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Laurier celebrates opening of Aboriginal Community Garden

WATERLOO – Wilfrid Laurier University’s Waterloo campus is celebrating the official opening of its Aboriginal Community Garden June 21, on National Aboriginal Day.

The garden, located at the Aboriginal Student Centre at 187 Albert St., is named “Mino-kummik,” which means “the good bountiful earth” in Ojibway. It was created through a partnership between Laurier’s Office of Aboriginal Initiatives, Sustainability Office, Physical Resources, and REEP Green Solutions, a non-profit organization that promotes sustainable living.

“As Aboriginal people it is important to us to have an outdoor space that represents the traditional teachings and world views of Indigenous peoples all over the world,” said Jean Becker, senior advisor: Office of Aboriginal Initiatives. “In Anishinaabemowin – the language of the Anishinabek, one of the Aboriginal peoples of this region – the words for medicine, ‘mashki-aki,’ literally means ‘strength of the earth operating as a healing agent.’ This remains an important concept for us and this beautiful garden will help us all to feel that healing connection to the earth.”

The garden consists of a landscaped seating area, an area designated for ceremony, a fire pit, a small vegetable/herb garden and an Aboriginal medicine garden. Any university group or class can book the space, which will showcase Aboriginal culture with activities such as elder teachings, sunrise ceremonies, drum birthings and circle teachings.

The garden itself will be used to grow medicines for smudging ceremonies and vegetables for the Aboriginal Student Centre’s soup and fry bread Tuesdays. REEP Green Solutions’ RAIN program will also use the garden to demonstrate two simple ways to manage stormwater on properties to protect local rivers, which includes a 2350-litre rain-water harvesting cistern and a rain and butterfly garden that uses water that would otherwise erode soil and flow into storm sewers. Laurier’s Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Social Work will integrate the garden into their curricula.

“The Sustainability Office jumped on the opportunity to create an Aboriginal community garden and natural area in partnership with Aboriginal Student Services because this project optimizes both of our missions to improve cultural and environmental stewardship,” said Claire Bennett, sustainability coordinator. “We are extremely excited about this new space, which will offer educational opportunities at Laurier as well as with the local community.”

The official opening takes place June 21 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Speeches begin at 11:30 a.m., followed by light refreshments and cultural demonstrations at noon.

Laurier’s Brantford campus is currently planning an Aboriginal medicine garden.

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