

# GATEWAY

PUBLIC  PARK

RIVERSIDE W. & CAMERON



A WORK IN PROGRESS



[WWW.GATEWAYPUBLICPARK.COM](http://WWW.GATEWAYPUBLICPARK.COM)

# GATEWAY PUBLIC PARK OF WINDSOR

~ A Work in Progress ~

In 1999 CP Railway agreed in principal to allow the City of Windsor to convert an abandoned railway cut beside Cameron Avenue, from Riverside Drive to Elliot Street into an international garden, honouring Windsor's twin cities around the globe.

Some cleanup work was done, park benches were installed and several flowering cherry trees were planted thanks to a donation from the Consul General of Japan.

But the entranceway, the land on the corner of Cameron and Riverside, remained a barren, unattractive, yet highly visible empty lot.

In 2002, Jack Renner, a local real estate agent and a resident in the immediate area, had experienced a very successful year in business and felt motivated to give something back to the community. A friend of the late Bert Weeks, an avid gardener and former mayor of Windsor, who had spearheaded the development of nine city parks during his long political career, Jack wondered if perhaps he could add to Weeks' legacy.

Surveying the empty lot next to Cameron and Riverside Drive, he realized he had the perfect location for a new Windsor park and a fitting gateway to the international gardens. Jack decided he would create "Gateway Public Park of Windsor."

With the blessing of CPR, the financial generosity of area businesses, the help of a local nursery, cooperation from the City of Windsor, sweat equity of the neighbourhood and friends, as well as Jack's own considerable financial and physical contributions, the once drab and unsightly corner of Cameron and Riverside overlooking the Detroit River, has been transformed into a beautiful, community park.

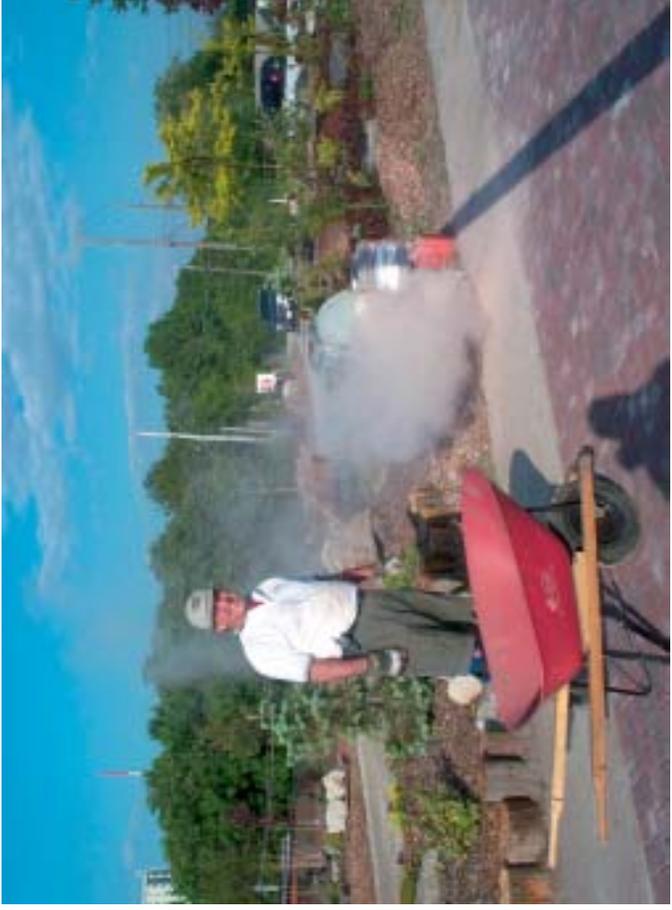
But Jack isn't finished. He and his volunteers have begun an ambitious landscaping plan for the banks of the railway cut all the way to Wyandotte Street and he hopes to create a dog park between University Avenue and Wyandotte.

Jack knows that in order to complete his vision, he'll need further support from the community and to that end, he commissioned a website as a tool to catalogue the progress of the park to date and how interested parties can help, both financially and physically.

**If you haven't had the pleasure of strolling through Gateway Public Park of Windsor yet to enjoy the spectacular view of the Detroit skyline while seated on one of its many benches, this booklet will give you a good sense of what you've been missing. And perhaps you too will become one of Jack's group of dedicated volunteers!**



2003



2003



Volunteer



Volunteers



Before – Spring 2005



After – October 2005



Before – Spring 2005



After – October 2005



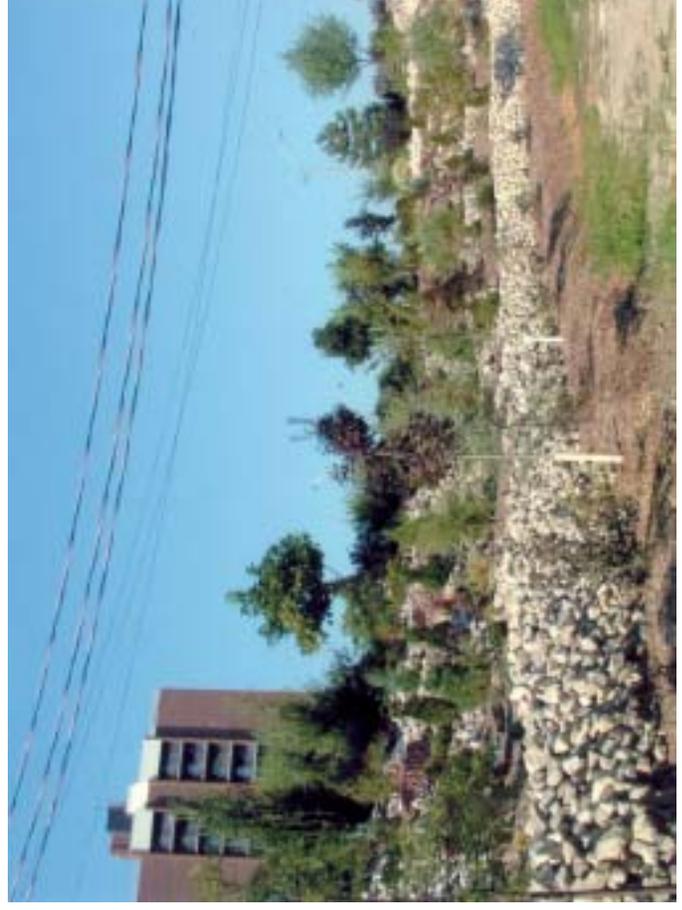
July 2004



July 2004



Before - September 2004



After - September 2005

# The park that Jack built

Jack Renner is like a dog with a bone. Once he gets an idea, he doesn't let go. Thanks to Renner, the entranceway to what will be the International Gardens is now a beautifully landscaped park instead of a vacant lot.



**SHEILA WISDOM**

The trick to this story is that the transformation is at virtually no cost to the taxpayer.

Where are the International Gardens? At the old, CN railway property beginning at the corner of Riverside Drive and Cameron Avenue, just facing the city's new showcase sculpture garden. Admittedly, the Gardens aren't exactly there, yet. However, they're now getting started.

This idea of a garden began a few years ago, when CN railway agreed to allow the City of Windsor to use the abandoned railway cut beside Cameron Avenue, from Riverside Drive to Elliott as an International Garden.

The plan calls for the area between Riverside and University to be a Japanese garden, honouring our twin-city of Fujisawa. The land immediately south, between University and Wyandotte will be a Chinese garden.

The railway cut extends south to Elliott, with the potential for other gardens. The Canada-Japan Society undertook to develop the Fujisawa gardens as part of the overall international garden.

Over the past two years, some clean-up work was done. In 2001, with the help of a grant from Human Resources Development Canada and the loan of some equipment from the city's parks and recreation department, the Multi-

Cultural Council cleaned up the area, cut the brush and installed some park benches.

In 2002, thanks to a donation from the Consul General of Japan, several Japanese flowering cherry trees were planted in the area designated for the Fujisawa Gardens.

But the entranceway, the front door to the future gardens, was a barren, unsightly vacant lot at Riverside and Cameron.

That's where things stood when Renner had an idea. Renner, a member of the Canada-Japan Society, had experienced a very successful year in his real estate business. He decided that he could give some of that back to the community and provide a kick-start for the entire International Garden.

With a considerable cash contribution from Renner, the financial generosity of area businesses, the help of a local nursery, and sweat equity of the neighbourhood, the corner of Cameron and Riverside is now the park that Jack built.

## Property values

The ragged corner has become a fully landscaped garden with a path winding down into the rest of the park.

What's refreshing about Renner is that he is plain spoken about his motives. He's not trying to pull the wool over anybody's eyes, pretending to be simply the altruistic philanthropist.

He fully admits, in fact offers up, that part of the reason he is doing this is as an investment. After all, Renner's business is real estate. If an area looks good, the price of houses goes up, and so does his commission with a sale. The community benefits, and so does Renner.

As a real estate agent, Renner long ago recognized the connection between beautification and property values.

Almost 20 years ago, he was part of a

group who invested in the Old Town area, the far west section of downtown Windsor, between Caron and Bruce Avenue.

Owner of the Billings Block, Renner spent a considerable amount of his own money on sidewalk pavers, planters, and beautification of the area around his property. However, larger plans overtook the dreams of the property owners in Old Town, as the adjacent area was designated as the site for the multi-use facility and the art gallery became the home of temporary casino.

It was difficult to market the concept of a quaint old town with the hubbub of the temporary casino and the vacant lot next door. But the beautification has helped the area maintain in the face of adversity.

## Recent changes

Renner saw potential in Old Town and he sees potential in the near west side of Windsor. And when you look at it, the recent changes in the area are significant:

- The elimination of the old Holiday Inn has created a continuous park that rivals many in North America, from the Ambassador Bridge heading east.
- The generosity of Louis Odette has enhanced this winding riverfront park with a sculpture garden that appeals to people of all ages.
- The potential of the Japanese and Chinese gardens will be unique.

The city's policy of clearing the riverfront has set the stage, as has the co-operation of CN.

And we are now in the happy situation where not one but several private donors from Jack Renner and Louis Odette to the Japanese and Chinese communities are helping to move the area to the next level.

---

*Sheila Wisdom appears every second Monday.*

## Jack's Park

---

Windsor realtor Jack Renner credo is "it's not what the city can do for you but what you can do for the city." Since last year, he has been converting a small plot of railroad land at Cameron and Riverside Drive. The railroad calls it "The International Gateway Garden" but some people know it as "the park that Jack built."



Inspired by the late Bert Weeks, former mayor of Windsor and a long-time friend, Renner is adding to the many parks that are part of Weeks' legacy.

Area residents, Parks and Rec. and local businesses have all played a role in building the park; Jack has donated his own time and money.

Due to its proximity to the Detroit River, Jack says "standing at the north end of the park makes you feel like you're on the bow of a ship." He hopes to complete the garden by August. If anyone would like to donate time, or buy a rock or tree to help complete the gardens, call Jack at 818-3630 or 972-1098.

## A Slice of Balance

# THE GARDEN THAT JACK BUILT

*by Rick Beneteau (from "A Large Slice of Life to Go, Please!")*

They arrive daily. Sometimes a single laborer but most often a crew of a half dozen. They dig, they shovel dirt, they pour sand, they lay interlocking block, and they move large boulders and small blocks and logs. Finally, they plant ornamental trees and shrubs.

From my 9th floor balcony where I often bring my laptop to write, I can gaze out at the magnificent Detroit skyline and watch the large lake freighters and pleasure boats pass by. On the trail in the riverpark I can also watch the thousands of daily visitors walk, bike and rollerblade. Very inspiring. However, it is what is happening directly below me, on a small piece of turf that is holding my attention these days.

What was only an empty muddy lot of few weeks ago is being transformed into a most beautiful rock garden - stone by stone, plant by plant, day by day. Much like a jigsaw puzzle that started as a pile of tiny cardboard pieces and ends as a complete picture.

I've witnessed on more than one occasion these landscapers tearing down a small section they had just built only to change the shape. They are obviously following a design but when what was once on paper became reality, they chose to make adjustments to their plan - to make it better.

One morning while having coffee and watching the sunrise, I noticed that someone had destroyed the section they had built the night before. I took this rather personally and became angry with the thoughtless vandal who chose to destroy this work in progress. I didn't happen to witness the crew's reaction to the destruction but by the time I next looked down later that day, the damage had been repaired and a new section was being worked on.

On mornings when it's raining, they don't show up. They can't, of course, work the ground when it's wet. No doubt, they are putting this off-time to good use spending time with family and friends, and resting up, as this is afterall, hard work.

The most impressive thing I've noticed about all of this is that most of these laborers take time to stand back and take an admiring look at their progress. In fact, the leader of this crew, the one who shows up alone on certain days, is always the last to leave, and although I'm too far away to see the details of his face, I can tell that when he takes a long, last look before he leaves in the evening, it's beaming with absolute pride!

This emerging rock garden is a perfect example of the Balance we all need in our lives. Time to plan, time to work, time to spend with those we love, time to adjust, time to rebuild and time to sit back, admire and be proud of all that we have accomplished.

What was once a patch of mud has become a place of beauty that will impact thousands of people in a most wonderful way.

I ask, shouldn't our lives be like the building of a rock garden?

# Green Shield

CANADA

*Where quality is more than a claim*

August 21, 2003

Mr. Jack Renner  
150 McEwan  
Windsor, Ontario  
N9B 2E4

Dear Jack:

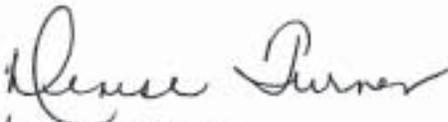
I would like to congratulate you on both your sense of community and for the beautiful garden you have created at Riverside Dr. and Cameron Avenue. Additionally, the benches dedicated to Wendy Regnier and Dr. Ed Mazak have very special meaning for all of us at Green Shield Canada.

We are unable to commit to any funding in 2003 for the completion and upkeep of the garden. However, we are pleased to pledge \$5,000.00 for the 2004 year.

We ask that you follow up with us early in 2004, advise us to whom the cheque is to be paid, and we will process the payment promptly for you.

Once again Jack, congratulations on a great community accomplishment!

Yours truly,



for J. David Garner  
Executive Vice-President &  
Chief Operating Officer  
H:\word\2003\game\donations\unapproved\renner.doc

JDG/dt





Jack,

It was great to see you this morning to discuss the security enhancements for the garden project on Riverside Dr.

When you have a moment can you send me a brief not that will summarize or outline your needs for us to consider and pass along to our operations manager?

Jack, we want to make sure that your project is a success and we want to work with you.

Regards and once again thank you.

John Parent  
*The Jobs Tunnel*