

# ChampionCountry

## Historic wagon donated to Country Heritage Park

*Measuring 16 by 12 feet, the Conestoga wagon is a mirror image of those loaded with household items and pulled by horses in the early 1800s.*

**By Stephanie Thiessen**  
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

The folks at Country Heritage Park weren't able to fit their latest addition under the Christmas tree.

In fact, several trees could actually fit inside the highly secretive gift presented to the park earlier this month.

When the curtains were pulled back at the park's annual volunteer appreciation celebration in the Gambrel Barn, visitors found themselves gaping at a replica Conestoga wagon.

Measuring 16 by 12 feet, the canvas-covered wagon is a mirror image of those loaded with household items and pulled by horses in the early 1800s.

"I am very pleased that this five-month project is now completed and that this Conestoga wagon is now under the Christmas tree at Country Heritage Park," said the mastermind behind the project, Arnold Rife.

In a voice shaky with years, Rife explained how he came up with the idea for the wagon.

"I had thought of donating money to the park, but decided that presenting a Conestoga wagon would be more beneficial," he said.

"It is my hope that this wagon will be an asset to the park and will help to preserve the heritage of the Pennsylvania Dutch settlers of Waterloo County."

History to be learned

Rife, who lives in Kitchener, said his great, great grandfather came to Waterloo County from Lancaster, Pennsylvania in a similar wagon.

"Many school children and visitors come to Country Heritage Park every year and this wagon will demonstrate to them how our ancestors came to this country."

The wagon was built by Mennonite craftsmen — from a blueprint of the original — in the St. Jacobs area and consists of kiln-dried white ash wood and 18 yards of white canvas.

The hoops are made of wood, which had to be steamed and bent into shape.

Park general manager Reg Cressman said the wagon is a tangible way to teach kids who visit the park about the pioneers and how they traveled.

"It's going to be a significant piece for the kids," he said, adding visitors will be able to see it in motion and maybe even take a ride in it during the park's Heavy Horse Field Days.

Two additional gifts of \$10,000 were presented to the park including one

from Milton-area resident David Pelletterio, who's the chair of the Country Heritage Experience Inc. board of directors.

The Volunteer of the Year — chosen from amongst the volunteers — was also announced.

This year's award went to Campbellville's Burnett Dennis.

Dennis is a machinist who took over the machine shop at Country Heritage Park.

He helped build the pedal harness horses at the park, just one of his many accomplishments there.

"He helps with mechanical repairs and machinery repairs; whatever we ask of him, he's prepared to do," Cressman told The Champion after the ceremony.

A man of few words, Burnett simply told the crowd: "I enjoy working here."

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Arnold Rife (left) presents the wagon to Reg Cressman, general manager of Country Heritage Park.

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