

COFFEE WITH: Chairman of the boardwalk

By Boaz Joseph - Surrey North Delta Leader - March 09, 2008



Wally Davyduke walks the boardwalk at the Delta Nature Reserve three to five times a week. The retiree, a member of the Burns Bog Conservation Society, is the man in charge of maintaining the path's 2.6 kilometres of planks that allow the public's only access to the Burns Bog.

BOAZ JOSEPH THE LEADER

Strolling along the path at the Delta Nature Reserve, the only publicly accessible part of the ancient lake of sphagnum moss known as Burns Bog, you might run into a silver-haired, gumboot-wearing retiree.

This is the man largely responsible for keeping your feet relatively dry.

Wally Davyduke was never an engineer, a carpenter nor your everyday handyman.

And the 72-year-old doesn't consider himself much of an outdoorsman.

In fact, his biggest effort with tools prior to the construction of the nature reserve's 2.6 kilometres of boardwalk was fixing a broken backyard fence.

The boardwalk, which stands a few centimetres above the surprisingly bouncy peat bog, is the conduit for more than 2,000 kids who come to the park annually on field trips to learn about the bog's ecological importance.

To keep the boardwalk in the 142-acre park in top order – for walkers, joggers and cyclists – Davyduke walks the route three to five times a week, often in the company of his dog Annie, who was an anniversary present for Eliza Olson, his wife of 28 years.

Davyduke, a founding member of the Burns Bog Conservation Society (BBCS), of which his wife is the president, is the man who replaces the planks that wear out on the path.

“It's really surprising how well the boardwalk has stood up – considering it's in a bog which is very spongy.”

He only learned his woodworking skills a few years ago, and was there with the many society volunteers who donated their time to build the path from 2003-2006.

He learned the construction process along the way by copying the experts who started the project – Roy Seer, Brian Taylor and a woman named Kimberly, he recalls.

“I learned more from Brian Taylor than any of the others.”

Bit by bit, the boardwalk expanded in a repetitive process of posts, frame sections, cross-pieces and the non-slip metal mesh on top.

“It's similar to how a railway is built,” he explains.

Now essentially completed, the boardwalk has a 1.6-kilometre outer loop and a one-kilometre inner loop.

A fixture in the Burns Bog world, Davyduke met his wife in 1980 indirectly through a singles club.

She was impressed by his quiet, thoughtful demeanour, and it took little effort to get him involved with the BBCS when it was founded in 1988 (taking over from the Burns Bog Protection Society, a product of the 1960s.)

Nowadays, the former tugboat operator (45 years on the Fraser River) is at his wife's side helping out at the society office in North Delta – when he's not out with Annie checking for worn-out boards on the Delta Nature Reserve boardwalk.

“It's a lot better than watching Oprah Winfrey in the middle of the afternoon.”

For more information about the Burns Bog Conservation Society, visit www.burnsbog.org

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