

CITY OF TORONTO GRANT 2003 SMALL CAPITAL PROJECT FINAL REPORT

Friends of Dufferin Grove Park

Kitchen Renovations for the rinkhouse/clubhouse in Dufferin Grove Park

1. Project Summary

- a) Our project began on May 12, although we didn't receive the city cheque until June 19. The project has still not quite ended since we will be putting in a stove hood (see below) at the end of March.
- b) FHAF activities began on June 19 and ended officially on Dec.31.

The kitchen story: Nigel Dean, our contractor, began work on the kitchen at the beginning of May. He and helpers from our group made a ceiling in our kitchen alcove, and put in the plumbing, the floor, the sinks, the wiring, and part of the cabinets in May and early June. We had our big Hobart bread mixer hooked up already and we began to use it to make bread. We were using it illegally since it was supposed to have the \$3000 safety shield, but we needed to make sure that it worked well (it was donated).

At the same time we had our first unanticipated expense: **a brand new commercial gas cooktop, costing \$1138.50**. The original plan had envisaged the kitchen as mainly a baking kitchen. But in the interval between our application and its approval, our community dinners had taken off and proved to be very popular. We decided we'd better make the kitchen more multi-purpose. That was a decision that proved to be fortunate (see below).

In the short run, though, the stove top cooktop led to another unexpected expense: hiring a gas specialist to hook up the stove. The rink house has a gas supply already, but it still cost an extra \$450 to make a new line for the stove, with multiple safety shut-offs.

Before our contractor even had the front wall up we made limited use of the kitchen for the warm-weather **community dinners on Friday nights** (cheap food: \$5 a plate) and for special events on lots of other nights. We couldn't wait, we had to use the partly-finished kitchen because there was so much going on in the park. We also began to make snacks to sell on farmers' market days, to raise money for the additional kitchen costs.

Our **Hobart mixer** was troublesome and at the beginning of July we had to have a major overhaul for it, which set us back an extra \$671.56. We decided that we would pay for the mixer repair with the money we had budgeted for a clothes dryer. By then our contractor had installed our washing machine, so **we put up a clothesline** spanning the rink fence and dried all the kitchen laundry (towels, aprons, baking cloths) on it. We felt this also sent a pleasant ecological message, with the clean towels flapping in the park breezes every second day.

Our contractor continued the work, again with help from our group and also from some youth whom we paid, and he installed our dishwasher and did more carpentry, shelving, and the front wall of the kitchen in July and part of August. He was only able to work on weekends since the timing of our kitchen had been postponed from earlier spring (funding delays), and he had other contracts to do as well. So the work went ahead slowly but steadily and in between each advance we always put the kitchen to plenty of use. A

Trinidadian farmers' market vendor began to prepare her foods in the kitchen in early August. That was tricky, but do-able. Then, in the middle of August, during a big heat wave, **the blackout** came.

The day after the power went out, our wading pool had 400 people at it, many of them from the nearby high-rise apartments (where the elevators were not working). They were desperate to cool off. People came to the rink house to wash (the water was not working in any of the buildings taller than 6 stories). The new kitchen was put into service as a water station (people came to fill up their containers). The park staff made a huge amount of food on the new gas stove (and in the wood-fired bake-ovens) and sold it very cheaply by the wading pool, for people who only had electric stoves at home.

Our area was without power from Thursday at 4.30 to 9.20 Saturday morning, so the support people got from our kitchen was very important to our neighbourhood – particularly as **a public source of drinking water**. (Fortunately the blackout ended before the whole city ran out of water.) The kitchen and the area around it also became a place to exchange guesses about when the blackout might be over, and to share frustration over the particular hardships faced by the people in the high-rise complexes. This was a quite unanticipated use of the new kitchen, hopefully not to be repeated in a long time. But thank goodness the kitchen was there.

Once the power went back on, our freezer struggled to regain the deep freeze temperature. The heat wave was too much for the old freezer, and it expired. We had added another unanticipated expense: **\$458.85 for a new chest freezer**. But by then it had already become evident that the increased attendance at the weekly community dinners, which the new kitchen made possible, was so great that we would be able to bring in any additional income we needed to cover unexpected costs.

In early September our contractor got the donated deck-oven hard-wired. This allowed us to find out that it wasn't working properly either. However, a quite unexpected **Ontario Works kitchen grant** appeared from nowhere at the same time. The recreation supervisor of our area had applied through Parks and Recreation on our behalf, without telling us. Suddenly he sent us an e-mail offering us \$3400 (it had to be spent in three days!). The money was meant for kitchen equipment, and we managed to spend \$3399.02 in a day and a half, thereby getting the deck-oven repaired and outfitting the new kitchen with excellent, commercial-grade pots and pans, a food processor, a kitchen trolley, a new bread scale, etc. This enabled us to ratchet up the new kitchen's capacities again.

All this time our park's **Thursday farmers' market** had continued to grow slowly as people discovered it. We decided to celebrate the still-not-quite-finished kitchen and to strengthen the market by having a food event, hoping to interest the press and get some publicity for the farmers. In conjunction with the Italian-founded organization *Slow Food*, we put on a **farmers' market "tasting fair"** in the middle of October. This event combined chefs with farmers to serve little sample portions of delicious recipes prepared with local produce. Usually such events are rather pricey, but we were able to make this broadly available by charging only \$2 per item. We were not, however, able to interest the press. No one wrote it up in advance (or afterwards). We were all the more amazed and astonished when almost 1600 tickets were sold for food portions, entirely covering the farmers' and chefs' costs. People came in droves. Street posters and word of mouth did it all.

That was the first **coming-out party for our kitchen**. The week afterwards, our contractor completed almost all the rest of the job, including the installation of a window, a fan, and a great deal of fiddly finishing work. Then on Nov.29, to celebrate the kitchen's near-completion, our staff person Dan DeMatteis and some of his colleagues collaborated with one of the farmers to put on a great **community feast that also marked the opening day of our rink season**. The wonderful dinner that was prepared carried our highest-ever price tag: \$10 for a heaping plate, a sampling of eight different ways to prepare this local farmers' pork. An entire large pig went into this dinner. There was marimba music in the change room, and good skating, and mulled wine, and a campfire where people could sit and eat as well: a very fine second-coming-out party for our kitchen.

It was good that we had this joyful celebration, because three weeks later we faced a crisis that we had not expected at all. But even before that dark cloud arrived, we had some smaller troubles: the big Hobart bread mixer began to falter again, and we decided not to throw any more money at it, but to have it removed. (Donated items are a pig in a poke.) Since we wouldn't need the \$3000 safety shield for the mixer, that freed up funds to install a stove hood, a requirement that arose when we added the gas cook top. At the same time, our donated deck-oven showed itself to be a huge energy hog and very temperamental. But before we could decide what to do, on December 18, our black-cloud crisis arrived. **Two employee health-and-safety inspectors from the Corporate Services Department** showed up during the pre-Christmas farmers' market. They took a look around our mixed-use rink/clubhouse/community kitchen and said this was the worst rink they had ever seen and they were considering closing us down right then.

What followed was written up in the papers and it also erupted in an avalanche of concerned e-mails sent to city hall by park friends (old and new). Basically, the Corporate Services inspectors said that even though our kitchen project had been approved by the Parks manager, it was against regulations, and **the kitchen would have to be removed**. In their view, the kitchen's placement off the zamboni garage was a danger to employees. Even stepping into the garage was to be forbidden to all except the zamboni driver. Our extra fridges and the freezer would have to be removed as well (they were in another corner of the zamboni room); and Corporate Services would call in all related inspectors (public health, fire, building) to drive their points home.

The suspense generated by this crisis, coming just at the start of the holiday season, put the plans for the stove hood on hold. Why spend more money if the kitchen was to be destroyed?

So our rather modest community kitchen was suddenly thrust into the limelight, photographed, visited and clucked over by reporters, residents, more inspectors, even the Parks and Recreation director (pressured to come by our frustration). If kitchens could be shy, ours would have been mortified. But it was very important to let people know the issues here. We kept the kitchen lights on all night for weeks so passersby could look in the new kitchen window and judge for themselves how dreadful our kitchen crime really was.

After a struggle, **cooler heads prevailed**. It emerged that there were not in fact explicit regulations that forbade what we had done. The city pitched in with some nice new storage shelves in the garage (the inspectors didn't like the rough ones we had built); the public health inspector was satisfied with mostly small changes. For the expensive

things we had to do – add more sinks, relocate our dishwasher, and re-jig our storage arrangements – we got some funding help from the Parks Division (recognizing how much the kitchen had already become a part of park life and community life), as well as some donations from rink users.

After the crisis had lifted, we named our new kitchen the “**zamboni kitchen**,” and held a “**zamboni valentine**” **celebration on Feb.14** to show that all was forgiven. A long-time park friend made a 10-minute movie of the whole event which will be shown at the ROM in the middle of March (with John Ralston Saul to discuss “popular democracy”) and on CBC Newsworld at the end of March.

In the meantime we can now go ahead and install the stove hood. And as spring approaches, we’re getting calls out of the blue, asking if people can use the new kitchen. An **Eritrean woman’s group** wants to develop a menu they can use to set up a catering business, trying out their recipes in our kitchen. A group of **Mexican aboriginal people** want to do a drumming circle and potluck for world peace on the first day of spring. The **sixth annual matzo-making** is near as **Passover** approaches – it’s gotten bigger every year and the organizers are glad they’ll be able to use the kitchen for those elements of the day that don’t have to be kosher. A **doula** group – people who help out families with new babies – want to have a baby reunion in May and one of the doulas wants to use the kitchen to cook her **Guatemalan food** for everyone.

The remarkable thing is, none of these events are thought up by the park staff, nor is there any call put out for programming. People just hear about the park and the kitchen, and they come by or call. It’s easy to fit them in between the dinners and the baking days. And having the kitchen, to attract new friends for the neighborhood and the park, is just wonderful. *Now we’re ready to begin.*

2. Project Output Summary.

- a) **number of individuals served:** Since we don’t count people who come to eat at the park, we have to calculate this in a round-about way. Our **gross income from food sales in 2003 was \$71,202.91**. The things we sold were priced between **25 cents** (slice of park-oven bread and butter) to **\$5.00** (Friday night supper), with most of the sales being at the lower end. If we assume an **average of \$2.50** spent per person, that means we served about **28,481 portions** to an unspecified number of individuals. Since lots of people like the park and return more than once, if we assume **10 portions** per individual, that would mean perhaps **2848 individuals** ate food prepared at the park.

This number is not precise because **a)** we let lots of **kids work for food**, i.e. if they didn’t have money they could do 15 minutes of litter-picking and then they’d get whatever was cooking (so that wouldn’t show up in our receipts) and **b)** lots of people come and **cook their own food** using our ovens and our kitchen. Still, the receipts give some idea.

Hours of paid staff: Our **net income from food sales in 2003 was \$30,980.71**. Of that amount, **\$29,894.69** was used to pay **additional staff wages**, above what the parks department already allocates for park staff. If one assumes for simplicity’s sake that all the extra money earned from food and spent on wages from June on was

related to this FHA project, that would mean that about **1750 additional hours** were paid for, all part-time. I do not know how I can express this in FTE's but perhaps it will be obvious to the reader. Some of the workers were youth from the park, some were regular park workers whose hours were expanded, some were specialists contracted for a particular purpose relating to food.

Hours of people who came just to help: negligible. Who would come only to help when they could eat too?

Hours of people who came to help and participate: I'm afraid we don't count. The kitchen has won many additional friends for the park, and many people help as help is needed. These hours are a free gift that neighbours give one another; we don't get in between and count. Participation is very large, though, since park users are under the impression that they jointly own the park. So they seem to take pains to look after whatever goes on there.

c) Capital goods and services purchased:

Service contract with our contractor: \$24,002. That included all materials including the gas cooktop. However, when we ran into our trouble with the inspectors and it seemed that we might have considerable additional costs, our contractor (who is also a park friend) reduced his bill.

Actual expenditures:

Contract with Nigel Dean Design:	\$21,500.00
Youth wages to help the contractor:	\$365.00
Appliances not in contract: (dishwasher, washing machine, chest freezer, later on a second hand clothes dryer)	\$1639.85
Shelving, paint, and other related costs:	\$1530.97
public health modifications: (fourth sink, moving dishwasher, wiring adaptations)	\$1359.75
Repairs and adaptations to donated appliances	\$748.60

Total goods and services purchased: \$27,144.17

Our project budget was:

Food and Hunger Action Project:	\$20,000
G.H.Wood Foundation:	\$8000
Friends of the park:	\$2,923
Total:	\$30,923

This leaves **\$3778.77** for the stove hood/ fan/ducts. That won't pay for it (estimated cost: \$4500 to \$6500), but we have received almost \$1000 in donations from park users since the inspectors came, and the rest can come from food income.

3. Project Outcome Summary

a) **Increased access to safe, affordable, culturally appropriate food:** Once again we will use the indicator of income: in 2002 our *gross* income from food in the park was \$24,860.85. In 2003 that was increased to \$71,202.91. In other words, this crude indicator of income suggests that **food was three times as plentiful** in the park this past year, when the kitchen was built, than the year before.

Safety: not one person reported food poisoning, and in terms of healthfulness, that increased as well (because much of the food was made with organic produce from our farmers market, right there in our handy kitchen – i.e. very fresh too)

Cheapness: our trademark before and now is cheap food. We were able to make cheap food even better.

Culturally appropriate: we made everything from organic hot dogs to enchiladas to curries to beet borscht. There are over 40 languages spoken in our neighbourhood and we made food from most of their countries.

Increased individual and community capacity to address food security: Cheap food does decrease the likelihood of hunger. But our new kitchen is really just in its infancy. We'll have to get back to you in a year or two, to see if this kitchen helped food security for people in trouble. It's going to be hard to measure, though, since so much of what food does in our park is foster situations that promote friendship. Friendship can lead to help in times of trouble, but that gift is often a secret.

3 c) outcomes not originally anticipated: since we are not a food bank, and we need to cover food costs (including wages), we charge for our food. Even though our food is very cheap, the kitchen made it so much easier to prepare the food, and we earned so much more, that we must now change our status. We must incorporate and get official **non-profit status**, and start reporting GST and all those things that we were able to avoid in the past. However, the additional paperwork is probably worth the trouble. For example, the additional staff hours we were able to pay meant that we could increase other activities in the park too. So we found out **a kitchen can support a park**, as well as supporting individuals that come to use it.

Such an outcome is important at a time when it seems that parks departments are sometimes too cash-strapped to care for our public resources properly.

3 d) The other big thing we learned from building the kitchen is that laws and regulations pertaining to work sites like mines and construction sites are a really awkward fit for public space. We became somewhat familiar with the **Occupational Health and Safety Act** after the visit of the inspectors from Corporate Services. The inspectors' rigid application of industrial safety standards to a space that's not a production site but a neighbourhood commons, turned out to be excessive. But they sounded a helpful warning. If citizens want neighbourhood kitchens and communal food and the sociability that grows around a dinner table, we had better take a detailed look at the laws that might prevent that, and educate our legislators. Accordingly, our group has begun to look into laws pertaining to our public spaces, and we intend to share what we find out as widely as possible.