



Hull Family Home and Farmstead Peace Garden in Lancaster, New York.

THE ART OF PEACE GARDENS TRAIL - A LEGACY PROJECT FOR THE SOUTHERN GREAT LAKES

What began as a simple conversation between the Executive Directors of four non-profit organizations in cross-border Niagara (the Binational Tourism Alliance, and Arts Councils of St. Catharines, Buffalo and Hamilton) after a January 2008 community stakeholder presentation of plans across the region for the upcoming Bicentennial of the War of 1812, has blossomed into a Southern Great Lakes initiative with the ability to link a broad array of heritage, architectural, garden, environmental and natural amenities in order to tell the wonderful story of our binational community.

Recognizing that the historic forts, heritage associations, museums and military groups on both sides of the border had already done tremendous legwork preparing for the commemoration of this bicentennial and the telling of the War of 1812 story, these community leaders decided their role would be to link the arts, cultural, ethnic, elder and youth segments of our region to the event by focusing instead on the 200 years of peace that has been shared between Canada and the U.S., and provide the opportunity for a broad range of community partners to participate in the interpretation and celebration of this momentous event in new and different ways.

In brainstorming the options that existed to make this happen, the concept of a garden with cultural space for community and visitor interaction, and the linking of these gardens through a trails network, was born. Because of our binational mandate and experience with the Binational Doors Open Niagara project since 2002, the Binational Tourism Alliance was asked by the Arts Council leaders to take on the project leadership for this initiative. We presented the concept to a variety of stakeholder groups on both sides of the border throughout 2008 and 2009, and by summer of 2009, had commitments for more than 20 gardens in the Binational Niagara Region.



*Trellised walkway at the Hull Family Home and Farmstead Peace Garden in Lancaster, New York.
**Photography credit to Gary Howell.*



*Grimsby Peace Garden in Grimsby, Ontario
The Phelp Gazebo under construction.*

What we never expected to happen however, was the sharing of the concept well beyond our local area thanks to the connectivity of the many Bicentennial regional groups that had begun forming and communicating in 2009 and 2010.

In spring of 2010 we received a request from Amherstburg to participate in the Bicentennial Peace Garden Trail, and that year we launched the first five of our gardens: Grimsby, ON; Black Rock, NY; Niagara University, NY; Lewiston, NY; and Amherstburg, ON. In March 2011, we were honoured to win Canada's 2011 Garden Tourism Award "Garden Tourism Initiative of the Year" and launched an additional three gardens in Thamesville, ON, Youngstown, NY and Lancaster, NY this past summer. In 2010, while researching garden tourism and investigating the type of visitor experience we would need to deliver to satisfy visitors from around the world who were expected to travel to our area for 1812 Bicentennial events, we learned that although our horticultural, botanical and agricultural roots run deep in the Southern Great Lakes, we are not yet considered a "garden destination" for most travelers.

THE ART OF PEACE GARDENS TRAIL

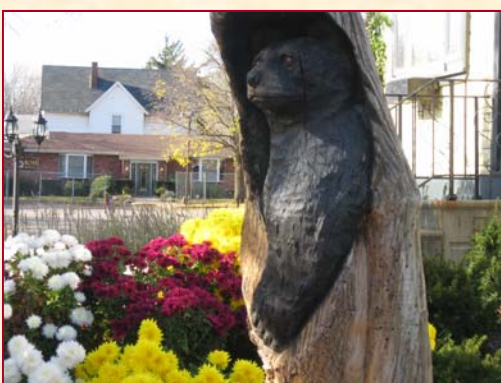
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We were advised to link other authentic heritage amenities with our gardens in order to broaden the appeal and the potential audiences, and thanks to our experience with Binational Doors Open Niagara, and the desire to celebrate our 10th anniversary of that event in a unique manner, now had the opportunity to link our gardens with our heritage offerings. The Art of Peace Garden Trail will therefore provide a permanent legacy for our Southern Great Lakes communities, many of them with strong cross-border connections, and allow us to tell a richer and more comprehensive story of our region and its place in the founding and growth of two great nations.

Much has taken place over the past four years to get us to this point and we continue to grow our partnerships throughout Ontario, New York, Michigan, Ohio and other states touching the Great Lakes. Based upon the preliminary plans now underway, we will be launching 60 gardens – 30 in each of the U.S. and Canada – as part of our Peace Garden Trail between May and October, 2012, with plans to add to this incrementally each year thereafter, and well beyond 2014 thanks to the number of historic events and anniversaries we have to celebrate over the coming years. The broad range of gardens are truly amazing – everything from traditional flower gardens, to



Mackenzie Printery in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario – one of our Doors Open Niagara sites.



Above and below are both images from the Lewiston, New York Peace Garden.

vegetables, sculpture, heritage, herb, stone, spiritual, labyrinth and cemetery settings/designs have been discussed and are in the works. The communities involved will showcase their own cultural activities and ensure these are community meeting points.

The role of the Binational Alliance is to assist our community partners with the interpretive signage, marketing, cultural programming that will travel between many gardens and involve youth and performers of all ages, launch events and overall project leadership and coordination. It has been an exciting and humbling experience to see the amazing creativity, work and community support that has gone into these gardens – many of them actually transforming and reinvigorating the neighbourhoods and areas they are part of. There is something about a garden that brings out the best in most people, and we have witnessed that miracle time and again throughout this process.



We welcome you to share in the story of our project as it continues to unfold and to participate in the Art of Peace Garden Trail offerings when our official launch begins next spring. And if you are interested in developing your own Peace Garden to add to the Trail, we'd love to have you join us! Our new website is in development and will be launched in the new year, but until then, please go to www.btapartners.com or www.btglobalgateway.com or contact us at 1.877.884.2736 for more details.

*By Arlene White
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