

Windsor West, a Hidden Jewel

By Dennis Knight

The manicured landscapes of Windsor Gardens stand out in every season, with glittering whitescapes in January, the budding of spring and glorious flower gardens in summer giving way to the colors of autumn and the beautiful lighting displays of the holidays. Visitors come to our community often just to drive through and admire where we live.

But there is another corner of our community that we don't show off to the public, and it's often forgotten by all but a few of us. Windsor West is a fenced natural area of several acres with a trail, humans only, no dogs allowed, for safe walking around wetlands of cattails and marsh grasses and groves of cottonwoods and willows.

There is a meadow with irrigated beds for our intrepid Windsor gardeners. In the summer you'll see them toiling in their corn and sunflowers, tomatoes, cucumbers, squash, melons, show flowers, and many other fruits of the soil. You can be sure the fauna of Windsor West take more than their share of the harvest, which is why I call our gardeners intrepid. Maybe stubborn is a better word.

This cold January evening, just before sundown with the temperature at 10 degrees and falling, I took a walk around the nature trail. It is covered with yesterday's light snowfall, still a crunchy powder, and evidence of only two humans having been on it in the thirty some hours since it snowed. The tracks going clockwise were tromped by boots to fit a lumber jack, and the imprints in the opposite direction match the sole of a small woman's shoe, untreaded. In case you are wondering, there is no sign of a rendezvous, or even that they passed each other, but I'm no Sherlock Holmes. Today I leave my own footprints on the trail.

Of the other tracks, and there are many, I recognize mostly those of rabbits and squirrels. I have memorized one unfamiliar set and I will check on line, but my guess is they were made by a fox.

The floor of the forest is deeply covered with autumn's leaves, too frozen today to be aromatic. Here and there are fallen trees, left to nature. A hollow log, devoid of bark, leans uprooted against a healthy cottonwood, and I wonder what interesting animals are making it home. I have never noticed it before, but I suppose it stands out today in a setting bereft of green.

The air is crisp and still now as I sit on a bench in the grotto to watch and listen for birds and critters, but I figure they are hunkered down for the night because the quiet is pierced only by gaggles of Canadians honking their own retreat, as should I. Today, in the dead of winter, I found plenty of assurance that Windsor West, the hidden jewel of Windsor Gardens, is alive and flourishing.