

High Park Stewards celebrate 20 years of preserving Toronto's High Park

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Environmental protection was top of Sharon Lovett's mind when she volunteered for the High Park Stewards group in 2000.

"I was always interested in ecology and environmental issues, and I spent quite a long time not really doing much about it," she told The Bloor West Villager. "I was going back to my roots (when joining the Stewards) of things that I was interested in for a number of years, but didn't do much about."

The High Park Stewards have been working with the City of Toronto since 1996 to protect and restore the remaining native areas of the park, including large areas of savannah with black oak trees and more, the group said on its website.

During the spring, summer and fall, the group plants and collects seeds, and removes invasive species from the park.

According to the Stewards' website, the invasive plants currently threatening the park include garlic mustard, tall sweet white clover, oriental bittersweet, Himalayan balsam and European buckthorn.

"There's very little of it left (High Park's habitats)," Lovett said. "It's important to protect those."

On Sunday, Jan. 22, the group celebrated its 20th birthday with a party at Howard Park Tennis Club, where dozens of city staff and current and former volunteers discussed the group's work over the years.

Parkdale resident Bill Montague, 60, told The Villager he joined the Stewards five years ago because he wanted to find a "positive way to get involved in the community."

"It's something I care about, which is ecological restoration," he said. "It's been a really wonderful experience."

He added he enjoys working with other volunteers who share similar interests, like native plants.

"The people are really interesting and they're really giving a lot of their own free time — they're there because it matters to them. They're not there because they have to be," he said.

Lovett said the Stewards have had over 11,000 participants working over 30,000 hours throughout its history.

"The fact that we've been able to do this for so long and we keep getting people who want to participate, it's really rewarding," she said. "I'm glad that we're still here."



Parkdale-High Park MPP Cheri DiNovo, left, and Ward 13 Councillor Sarah Doucette present certificates to High Park Stewards volunteer administrator Sharon Lovett at the group's 20th anniversary celebration at Howard Park Tennis Club Sunday, Jan. 22.



Parkdale-High Park MP Arif Virani presents a certificate to past and present members of the High Park Stewards at the group's 20th anniversary party held at the Howard Park Tennis Club Sunday, Jan. 22.



Sharon Lovett, volunteer administrator of the High Park Stewards, displays the group's guidebook Sunday, Jan. 22, during the organization's 20th anniversary celebration held at the Howard Park Tennis Club.