

## Making History by Reinventing the Future

“Geography clamors for history,” novelist Yann Martel reminds us. Take a springtime stroll around the unique Yorklands Green Hub site in Guelph near York and Watson Roads. It's a rolling 47 acres of stream-and-stone-wall-laced land. We have a vision of transforming this heritage geography into a public ecological learning centre. It's a place with a history of reform that we wish to carry into the future.

For 11,000 years this land was native land. With the arrival of British settlers and the founding of Guelph in the 1800s, it was cleared for farmland. Then in 1910, seven farms were turned into a working provincial reformatory for young offenders. It's goal was humane: to reduce the rate of re-offense by helping those convicted to become, through hard work at a variety of occupations, “contributing members of society.”



*The Ontario Reformatory Stone Quarry, 1912.*

The first young inmates were brought to live in the existing farm buildings. They dug ponds and a limestone quarry. They landscaped the site with stone walls and steps, and bridges over Clyde Creek. And they built the prison buildings, including



*The former Guelph Correctional Centre's Administration Building.*

architect John Lyle's classic administration building which dominates the site today.

In the years that followed, they completed over 20 buildings. And on that farm they were given a chance – and some choice – of gaining working skills to equip them for their future lives. At its peak, the Guelph Correctional Centre's working farm had inmates working, in addition to farming, in its dairy, greenhouse, abattoir, wood-working shop, orchards, cannery, bakery, machine shop, woolen mill, tailor shop, mattress factory, and laundry. It was a place of building skills for the future. The reformatory was self-sufficient, provided for other institutions, and turned a profit.

But with time, constrained budgets and mixed prison populations, the ideal of reform became more difficult to implement. Farming was discontinued in 1970. The GCC was decommissioned in 2001.

Today, we all need new skills for our future. We need to learn to live within the limits of nature's boundaries. The vision of the

Yorklands Green Hub is to create, on this historic site, a place where we can create a new kind of history. The YGH vision is to build a legacy of sustainability for future generations, with a focus on organic urban agriculture, protection of our water resources, and renewable energy. Through education, demonstration, hands-on participation, and business applications based on the best research, we want to provide a model green hub where people can learn to speed the transition to a green future – and grapple with climate change.

In 2016 we will begin a \$3 million capital fundraising campaign for the land and the Superintendents' House. We hope you'll join us in making history (see “Fundraiser” p. 4)! ☐



*The Superintendent's House.*



Professor Shoshanah Jacobs and the ICON team at the conclusion of their YGH presentation.

## ICON Helps YGH Hit the Road

On April 13<sup>th</sup> YGH representatives were invited to a unique academic presentation. The Yorklands Green Hub “mobile learning lab” project was the subject of a semester’s coursework in a new program called ICON at the University of Guelph. The 41 participating students from 14 different departments presented the results of their collaboration on the green design and programming of a sustainability-teaching “tiny house” classroom on wheels.

The program is called ICON, short for Ideas Congress. It’s an innovative development and entrepreneurship program in the faculty of Arts and Sciences. A brainchild of faculty members Dr. Shoshanah Jacobs and Dr. Daniel Gillis in 2014, ICON’s ambition is to promote interdisciplinary and collaboration across departments at the university, and introduce students to real-world challenges by pairing a multi-disciplined class with a business or a community group.

For the YGH project their task was two-fold: to develop a design for the

physical rolling educational caravan and its green systems, and to create curriculum coordinated with Ontario schools to illustrate environmentally-friendly solutions for delivery to students and the community. The lessons they wrote are themed around YGH’s three pillars of sustainable urban agriculture, water conservation and renewable energy.

The design team presented plans for a compact teaching lab that incorporates a grey-water treatment system with see-through pipes, solar panels as a power source, and a “green wall” garden on one of the interior walls to provide a vertical garden for a variety of plants and herbs. The green wall demonstrates how to grow plants indoors with water recycled through a grey-water system. Other proposed tiny house features include a composting toilet, a reclaimed old lumber floor, and a winding stairway to combine storage with access to an upper-level sleeping loft for an instructor. The team enthusiastically proposed the acronym “YELL!” for the mobile lab’s exterior walls, painted in YGH logo colours, short for Yorklands Eco-Learning Lab.

The ICON students’ proposals will form the basis for the next steps on the mobile learning lab’s evolution. We congratulate them on rising to the very considerable challenge of a complex task, and thank them for their wonderful contribution to YGH’s ability to take our vision and the message out to the community. ☐

## What is the Yorklands Green Hub?

The Yorklands Green Hub is a non-partisan citizens’ group that is promoting the creation of an Ontario sustainable eco-centre at the former Guelph Correctional Centre (GCC). The goal: a self-sustaining forum where institutions, groups and sustainable businesses can come together in a structured setting to promote greater understanding and participation in making the transition towards a low-emissions, climate-stable future.

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## Turning Brown to Green: Reclaiming Brownfields for New Urban Use

Since the Industrial Revolution, humans have left unwanted substances behind them in the course of their manufacturing activities. Many industries - mining, smelting, refining, metal-working - have left residues of their by-products in abandoned worksites. Lands contaminated with toxic chemicals or hazardous waste are referred to by planners and developers as "brown-fields." It's a designation that means land may not be used for some purposes without a thorough cleanup, or may be restricted from some future uses entirely.



*Ontario Reformatory Machine Shop.*

What's this got to do with YGH? The proposed Yorklands Green Hub site is described as having "brown-field remediation challenges." Metal-working and quarrying were among the activities carried out there as part of the many prison jobs done by inmates. Being designated as a brownfield means certain conditions apply for transforming it for a new use. Agriculture may not be possible directly in the soil.

Reclaiming land and soil from contamination is an important environmental process. And YGH would like to count itself as part of a movement of sustainable communities around the world that are addressing this challenge. Increasingly, brown-



*The Toronto Don Valley Brickworks in their heyday. The pit is now a pond and wetland.*

fields are being seen as valuable land be cleaned up, reclaimed and repurposed.

One example of a reclaimed industrial site is the [Eden Project](#), located in the UK's Cornwall. It's a multiple greenhouse biodome complex, built in the crater of an exhausted china clay pit that had been excavated over 160 years. Its two biomes contain plants collected from many diverse environments. Since 2001, the Eden Project has become a world-famous tourist attraction and educational charity.



*The Eden Project tropical biome.*

Closer to home, [HazMat Magazine](#) reports that there are some 30,000 abandoned and underutilized sites across Canada. They also note that cleanup is good investment: at a 2004 GLOBE environmental conference in Vancouver, British Columbia experts estimated they could leverage about

\$380 in public and private benefits for every \$100 invested in recovery of contaminated lands.

The Evergreen Brickworks is one shining example of brownfields transformation. A huge contributor to Toronto's early development, the Don Valley Brickworks produced up to 25 million bricks a year at the peak of its 100-year life. It closed in 1989. In 1993, the Toronto Region Conservation Authority and (then) Metro Parks initiated the Don Valley Brick Works Regeneration Project. The site consisted of an enormous clay pit with brick kilns along its rim. Years of industrial activity left PCB wastes and traces of toxic solvents and waste oils. Extensive cleanup, site remediation and landscaping were undertaken. Some of the original buildings were renovated. A new LEED-certified building was added to the site. Today the [Evergreen Brickworks](#), run by a national environmental group, includes an interpretive centre, a farmers' market, a cafe/ restaurant, event spaces and the new Centre for Green Cities.

Fortunately, many [options](#) are now available for soil cleanup. Once soil analyses are available, YGH will determine best practices for dealing with conditions on the Guelph site. ■

## Our 2016 AGM: Reflecting on First Nations Heritage, Looking Ahead

On April 18<sup>th</sup>, YGH held their 2016 Annual General Meeting (AGM) at the Red Papaya restaurant in the Quebec Street Mall. The keynote speaker for the well-attended event was Gary Warrick, Professor of Indigenous Studies and History, Wilfrid Laurier University, Brantford. He offered an illustrated presentation on the history of First Nations' presence in the Grand River watershed and beyond, from the earliest prehistoric days of settlement to secession of tribal lands through treaties with European colonizers. Professor Warrick was presented with

a Little Sun solar-rechargeable light, one of YGH's current partnering promotions.



*Prof. Gary Warrick addresses our AGM attendees.*

YGH chair Norah Chaloner welcomed the audience, and conveyed the greetings of Ontario Ministry of Education Liz Sandals. She remarked on the fact that there will be a need to assess soil conditions on the Yorklands site with an eye to public health and suitability for urban agriculture.

Two upcoming fundraising efforts YGH were announced: one for the mobile learning lab (MLL), and a \$3 million capital fund for the purchase of the Yorklands property and renovation of the Superintendent's House. The 2016-17 Board was elected.

Contributions to the YGH capital fund are now tax-receiptable thanks to a partnership with the Guelph Community Foundation.

Each YGH committee – Water, Energy, Urban Agriculture, Communications, Fund-raising, and Governance – then presented a brief report of key activities over the past year.

YGH welcomes new committee members! ☐



## Special YGH Fundraiser at the Guelph Bookshelf!!

– May 30th, 2016 –

**Come out and join us for dinner  
and a movie, or a movie and  
meet-and-greet, featuring  
“Living Small”**

A documentary that explores the world of tiny houses through the lives of people on the forefront of this emerging movement.

**Dinner served at 5:30 at  
Mijidaa Cafe & Bistro prior to  
film screening at 7:00 pm.**

**Tickets can be purchased at the  
Bookshelf or at Mijidaa. Info at:  
<http://yorklandsgreenhub.ca/mobile-learning-lab-fundraiser/>**

Resource: **“Soil Assessment  
Guide for Community Gardens”**  
City of Toronto Public Health Dept.  
2011 . [http://www1.toronto.ca/City%20Of%20Toronto/Toronto%20Public%20Health/Healthy%20Public%20Policy/Environmental%20Pollutants/Files/PDF/guide\\_for\\_soil\\_testing\\_2013.pdf](http://www1.toronto.ca/City%20Of%20Toronto/Toronto%20Public%20Health/Healthy%20Public%20Policy/Environmental%20Pollutants/Files/PDF/guide_for_soil_testing_2013.pdf)

## Volunteer with Yorklands Green Hub!

**Our organization is an all-  
volunteer citizens' group.  
This opens up great  
opportunities for our  
members to share  
knowledge and skills - and  
help us achieve our dream of  
a unique public eco-centre in  
Guelph.**



**We invite and encourage you  
to join us! You can reach us  
[here](#)...to sign up.**

**“The Green Door” is a publication of the Yorklands Green Hub  
Communications and Outreach Committee. We welcome news,  
articles and letters. Each must include the author's name and full  
contact information.**

**We reserve the right to refuse or edit all submissions. Ques-  
tions should be directed to the editor or a member of the Board of  
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