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By Kris Scheuer

Rooting for healthier eats

Green advocate plants seeds of hope for an urban orchard



Photo courtesy Susan Poizner

Susan Poizner has a vision of students picking fruit off a tree in a park rather than grabbing a sugary treat on their way home.

The founder of Growing For Green has a dream of creating the city's first urban community orchard.

Poizner lives near Ben Nobleman

Park across from Eglinton West subway station and has her sights set on planting more than three-dozen fruit trees there.

"I stumbled on a small community orchard in Vancouver," she said. "So now every time I walk by Ben Nobleman Park, I dream of kids coming home from school and instead of picking up a (chocolate) bar, they pick an apple from a tree and munch on it on their way home."

And Poizner has been working with the city's parks department on making the project a reality.

She has applied for city funds and is also looking for other government

money to get the project started. So far, she has received seed money from Carrot Cache, an organization focused on supporting co-ops and organic farmers.

“Our goal is to have 40 fruit trees,” she said. “We will definitely have apples, pears, cherries and plums.”

Poizner’s group will organize the project and do the irrigation. She is partnering with volunteer group Not Far From The Tree founder Laura Reinsborough, who has experience harvesting fruit trees at the Spadina Museum near Casa Loma and in people’s yards.

“It’s exciting to see a project that could meld the urban forest with agriculture in city parks,” said Reinsborough. “To have these orchards means different access to food. If all goes well, we’ll plant in the spring.”

It could take a few years before the trees bare fruit.

The project is completely reliant on volunteers for planting, pruning and harvesting the trees. And volunteers get some of the bounty.

“We have a few hundred volunteers across the GTA for Not Far From The Tree,” Reinsborough said. “But we are hoping the volunteers we have for Ben Nobleman Park include people who live nearby.”

St. Paul’s councillor Joe Mihevc said there used to be orchards all over the area.

“This will be the first (Toronto) orchard in a public park,” he said. “If you talk to old timers, there were many orchards in the community and across Toronto.”

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