

Reclaiming Roots

Our Request to You

In 2018, a decision was made to remove the upper portions of two well-loved Cottonwood trees in Cooper Park for public safety. The loss was deeply felt, and the trunks that remained were reminders of what had been lost. Since this time, community members have voiced a desire to see something meaningful in their place. The bare trunks stand as reminders of what was lost, but also offer an opportunity to reclaim, reimagine, and restore.

The City hopes to use this opportunity to reflect the roots of Dryden, our history and heritage. With two trunks, there will be two sub-themes: the Indigenous connection to the land that Dryden and Cooper Park sit on, and the development and progression of Dryden as a City. Two concepts like different roots on the same tree, ever connected and feeding the life of the tree.

Cooper Park was once known as Paawidigong, “Place of the Rapids”. The land here was an important seasonal meeting place for Indigenous peoples who brought together communities to hunt, fish, and harvest. This park continues to be a gathering place for all, yet its Indigenous history often goes unacknowledged. This project aims to restore that connection, beginning with the carving of the first trunk to reflect the Indigenous concept. The City hopes that through collaboration with Indigenous representatives from the area, the sculpture will stand as a call to action as a permanent testament to the resiliency and ongoing movement towards reconciliation through the visual recognition of the ties to this land.

The second carving is to reflect the progression of Dryden as a City as our roots, as those of a tree, have provided the necessary resources, support, and strength to become what we are now. This sculpture will be a continued reminder of the process of progression, and Dryden’s commitment to moving forward.

This project offers a unique opportunity to take something that once symbolized loss and transform it into a living monument, one that honors both the original stewards of this land and the story of Dryden’s growth. These sculptures will not only enhance the landscape of Cooper Park but will also speak to visitors and residents alike about who we are, where we’ve come from, and how we are choosing to move forward together.

We are inviting local businesses, organizations, and individuals to be part of this legacy. Whether through financial support, promotion of the project, or by helping us share its story, your contribution will help bring this vision to life. Every donation, no matter the size, brings us closer to a future that honours our shared past.

For more information or to find out how you can support the project, please contact Michelle Walter. Thank you for considering this opportunity to make a lasting impact.

With appreciation,

Michelle Walter
Museum & Heritage Coordinator
Office Phone: (807) 223-4671
Email: mwalter@dryden.ca



Reclaiming Roots

Donation Pledge Form

Donor Information

Donor: _____
Contact Last Name: _____ First Name: _____
Address: _____ City: _____
Province: _____ Postal Code: _____
Billing Address: _____
Phone Number: _____ Email: _____

Gift/Pledge Information

☐ Personal Gift ☐ Corporate Gift

Gift Amount: \$ _____

Method of Payment

☐ Cheque: \$ _____ (Please make cheque payable to the City of Dryden and include this form)
☐ Cash: \$ _____ (Please include this form)

Payments can also be made online at <https://forms.dryden.ca/Finance-Ecommerce/Reclaiming-Roots-Donation-Form>

Donor Recognition

Please use the following name(s) in all acknowledgements: _____

OR ☐ I/we wish to remain anonymous

☐ My gift is in Honour OR Memory of: _____
(Circle one)

☐ I would like a tax receipt (if applicable)

Signature: _____ Date signed: _____

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Donation Categories

Legacy Grove Donor \$5,000

All Canopy Contributor recognition

Featured name on printed signage
at unveiling and spoken thank-you

Canopy Contributor \$1,000 - \$4,999

All Branch Builder recognition

Name included in press
release recognition

Branch Builder \$500 - \$999

All Root Nurturer recognition

Name included in social
media thank-you post

Root Nurturer \$100 - \$499

All Seed Starter recognition

Name on printed display at
unveiling

Seed Starter \$25 - \$99

Thank-you email

Name and category on
website

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Meet the Artist



Dryden born artist Darcy Birnie is the creative force supporting the “Reclaiming Roots” project. A self-taught carver with nearly two decades of experience, Darcy’s work is rooted in his deep appreciation for the land, wildlife, and people of Northwestern Ontario. His artistic journey began in 2006 and has evolved over time into a practice of transformation, taking wood, antler, and even stone and turning the raw material into works that reflect the natural world around him.

Darcy’s specialty lies in wildlife and nature. He is well known for designing and completing custom work with a high level of detail, craftsmanship, and personal care. His portfolio includes hundreds of works that have made their way into personal collections, public events, and commercial spaces. His talent has even been recognized with multiple awards throughout his participation in carving competitions, including recent wins at the West Hawk Lake Chainsaw Carving Competitions in 2022 and 2024.

Beyond carving, Darcy is deeply connected to his community. He has contributed to regional organizations and local events through donations of artwork and time, supporting groups such as the Dryden Trappers Council and the Northwestern Ontario Tourism Association. His live carving demonstrations and participation in community initiatives have made him a familiar and respected presence across the region.

The “Reclaiming Roots” project represents a new chapter in Darcy’s art career. This will be his first large-scale public art installation. His passion not only sits in the personal accomplishment that this will be, but to the knowledge of the legacy that will be left speaking to both the Indigenous roots of the land and the development of Dryden as a city.

With his skill, vision, and heartfelt connection to this land, Darcy will help transform the remains of the two Cottonwood trees into monuments of our shared history.

