

# WDHS students take on 10-year anniversary project at Souharissen Natural Area



Cara Nickerson

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*Students with the canoe garden, installed in the Souharissen Natural Area in 2015, for the Toronto PanAm Games. | Nathan Tidridge*

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Before Waterdown was a village, the land was inhabited by Indigenous people.

And Waterdown District High School (WDHS) history teacher Nathan Tidridge has been working for years on a project to represent that history, and what it means in the present day.

Ten years ago, a group of WDHS students worked together with leaders from Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation to form the Souharissen Natural Area.

Now, a new generation of high school students will work on a 7.05-acre piece of the 55-acre natural area, in time for the 10th anniversary of its creation in August.

Council approved \$10,000 from Ward 15's non-property tax revenue account for the project. The project was also approved by Ogimaa Kwe and the Council of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

## Waterdown 'inhabited by Indigenous people for a millennia'

Tidridge was at the forefront of the project in 2014, when the natural area was created.

The local resident had noticed a number of archaeological digs were happening close to the land earmarked for Waterdown South housing developments, around 2008.



*Former Ward 15 Coun. Judi Partridge and Gimma Brian LaForme place a moccasin print near the Souharrisen Natural Area. Nathan Tidridge*

"In total, 104 Indigenous sites were found," Tidridge said in a video he made about the project.

Those digs unearthed a wide array of Indigenous artifacts, showing the long history of Indigenous life in the area.

"This land has been inhabited by Indigenous people for a millennia," he said.

"Nearly every house built here has found objects connecting this land to the thousands that lived here before."

Since its creation in August 2014, students from WDHS have worked on a handful of projects in the natural area.

Students painted 205 stones to commemorate the unmarked graves found at Kamloops Residential School, built a garden in a donated canoe filled with soil gifted from Rick Hill of the Tuscarora Nation, and planted white oak trees to commemorate the beginning of reforestation in the area, as just a few examples.

## Students to work on project at 'The Ponds'

The new funds from the city will go toward student-led projects at 'The Ponds' part of the Souharissen Natural Area.

The Ponds are west of the Trend Condo Towers. According to Tidridge, The Ponds is a popular spot for residents to take a walk. The area is part of the Souharissen Natural Area, but there currently is no signage to inform people of the land's significance.

For the 10-year anniversary, students will erect a monument stone, put up signs acknowledging the space and will find a name for The Ponds that honours the Neutral Confederacy.

A dedication ceremony is planned for the project on June 21, 2024.

### A Walk Through "The Ponds"



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***About the Author:* Cara Nickerson**

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