

Article rank ■■■■

## Bowker Creek advocates celebrate four years

### Group formed to clean up pollution in urban watershed

*KATIE DeROSA Times Colonist*  
kderosa@tc.canwest.com

From the bridge that crosses Bowker Creek just behind Richmond Elementary School in Saanich, there is a plastic bag tangled among the tree branches, a football lying in the water and an old couch cushion strewn among the bushes.

In fact, it took a terse warning to her 12 year-old to stay out of the “dirty” creek to make Carolyn Knight care about cleaning up the urban watershed.

Now, the local artist and member of the Bowker Creek Initiative wants her art to inspire local residents to help return the creek to the natural haven it once was.

“The children should be able to play in the water,” she said.

Knight unveiled a steppingstone mosaic at the Bowker Creek celebration yesterday at Richmond Elementary School. The colourful melange of stones form a leaping salmon, a tribute to the lush colony of fish that used to populate the creek 50 years ago.

Hundreds of community members came out for a salmon barbecue and celebration marking four years since the spawning of the Bowker Creek Initiative, an effort between community members and local governments to revive the urban watershed.

The eight-kilometre creek meanders through Victoria, Saanich and Oak Bay starting at the University of Victoria and opening up into the ocean near Willows Beach. The majority of the creek is underground, covered up by urban developments like roads and homes and the Hillside Shopping Centre. The portions that are above ground suffer from urban runoff and pollution.

Ian Graeme, president of the Friends of Bowker Creek Society, said the celebration was about changing how people look at the creek. “Do you see it as a place where you can dump shopping carts and garbage, or do you see it as a really valuable community asset?” He said people need to be educated about where the creek flows so they are cautious when using pesticides or other chemicals that can run into the water.

More than 200 people signed the watershed pledge, said Graeme, a commitment from homeowners and business owners to help reduce pollution in the creek.

Knight’s mosaic will be placed in the North Jubilee neighbourhood spirit garden to “remind us that the creek is beneath our feet,” she said.

Last year, the province pledged \$50,000 to advance a master drainage plan that studied ways to reduce stormwater runoff into the 1,028-hectare watershed. The second phase will look at improving water quality and daylighting some buried portions of the creek.

Tanis Douglas, one of the event organizers, said showcasing the continued revival efforts of Bowker Creek will remind local residents, especially children, that even in their urban neighbourhoods, they can connect with nature.

“Can you walk along the creek?” one Saanich resident asked Graeme during the celebration. That is exactly the vision members of the initiative have in mind. Their next goal is to create a path that winds along the creek, connecting the three municipalities and revitalizing neighbourhoods, said Graeme.

“Who wouldn’t want a clear babbling brook running through their neighbourhood, running over their toes?” he asked.

ADRIAN LAM, TIMES COLONIST



**Tanis Douglas, in her queen-bee finery, was one of the organizers of yesterday’s celebrations marking four years of the Bowker Creek Initiative.**

ADRIAN LAM, TIMES COLONIST



**Five-year-old Jordan Mercer and her mother, Andrea, play at one of the exhibits as people celebrate four years of progress in the Bowker Creek initiative yesterday.**

