

# United Nations recognizes Green Legacy Program

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GUELPH -

It started out as a simple idea - to plant trees and make Wellington County a little greener. Now it is a simple idea with United Nations recognition.

It was a morning of celebrating environmental milestones on Nov. 25, as the **County of Wellington's Green Legacy Program received recognition from the United Nations for its contribution to the environment.**

The announcement was made, appropriately enough, following a premiere of a documentary on the success of the program. That screening was held at the Bookshelf cinema for an audience of 80 people, including community volunteers, political dignitaries, staff and local partners.

## **U.N. recognition**

Following the premiere of the 17-minute film, Warden Joanne Ross-Zuj announced the United Nations recently recognized the county's Green Legacy Program under its International Billion Tree campaign. The Green Legacy was honoured for its exceptional contribution towards improving efficiency in the United Nations.

"It is fantastic that our community tree planting program has caught the attention of the United Nations in Kenya," said Ross-Zuj. "It's an honour to be recognized by such an organization. That's how far reaching the Green Legacy program has got to."

She added, "The story of the Green Legacy program is spreading. We've planted one million trees and have plans for millions more."

To date, the United Nations Billion Tree Campaign has recorded over ten billion trees planted in 192 countries.

"Being on the United Nations radar is amazing," said county planning director Gary Cousins, whose department oversees the Green Legacy program.

"When the county started this community driven tree planting program in 2004 we never thought it would grow into the largest municipal tree planting program in North America. To be recognized by the United Nations is a remarkable achievement for the County of Wellington."

Communications Officer Andrea Ravensdale said, "The county created this documentary to share the story of the Green Legacy Program and to inspire other municipalities, individuals and organizations to plant more trees in their communities. The film shows the events leading up to the planting of the one millionth tree and celebrates the community volunteers and partners who have helped make the Green Legacy a success.

“Many organizations, including the United Nations, have requested copies of the documentary.” In 2011, the county will plant another 157,000 trees, and will increase its contribution to the United Nations Billion Tree Campaign.

Ross-Zuj congratulated all those who had participated in the program. “It’s something very special that we can all be proud of. This recognition came to us from the U.N. offices in Nairobi, Kenya.”

“This [U.N.’s] program was established in 2007, and trees planted under the Green Legacy from 2007 onwards, will be included in the UN registry.”

She said there are already 618,000 Green Legacy trees registered.

Ross-Zuj said, “This campaign by the United Nations has won 20 international awards for its exceptional contributions. To date over 10 billion trees have been planted in 192 countries. We now have the honour of being part of that registry, and being recognized internationally. Planner Mark Van Patter accepted the award on behalf of Green Legacy for the county.

### **Legacy documentary**

Ravensdale produced the documentary. She said, “When we came up with the idea to have a documentary we had two main ideas. We wanted to tell the story of the Green Legacy program which is now the largest municipal tree planting program in North America.”

She added, “The film really celebrates the volunteers, the school children, and everyone who has made this program what it is.”

She acknowledged videographers Steve Bergwerff and Don Coulombe, of Ironcloud Productions, and added that the music on the video was by local singer-songwriter Kenny Phelps, and involved in two bands, Speakeasies and Remnants. “It’s all original music.”

Green Legacy began in 2004 to help the county celebrate its 150th anniversary. Students in the film described the ways in which various students take part in aspects of the programs.

“No matter how small or how tall, everyone is doing their part,” said one of the students. The video also offered a close-up view about how the information is presented to young people. Green Legacy nursery manager Rob Johnson said, “Here at the Green Legacy Nursery we grow hundreds of thousands of trees with the help of students and variety of volunteers.”

He described how trees are transplanted during various stages of the greenhouse for seeding the next generation of trees, and ways to make the process more efficient and effective to be able to seed 208,000 trees.

He said students help by preparing the flats, water them, and cover them with sawdust. Johnson noted that 30 per cent of the trees being grown are hardwoods - sugar maple, silver maple, black maple, ash trees, and even walnut trees.

“Every day from April to mid-June we have a bus load of kids come out to the nursery, to help us grow the trees.”

“There is a whole variety of different volunteers,” Johnson said. He anticipated over 3,500 volunteers putting in about 15,000 hours.

That effort provides 150,000 seedlings, but Johnson said the nursery also grows larger trees for a variety of different projects.

One of the bigger current projects involves living snow fences.

“About 30 to 60 metres from the edge of the road, we put a line of (normally) white spruce, which acts as a wind and snow barrier. It keeps the snow out on the land and doesn’t drop it only the road.”

The eventual goal of the nursery he said, is to produce 250,000 trees per year.

He believes that for students, the hands on approach helps them connect and understand their environment.. “Small things can make a difference.”

In a presentation to one of the local schools, county councillor Gord Tosh said the trees will not only make a difference for this generation, but for generations to come.

“It’s a legacy, something we are doing for the future. Each of us can make a difference.”

This year, the warden’s annual tree planting celebrate the planting of the one millionth tree. Part of that celebration including Johnson running the breadth of Wellington County, from Mount Forest to the tree nursery in Puslinch in a single day.

“I wanted everybody in the county and beyond to know what we’ve done with the Green Legacy program. I’m proud of what’s happening with education and trees getting into the ground. I wanted to challenge the community and everyone in the county to plant 10 trees a year. If you can do that, we’ll be planting a million trees each year.”

He added, “Every tree we plant is a gift to the next generation. The most important thing trees do is moderate our climate. We’re aiming for 30% tree cover [in the county] and we’d like to see it happen by 2030.

At the council chambers, Ross-Zuj continued the commentary, said the documentary was well received by everyone. She commended Ravensdale and all those who contributed.

“It was just delightful to watch it.”

### **Individual award**

In continuation of the Green Legacy achievements, local awards were also part of the council agenda.

Ross-Zuj said awards of excellence were for individual and group achievements. She assisted Mark Van Patter presenting them.

Van Patter commented on **Libby Little’s** individual contribution.

Little was co-founder of Eden Mills Carbon Neutral Initiatives and a Green Legacy volunteer. Van Patter said at the heart of Green Legacy is the relationship with the other organizations which support it.

“Libby’s gone a long way to helping us build bridges with other organizations.” Little was on the committee for some time, and was a valued member during that time. However, Van Patter added that Little was instrumental in developing relations with other organizations as well.

“Without her help, I don’t think the Green Legacy would be doing as well as it is today.”

### **Group award**

Also recognized was the **Upper Grand District School Board.**

“They’ve become a tremendous partner,” said Van Patter. “They really support the Green Legacy program.”

He estimated that in the past year, over 7,000 thousand students have been involved. He cited the number of students helping out at the tree nursery as well. “It’s a tremendous involvement and that’s really what we’re trying to do,” Van Patter said.