JIM HUME MEMORIAL STUDENT ESSAY CONTEST

2012 WINNERS

Canada*West*
FOUNDATION

2012 JIM HUME MEMORIAL
STUDENT ESSAY CONTEST

For over 40 years, the Canada West Foundation has been a passionate advocate for western Canada. From free trade and federal transfers to environmental regulation and immigration, the Canada West Foundation has been at the forefront of the policy debates shaping both the West and the country.

One of the critical pieces of this work has been to encourage, support and foster the public policy leaders of tomorrow through initiatives like our internship program and essay contests. The Jim Hume Memorial Student Essay Contest was developed in order to connect with post-secondary students interested in public policy and challenge them to think critically about current issues in the West.

This year, students were invited to submit essays on the question:

How can we make western Canada an especially inspiring place to live?

The emphasis of this question is on the word *inspiring* and the importance of creating a region that is not only economically successful and socially supportive but one with a high quality of life as well.

Congratulations to our winners and thank you to all that entered this unique contest.

A VERY SPECIAL THANK YOU AS WELL TO **SHEILA O'BRIEN** AND **KEVIN PETERSON** FOR THEIR GENEROUS SPONSORSHIP OF THE 2012 ESSAY CONTEST!

ABOUT JIM HUME

James Borden (Jim) Hume was an ardent supporter of the Canada West Foundation. He served on the Foundation's Board from 1995 until his death in 2009 and, through the Kahanoff Foundation, was involved in many of our major projects spanning natural capital, regional economic development, the nonprofit sector and gambling policy.

He believed that a strong public policy voice from western Canada was of benefit to all Canadians and that a prosperous West had both the opportunity and obligation for constructive national leadership. Jim's infectious optimism shaped his outlook on western Canada and his contributions to the Canada West Foundation.

The essays in this document were submitted in response to the 2011/12 Canada West Foundation Jim Hume Memorial Student Essay Contest. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Canada West Foundation's Board of Directors, advisors or funders. Permission to use or reproduce this document is granted for personal or classroom use without fee and without formal request provided that it is properly cited. Copies may not be made or distributed for profit or commercial advantage.

FIRST PLACE ESSAY

Stephanie Cleveland

Brandon University | Pre-Psychiatric Nursing

Connected Neighbours
How Food Can Build Strong Communities

Renowned chef and food writer James Beard was known to have said: "Food is our common ground, a universal experience." These words hold inherent truth, so what better way to unite a community than through food? Shared gardens, fruit harvesting initiatives and collective kitchens can easily be operated in a symbiotic fashion and on a wide spread scale. Food in a community context becomes a means of meeting the social, cultural and spiritual needs of the people.

This essay will demonstrate how urban farming—including shared gardens, fruit harvesting initiatives and community kitchens—has the ability to shape our communities through exercise and interaction, developing food security, bridging community social networks and strengthening support for multiculturalism in western Canada.

Shared Gardens

Shared gardens refer to a single piece of land that is collectively gardened by a group of people. The idea is not a new one but society's newfound interest in local produce is causing a resurgence of these cultivated green spaces in Canada. Between the Food Policy Council in Calgary and Vancouver's City Council alone there is a goal to establish thousands more in the years ahead. In 2010, Vancouver announced a goal of creating 2,010 spaces to honour the year it hosted the Olympics (Elton). This goal has been surpassed with 3,700 plots currently available (City of Vancouver).

Initial start-up for a shared garden has been estimated at $1,500-$4,000 depending on size and design (Urban Harvest). These early costs may seem daunting but they can be significantly reduced with some ingenuity and research. Supportive municipal and provincial government policy can, where available, also help curb expenses. Some good examples of supportive public policy in western Canada illustrate this. In Calgary, for example, upon project approval, "…new gardens may receive up to $5,000 in materials and irrigation…" from the City (City of Calgary). In Manitoba, the Neighborhood Renewal Fund provides funding to projects supporting the growth and well-being of communities (Manitoba Housing and Community Development). This resulted in the City of Brandon receiving $8,300 toward their gardens from the fund in 2009 (Province of Manitoba News Releases).

At an individual level, gardening has a multitude of benefits. It's an aerobic exercise that offers an opportunity for physical activity at a relaxed but persistent pace. Studies have shown that gardening strengthens immunity, reduces rates of asthma, decreases stress and increases a sense of well-being in participants (NSEN). There are additional health benefits of eating fresh food that has been grown without the use of commercial pesticides and fertilizers. This is significant because even small plots are able to produce sizeable amounts of food. On average, shared gardens produce 540 pounds of produce per year (Lyson 2004).

Beyond offering some resolution to larger social issues, such as epidemic obesity, shared gardens beautify public areas and create positive circumstances for neighbours to interact. People of different abilities, backgrounds and ages can maintain a productive food space at low cost while ensuring increased food security.

Fruit Harvesting Initiatives

Growing and harvesting fresh and nutritional vegetables can easily be done on urban plots in a relatively short amount of time. Fruit is a different story. Trees can take between two to six years to start bearing fruit but often produce a large quantity once they are fully mature.

Fruit trees on personal property often go unpicked. The produce ripens, falls to the ground and rots. The good news is there are some resourceful programs to share the spoils, so to speak, such as gathering collectives. Gathering collectives focus on connecting tree owners with fruit pickers so the product can be harvested in a timely manner. Commonly, one-third of the bounty goes to the proprietor of the trees, one-third to the pickers and the remaining third goes to a charitable organization (Not Far From The Tree). These programs allow neighbours to share with one another while also supporting a charitable endeavour.

Community Kitchens

Shared gardens and fruit gathering programs create a solid foundation for community kitchens. A community kitchen is one "in which people enjoy preparing good, healthy food, trying new recipes, socializing, and going home with more food than they could make at home [on their own]" (Field). These collectives are also known for participating in local bulk buying strategies.

Bulk buying strategies can support the local economy and drive down prices for group members. By contacting a local farmer, orders can be placed directly at the source for kitchen staples. It is then possible to receive a variety of fresh meat, produce and herbs without extensive transport times. These strategies enable a connection between local farmers and consumer groups and help connect individuals to their food sources.

Every member of the community kitchen plays an important role in the planning, prep work and cooking of each meal. Through these creative processes, members are encouraged to share their culinary ideas with one another while developing confidence, reducing social isolation and promoting food knowledge (Field).

In multicultural neighbourhoods, organized kitchens can bring together a variety of people. Every culture around the globe has food rooted in its respective traditions. Cooking together is an opportunity to communicate a piece of that tradition with neighbours. Members have the chance to make and taste culturally inspired dishes that they may not have otherwise encountered. These interactions serve as an educational opportunity and learning about other cultures and beliefs helps to deepen intercultural understanding and appreciation.

Conclusion

Participation in all of these food-based initiatives can be increased by their integration "into broader community projects such as after-school programs for children, activities for the elderly and resources for food banks…" (Local Government Commission). Creating these types of integrated community activities serves to connect and protect all members of a community and creates a more inspiring and welcoming place for people to live.

Urban farming, fruit harvesting and community kitchens have the potential to shape neighbourhoods and bring people together. These activities create forums for socialization, sharing and an optimization of health by increasing human contact and movement. By giving a community its own character and spirit, inhabitants develop a link between themselves, their neighbors and the place they live. A clear indication of commitment and respect is the lower crime rates and reduction in graffiti and littering that has been noted in areas with above average green vegetation (NSEN).

These efforts around connecting people through food, used in conjunction with one another, create a movement. They are a viable way to foster and strengthen community bonds while developing skill sets that facilitate self-sufficiency. People who have a sense of belonging and purpose outwardly reflect that with pride and welcoming. Food is a simple, yet effective, way of establishing neighbourhoods, cities and provinces that are truly desirable and inspirational places to live.

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STEPHANIE IS IN HER PRE-PSYCHIATRIC NURSING YEAR AT BRANDON UNIVERSITY AND HOPES TO MAKE IT INTO THE FACULTY FOR YEAR TWO. RESIDING IN WINNIPEG, MANITOBA, SHE IS CURRENTLY PLANNING TO WORK WITH INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE CO-OCCURRING MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE DISORDERS UPON RECEIVING HER B.SC.

SECOND PLACE ESSAY

Alyse Munro Hindley

Camosun College Interurban Campus | Civil Engineering Technology Access

Public Art
Inspiring Culture in Western Canada

How can we make western Canada an especially inspiring place to live? The landscapes, the Pacific coastline, the rainforests – these can all spark interest, but to make western Canada a truly awesome place we need to tap into our creative resources and celebrate our culture. Local artists have unique ways of expressing the culture of their homestead. Public displays of local artwork brighten our environment and set us apart. I believe that to show how inspiring western Canada can be we need to show our culture through local artists, public displays of exceptional artwork and community collaboration to celebrate all that makes the West the best.

Western Canada has an abundance of local artists each with their own unique style shaped by their home. From handcrafted jewellery and driftwood furniture to larger-than-life murals and totem poles, these works are a true representation of western culture. Many shops and galleries have local artists' products, which generate interest in western Canada as a place for travel and investment when tourists bring them home to show friends and family. The amazing thing about local artists is they each have their own style that represents their experiences and the many different backgrounds and lifestyles that come together in a community.

The murals of the town of Chemainus within the North Cowichan region, in particular, are a wonderful representation of how a diverse community can rally together to create a cohesive and artful display of their culture and history. After a decline in the forest industry, the backbone of Chemainus' economy, the North Cowichan Council developed a revitalization project to reinvent the downtown area and outdated main street. One year later the mill shut down leaving 700 in a town of 4,000 without work. The people of Chemainus continued to work on revitalizing their downtown and resident Karl Schutz offered the breakthrough notion of "painting history on the walls" (Cowichan). There are now over three dozen murals painted, all based on real events and people of the city's past. These murals now enjoy world renown and attract hundreds of thousands of people to the town every year.

By having large, prominent displays of local artwork we can convey our spirit, culture and personality to all who visit. These exhibits help define unique cultures, bring travellers and provide inspiration to all who view them. Public art around the world provides cultural landmarks such as the Moai stone monuments of Easter Island, the *Arc de Triomphe* in Paris and the totem poles of coastal British Columbia. These pieces of art are the tangible expressions of the cultures that created them. They also serve as a point of pride and pinnacle of community identity in a time when it is difficult to distinguish one metropolis from another. Western Canada is socially diverse and comprised of cultures from all walks of life. With so many different cultures in the West these displays help create a sense of belonging and provide a way to express our individuality and heritage. Furthermore, as our culture is changed and influenced by people of other cultures joining our community we can see these changes reflected in the arts.

These public projects require the cooperation of a variety of key players. Artists, engineers, public officials, businesses, local residents and sponsors all must work together to make these projects a success. Especially important is the role of governments, from municipal to provincial, in providing the resources and encouragement of public art. The Canada Council for the Arts was established to "foster and promote the study and enjoyment of, and the production of works in, the arts" (Canada Council for the Arts). There are several organizations dedicated to the funding and procurement of public arts. With the help of these organizations, cities can define and express themselves and take pride in their community while beautifying their public spaces. One of the great benefits of these outdoor displays is that they are accessible to everyone at no cost and therefore invite the entire community to enjoy and celebrate the arts and take pride in their hometown.

Western Canada becomes a more inspiring place to live when we can take pleasure and pride in the culturally rich communities of the West by encouraging the creation of new public art and cherishing that which we already have. With a working collaboration of government, organizations and individuals we can achieve this goal and ensure that we do not become just another commune of humans on the map with the same societal elements and infrastructure of any other section of the globe. With public art, we can maintain western Canada as a place of expression that creates a true home for the people who live here and a beacon for those who do not.

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ALYSE MUNRO HINDLEY IS STUDYING CIVIL ENGINEERING AT CAMOSUN COLLEGE IN VICTORIA, BC. SHE IS IN HER FIRST YEAR AND HOPES TO WORK ON URBAN DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS, LIKE LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT SYSTEMS, UPON GRADUATION.

THIRD PLACE ESSAY

Justin Chen

Simon Fraser University | B.A. International Studies

Role Model Communities

Urban Planning in the Southeast False Creek Area

Vancouver is rated as the third most livable city in the world according to the 2012 report by the Economist Intelligence Unit or EIU (Vancouver Sun 2012). Although the report shows that Vancouver is a great place to live, the city still needs to be careful of how it develops in the future. According to the 2011 Census, Vancouver proper is the densest city in Canada and the population is still growing above the national average (Statistics Canada). Therefore, there needs to be adequate urban space set aside and efficient residential planning to accommodate the influx of people. As residential units are being built the question becomes: should priority be placed on increasing density by constructing dense skyscraper communities such as the condominium high rises in downtown Vancouver? Or can high urban density be achieved while still integrating diversity and social comfortability within our urban residences? I believe there should be an emphasis on creating diverse homes as this will enable Vancouver to be an inspirational model for other cities to follow.

Social capital—which is defined by Brisson as "the trusting network of relationships between members of a neighborhood"—is a key factor in creating homes for people. It is important to note that "home" is a reference to an abstract idea built upon the relations of trust or bonding social capital rather than a physical area of residence.

Given the importance of social capital in creating homes for people, the question that must be asked is: as Vancouver becomes increasingly dense, does that facilitate a sense of trust and create homes? Regoeczi, compiled multiple studies along with her own sample analysis from a survey conducted by the Toronto Mental Health and Stress Study. She found that residents in high density areas "respond to crowding stress with… increased depression… [and] higher levels of withdrawal," revealing a concern for resident social health as well as a lack of bonding social capital. One way to increase bonding social capital, then, is to create less crowded, low-density residential areas. This creates a tension, however, because increased urban sprawl results in a less environmentally friendly city with increased carbon emissions, loss of forest cover and impacts on local watershed quality (Frumkin). Kushner, a professor at Utrecht University, agrees that suburban sprawl "increases dominance of automobile transport, and environmental nonsustainability". Vancouver's most important livability feature is its environment. As Cooper points out, Vancouver "boast[s] a spectacular natural landscape, a temperate clime" all while guarding a "strong economy". Therefore, increasing urban sprawl would not be ideal in improving Vancouver's livability.

One model that may provide a solution is the South East False Creek (S.E.F.C), an urban community within Vancouver that was built based upon the planning principles of the Integrated Community Sustainability Planning (ICSP) initiative. The ICSP is a tool for creating three dimensional communities that consider the sustainability of economics, society and ecology (Ling et al.). This model is different from other sustainable community models because there is a focus on social participation and collaboration within the proposed community where urban development occurs. Collaborators include businesses, community organizations, conservation groups, developers and government. Collaboration among the participants develops bonding social capital and reinforces the network of relationships that was highlighted by Brisson as being important. John Irwin, researcher and member of the S.E.F.C. Working Group, says community members were able to collaborate to promote the conservation of green space, integration of arts and culture and establishment of affordable housing (2012).

All these factors have created a sense of community inclusion. One economic participant responded positively to the use of social participation in the policy document implemented in S.E.F.C during an interview conducted by Irwin:

> The document is empowering. It recognizes the need for inclusiveness… it's a fundamental democracy… It's a fundamental definition of participation. Having a voice [and] having a say. And it allows the intelligence of the citizen to come forward… There's something out there that empowers people and insults them when they're not consulted. (2007: 247)

This personal account emphasizes how the empowering aspect of social participation creates feelings of personal ownership within communities and develops networking relationships between community members, thus creating bonding social capital. Brisson and Usher observed similar results their study of bonding social capital in low-income neighbourhoods. They found that "resident participation is the strongest predictor of an individual's bonding social capital… suggest[ing] that empowering approaches to low-income neighbourhood development… can have an impact on the development of bonding social capital for families". S.E.F.C offers a positive western Canadian example of how homes can be created within dense communities without compromising bonding social capital.

More cities should be developed with this tool to help integrate community members and encourage participation in planning communities. Not only will trusting relationships be built within these established homes by doing so but more community voices will be heard as well, creating a vibrant community richness. This vibrancy is evident in Southeast False Creek. Walking through the area reveals Aboriginal artwork, conservation efforts along the ocean shoreline and an integration of corporate as well as local businesses into a dynamic community mosaic.

As Vancouver and other western Canadian cities grow, and more people are attracted into the cities, Integrated Sustainable Community Planning is a method of creating homes rather than houses by developing bonding social capital. Through community collaboration, trusting relationships are manifested into the architecture of the neighbourhood. This is evident in Southeast False Creek's physical features that express the empowerment of these individual voices and create a diverse community of homes. The use of Integrated Community Sustainability Planning within Southeast False Creek offers us a model of what can be achieved and how Vancouver can be an inspiration for other cities to follow. We already see the tool being implemented across Canada in Nova Scotia, Ontario and Alberta (Town of Bridgewater, the City of Kingston and Alberta Urban Municipalities Association). Since the City of Vancouver launched the goal of being the world's Greenest City by 2020, Integrated Community Sustainability Planning will be a formidable tool in accomplishing that goal by creating inspiring homes within sustainable communities.

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JUSTIN CHEN IS A SECOND YEAR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES MAJOR AT SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY IN BURNABY, BC. HE IS EXTREMELY INTERESTED IN ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP AND SUSTAINABILITY, PARTICULARLY AFTER PARTICIPATING IN THE NATIONAL YOUTH VOLUNTEER PROGRAM, KATIMAVIK, AND TIME SPENT IN MANITOBA WWOOFing.