

# SOS Elms News



Newsletter No. 21, December 2007  
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Web Site: [www.soselms.org](http://www.soselms.org)

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## Message from Judith

Seasons' Greetings from the SOS Elms Board to all our members! Thank you for your continued support – for fifteen years now, you've kept us going! 2007 has been a good year for our organization – we have received two environmental awards (see article below). This fall we welcomed a new board member, Cliff Speer, and look forward to benefiting from his energy and ideas. Michelle Chartier, who has been an active board member for many years, has resigned for personal reasons. We thank her very much for all her past contributions, and we know that she will continue to be a strong advocate for urban forests of Saskatchewan.

SOS Elms remains persistent in our fight to keep Dutch Elm Disease (DED) out of Saskatoon. We continue to remind City

Council to remove hazard elms from Woodland Cemetery and the buffer zone, to monitor firewood at Holiday Park Campgrounds, to properly dispose of elm wood from pruning of city elms, to establish an enforceable bylaw which will protect elms and other mature trees from unnecessary damage or removal during street and building construction. We are also attempting to contact Lake Placid Developers about the fate of the eight mature elms on the former Gathercole property. Did you notice that the local media have been referring to us as “watch-dogs” – on guard for our community trees!

We appeal to our membership to write letters to City Council expressing your concerns about any of the above issues. They must respond to your letters, and the more letters, the louder our voice. Letters to the Editor of the Star-Phoenix make a significant statement as well. If you see destruction of boulevard trees in your neighbourhood, please contact SOS Elms. The more “watch-dogs” the better!



## **SOS Elms' DVD Launched**

By Judith Benson

The much anticipated DVD "Saskatoon's American Elms: A Legacy for the People and the Planet" was viewed by SOS Elms members and friends at this year's AGM. Judith Benson, who oversaw all phases of this project, presented participants in the DVD with copies of the DVD. It was funded by Saskatchewan Environment, Riversdale Kiwanis, the Meewasin Valley Authority, and citizen and member contributions. Judith was declared an "Honorary Member of the Loyal Order of the Elms" and was presented with a fan made from large golden American Elm Leaves. In addition to distribution to all parties involved in its production, copies of the DVD are being distributed to Saskatoon's school libraries; Saskatoon, University of Saskatchewan and provincial archives; and the National Library in Ottawa.

The DVD relates the story of Saskatoon's elms from planting to the present in five parts. The first includes archival photos of the emergence of our elms from saplings to maturity, with credit given to Alf Browne, who planted and supervised the planting of our elms for the first forty-five years of their lives. His daughter, Joan, relates childhood memories of being part of a tree planting family. The second part walks viewers down University Drive, the City's longest elm lined street, to hear from residents about their experiences in living with the elms. Part three takes us to the University Bowl where students share their views. In part four, Don Kerr shares a poem inspired by the elms. (Don is a professor, author, SOS Elms member, and recent recipient of

Saskatchewan's highest honour, the Order of Merit). The last segment features students at St. Frances Elementary School celebrating the elms with planting young trees as part of the SPLIT (Students Plant a Legacy of Trees) program. The overall message prevails: American elms in the city and province are an integral part of our urban forest, worthy of quality care to enable them to fight disease, notably the deadly DED.

Members who wish to view the DVD within the next six months may borrow a copy from the SOS Archives. Phone Judith at 653-4339 or email [jg.benson@shaw.ca](mailto:jg.benson@shaw.ca).



## **SOS Elms Wins Awards**

By Judith Benson

The Saskatchewan Eco-Network (SEN) recently presented SOS Elms with two awards:

### **Saskatchewan Environmental Champion Group Award**

SOS Elms received this award in the Centennial Environmental Champions project for our work in Public Awareness. We shared this honour with other Saskatchewan individuals and groups, Champions who

"...have made major contributions to their province, Canada, and the world in the fields of land conservation, natural history, land ethics, environmental protection and sustainable development..... In addition to

highlighting Saskatchewan success stories during its Centennial Year, the project provides a review of a century of environmental challenge and innovation at a time when Canadians are faced with developing new models of sustainability. It provides a unique perspective on the history of Saskatchewan that combines the arts and sciences and the convictions of individuals and groups working together co-operatively to honour and preserve our natural heritage..."

SOS Elms' application included the following achievements, carried out by members of a small, non-profit organization - a testament to the power of community environmental action:

- Organizing a major urban forestry conference;
- Setting up information booths at the Saturday Farmers' Market and Gardenscape exhibitions (in partnership with SDEDA);
- publishing and distributing province-wide, two editions of the *"Homeowner's Guide to Elm Care and DED Prevention in Saskatchewan"* (with SDEDA);
- organizing a draw for tree pruning services, and a "Find the Largest Elm" contest;
- participation in International Children's Festival events and SPLIT (Schools Plant Legacies in Trees);
- initiating the Adopt an Elm Program, an interactive school program for grade 3-5, with accompanying guide;
- designing two public service announcement videos (with Saskatchewan Environment) on identification of signs of DED and transporting elm firewood;
- offering two community tree tours and producing accompanying tree

tour guides in booklet form (with the support from the Saskatoon Foundation, City of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan Environment, and Meewasin);

- presenting a session on ideas for community action in DED control at a SDEDA workshop;
- attending City Council and various forums on urban forest matters;
- making media presentations and giving interviews;
- writing letters about tree protection and DED prevention at the local and provincial levels;
- lobbying to save heritage trees such as those at the former Gathercole site, Woodlawn Cemetery, and Patterson Gardens on the University of Saskatchewan campus;
- developing newsletters for the membership; and
- maintaining the website <http://soselms.org>.

### **2007 Environmental Activist Group Award**

SEN presented SOS Elms with this award at the Environmental Film Festival Gala in Saskatoon on November 24, 2007. "SOS Elms Coalition, since its inception in 1992, has worked to inform the public about the health of Saskatchewan's community tree populations, with a particular emphasis on the threat of Dutch Elm Disease. They have recently completed a 21-minute DVD entitled *Saskatoon's American Elms: A Legacy for the People and the Planet*"

A number of SOS Elms board members attended the Gala. Excerpts from Judith Benson's acceptance speech:

“It’s my pleasure to accept this award on behalf of SOS Elms Coalition. The media has labelled us an organization of “watch dogs”, but our relationship with trees is far different from that familiar to seasoned dog walkers. Here’s our story in brief.

Fifteen years ago a handful of Saskatonians founded SOS Elms with a view to becoming a voice for our city’s urban forest in general and its American Elms in particular. We had received word that DED was encroaching upon the city from outlying areas to the north, east and south. Our purpose was and is to develop a public awareness campaigns whereby citizens would first, be able identify the elm, and then to watch for symptoms of DED. Early detection of the disease is one way to slow down its progress. Another is to initiate frequent and regular pruning. Over the years we have acted to increase the pruning frequency for boulevard and park trees by the City, from once every twenty-four years to once every seven years. We’ve instituted a variety of initiatives to raise awareness of the value of our elms...

We still have much work to do to persuade City Council to budget for removal of hazard trees in Woodlawn Cemetery, and to convince them to work with the Provincial government to remove hazard trees from the areas immediately surrounding Saskatoon. Dead and dying elms attract the elm bark beetle as breeding sites...

Thus far, the elms in Saskatoon have tested negative for the DED fungus, and we are committed to work with the city to continue this record. An American elm that has taken ninety years to achieve

maturity can die of the DED within **three months** if it is already stressed due to lack of pruning, lack of watering and subject to battering during street and building construction. Removal of diseased elms will cost us millions; thus, both our elms and our wallets benefit from a multitude of watchdogs... Many thanks to the Saskatchewan Eco-Network for acknowledging our efforts.”



### **A Shock for Residents of Spadina Crescent East**

By Judith Benson

On October 23, 2007, SOS Elms received word from Ian Birse, Superintendent of Saskatoon’s Urban Forest, that one of Spadina Crescent East’s most magnificent American Elms would be removed due to a fungal disease. Fortunately, it was not DED, but nevertheless, the fungus (*Dothiorella*) is a contagious one and costly to the urban forest. Ironically, the elm was located halfway between the residences of two of SOS Elms’ founding members! We had a diseased tree in our midst, and were completely unaware of the existence of its fungus or symptoms of the ensuing infection until notified out of the blue that it would be removed within the week!

The two of us took numerous photographs and video footage of the felling of the tree at 1066 Spadina Cr. E. When you drive by, you can’t miss the gaping space. In addition to costing taxpayers \$3000 for removal, the street was closed for a day, local traffic was

impeded, and our senses were violated by the constant roar and exhaust fumes of the saws and the branch shredder. It made one think of how devastating a major die-off of ALL our mature elms could be. I counted 88 rings (= **88 years**) on the stump, which the city pulverized the following week to prepare for the planting of a replacement tree in spring. We will monitor the care and health of that tree with interest. This incident exemplifies the future of the remaining elms on our boulevard and those in other parts of the city—great gaps, no shade provider or noise and pollution buffer, no wildlife shelter, no item of beauty and awe. Of course, the replacement tree will not be an elm.

Since 1993, 22 American elms have been removed in the City because of *Dothiorella* elm wilt infection. The neighbourhoods affected are Caswell Hill, College Park, Grosvenor Park, Sutherland, Central Business District, Ctiy Park, Avalon, Exhibition, Central Industrial, Mayfair, King George, Nutana Suburban Centre, Holliston, Kelsey-Woodlawn and Adelaide/Churchill.

Because *Dothiorella* spores are carried by wind and water, there is no deterrent treatment. In other words, it occurs in nature. As often occurs with all diseases, *Dothiorella* strikes stressed individuals. When the ground begins to thaw in 2008, I will invite residents on my block to take a walk past the great gap in our elm canopy. I will advise them to deep water their own boulevard elms in order to discourage further stress accumulated during the 1998-2005 drought years, from which Saskatoon's boulevard trees have not recovered. It's a preventative measure we can take—a way we can make a difference.



### **SPLIT Program 2007 Hometown Hero Finalist**

The SPLIT (Schools Plant Legacy In Trees) Program was chosen as one of the ten finalists for the 2007 Hometown Heroes Award. Sponsored by Earth Day Canada, the Hometown Heroes Award was established to honour Canadians committed to local environmental change. Faced with pressing environmental concerns, these individuals strive to create healthy and sustainable communities, fostering long-term community awareness and action.

The SPLIT program is an urban forestry project that offers young people an opportunity to learn about Saskatchewan's forests. The program fosters responsibility, stewardship, and an awareness of planting and caring for trees.

To achieve these objectives SPLIT has partnered with the City of Saskatoon, Riverdale Kiwanis Club, **SOS Elms Coalition** and one participating school per year to present a series of environmental activities. The process begins by inviting speakers to the chosen school to present on relevant topics ranging from botany, ecology, soil science, insects and diseases on trees and climate change.

A student committee is then invited to learn skills in landscape design that they use to create a plan for their schoolyard. Following this, a forestry expo is held where all students enjoy interactive displays, including everything from

pruning demonstrations to planting seedlings. The final event is held in June where the school and local community come together to put the landscape plan into action!

In 2006, the SPLIT program won the Gold Leaf Award from the International Society of Arboriculture for outstanding landscape beautification activities. In the face of funding difficulties, the SPLIT program has been successful in engaging students in eco-action, and it is now expanding outside Saskatoon with the City of Prince Albert.

The SPLIT program will continue to take on a leadership role in the promotion of urban forestry. In the process, the program will positively influence all participating students to understand and help nurture their local ecosystems, while providing an inspiration for many more communities throughout Canada.

From: Hometown Heroes Award website:  
<http://earthday.ca/hometown/index.php>

## SEASON'S GREETINGS

**Join SOS Elms:** \$10 per family/year  
See: <http://www.soselms.org>  
Or mail us at:  
P.O. Box 1313, Saskatoon,  
Saskatchewan S7K 3N9

### Court gives Anne Frank tree reprieve

AMSTERDAM (Reuters) – A Dutch court granted a reprieve on Tuesday to the chestnut tree that comforted Anne Frank as she hid from the Nazis, ruling in favour of conservationists who want to stop it being felled. Judge J. Bade said city officials should look into ways to save the 150-year-old tree and not proceed with plans to chop it down today despite their fears it could topple over as a fungal disease has spread through most of the trunk.

The Tree Foundation, a group of tree conservationists, had sought the injunction against the felling; saying independent stability tests indicated the 27-tonne chestnut was still safe. The Tree Foundation's Edwin Koot welcomed the decision: "The worldwide attention for this tree shows how important this tree of Anne Frank is", he said.

From: The StarPhoenix, Saskatoon,  
21 November 2007

#### SOS Elms Coalition Inc. Board of Directors

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