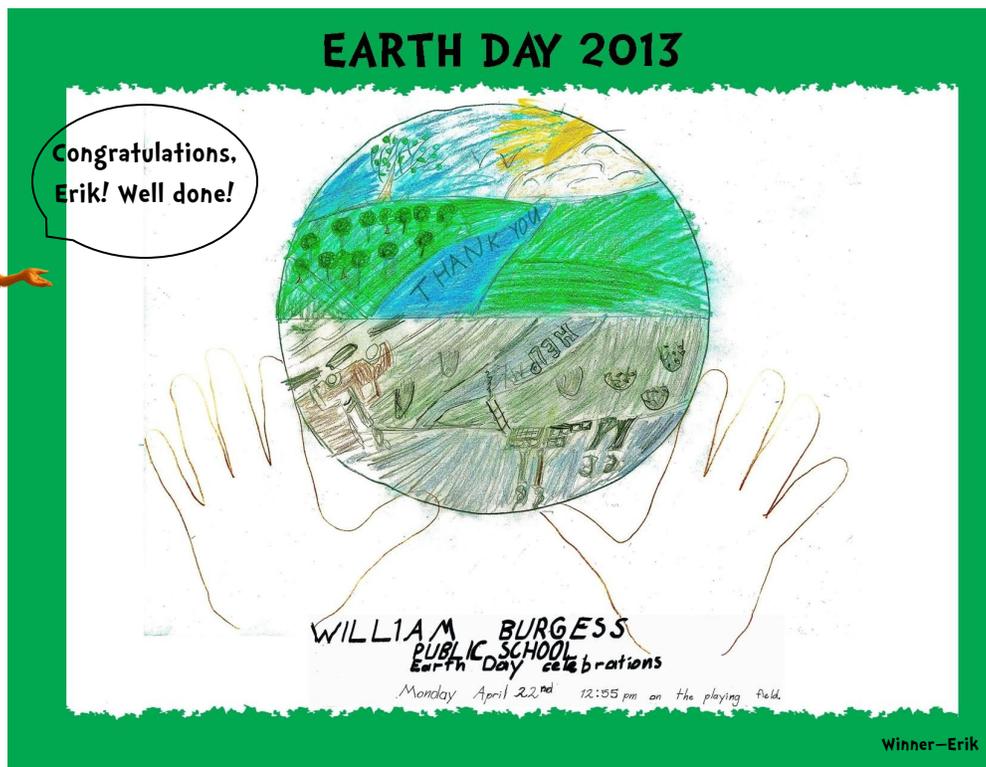
In March 2013, the School Grounds Committee held a poster contest to help spread the news about our Earth Day celebrations! We had three winning posters and an honourable mention to showcase. These four posters were posted throughout the school and all four students received poster-sized mounted prints of their creations.

A great job and a heartfelt thank you goes out to all students that participated and the teachers that guided them along!

The theme for the Earth Day poster was:

## UNLESS

“UNLESS someone like you cares a whole awful lot,  
Nothing is going to get better. It’s not.” - *Dr. Suess, The Lorax*



TURN OVER FOR  
MORE WINNERS!



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# WILLIAM BURGESS EARTH DAY POSTER CONTEST



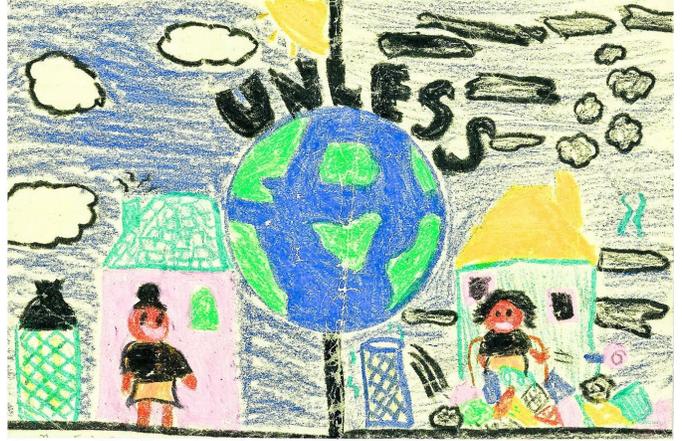
Look at the detail that Abbey did!



**EARTH DAY 2013**  
Monday April 22nd  
12:55 pm  
William Burgess  
play field

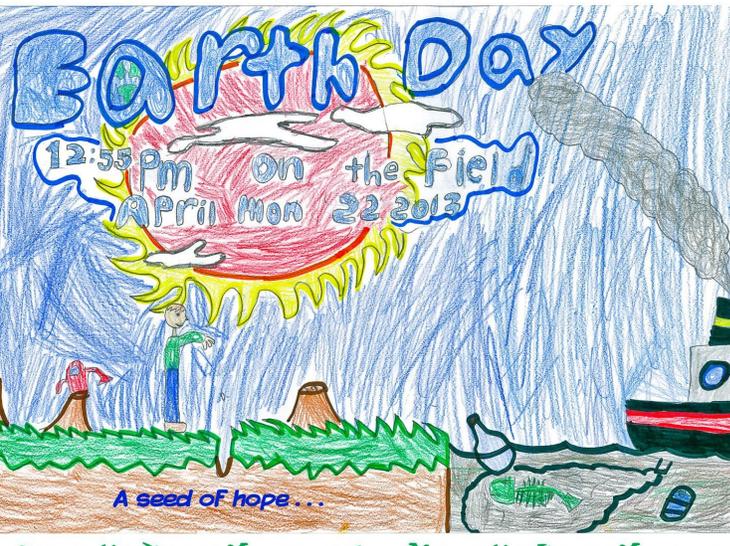
Winner—Abbey

The Earth Day event will be held at school on Monday April 22nd with special ceremonies to take place at the playing field (at 12:55pm)



Winner—Anastasia

Great work on showing two sides to the story, Anastasia!



Honourable Mention—Noah

Honourable mention goes out to Noah!



