

2020 Conservation Award – Non-Member: Daniel Buckles and Debra Huron

This award is given in recognition of an outstanding contribution by a non-member in the cause of natural history conservation in the Ottawa Valley, with particular emphasis on activities within the Ottawa District.

The 2020 award goes to two particularly deserving individuals, Daniel Buckles and Debra Huron, for their long dedication to the historic bur oak trees in the Champlain Park neighbourhood of Ottawa.



A slice of a giant bur oak. Photo by Daniel Buckles.

Bur oaks are slow-growing and majestic trees, and those in Champlain Park are of a venerable age, with one confirmed to be more than 190 years old; they are descendants of an old-growth oak forest as indicated by the informative Champlain Oaks website (<https://www.champlainoaks.net/>).

The oaks are a source of pride in the area; however, recent development has seen the removal of several gigantic oaks, much

against the wishes of the established neighbourhood. This motivated Daniel Buckles and Debra Huron to initiate and organize the Champlain Oaks Project in 2010, bringing together a volunteer group of neighbours to celebrate, preserve and restore the historic oak forest in Ottawa's west end. Daniel & Debra, as the animators and catalysts, have ensured the engagement and momentum of the group.

Raising awareness of the heritage value and history of the old bur oaks and current threats to them is an important way to garner support for preserving the trees. Daniel and Debra conceived the idea for, and provided coordinated, effective leadership to complete, the informative oak display at the Champlain Park Field House: outside, a slice of a giant bur oak that was lost to development is displayed; and inside, a timeline of the tree history of the neighbourhood is presented. Daniel and Debra have tirelessly promoted the Champlain Oaks directly to City of Ottawa forestry staff, on National Tree Day events, with the children from the local school, through their City Councillor, and in the media.

Thanks to Daniel's and Debra's efforts, in 2017 and 2018, seven ancient bur oaks were named Heritage Trees, complete with heritage plaques, by Forests Ontario. To gain this commemorative designation, Daniel and Debra had rallied support from neighbours and tree-lovers and environmentalists from across the city. In 2019, they organized a Jane's Walk to celebrate the Heritage Trees.

A crucial means of protection for mature trees is the City of Ottawa's Tree Protection By-law, recently consolidated and strengthened, and the updated Urban Forest Management Plan. Daniel coordinated community input to both of these initiatives to ensure that the needs of the Champlain Oaks were considered. He also coordinated local comments on the City's tree planting plans in their neighbourhood.

Daniel spearheaded the Champlain Park community's adoption of *Neighbourwoods*, a community-based tree inventory, monitoring and stewardship planning program. Training of volunteers was provided, a good amount of tree inventory data was collected, and two educational infographics were produced.

Maintaining the unique genetic diversity of the heritage oak trees is important due to their adaptations to conditions in the area. To this end, Daniel and Debra maintain a backyard nursery of baby bur oaks grown from acorns of heritage trees. The saplings are available for tree planting in the neighbourhood. Daniel, Debra and the local Environment Committee volunteers also produced a brochure, *Planting Trees in Small Spaces*, that was distributed throughout the community.

Mapping Ottawa's Lost Trees is another project initiated by Daniel and Debra. They piloted its precursor prior to the city-wide launch by partners in 2018. It is an interactive mapping tool that will help keep track of what is being lost from the urban forest and is planned to be linked to other mapping tools.

The OFNC is pleased to confer the Conservation Award for a Non-Member to Daniel Buckles and Debra Huron.

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