

ARTS OPINION

Outdoor museum an art pipeline into community health

East end Trail Mix Museum not just a way to get in your steps — it's glimpse into city art, grassroots action, writes Jeff Mahoney

By **Jeff Mahoney** Spectator Reporter
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They call it a museum but it's three kilometre long, it's out of doors and when you cross you have to look both ways because there could be cars coming.

But there's art, there's gardening, there's history, literally running under the ground — this is the famous Pipeline area of Hamilton. And, perhaps best of all, the Trail Mix Museum stockpiles a treasury of East Hamilton community collaboration, engagement and activism, hoarding together the committed efforts of the Red Tree Artists Collective, The Hamilton Dialogues group, Pipeline Trail Hamilton, the naturalists' club and other groups.

And so, yes, it is a "museum."





Along with Ingrid Mayrhofer (Red Tree Artists Collective), Olga Kwak (The Hamilton Dialogues), Elizabeth Seidl (Pipeline Trail Hamilton, Dialogues and Red Tree) and photographer John Rennison, I walked the “Trail Mix Museum” recently, following the historic Pipeline Trail, through Crown Point and other neighbourhoods.

The Pipeline Trail is a length of enhanced, remediated urban corridor, featuring parks, planting, natural elements, fencing, pathways and much else, most recently art.

Says Ingrid, “The idea (of the Trail Mix Museum) was conceived partly in response to closure of museums and galleries during the pandemic. It offers 24/7 access to artworks for neighbours and visitors in East Hamilton.”



The Pipeline Trail follows the underground spine of Hamilton’s original water pipeline which connected east end residential areas to the city’s waterworks, a marvel of infrastructure at the time (the 1850s) when the hitherto absence of proper water and sewage systems contributed to outbreaks of cholera.

And now, thanks to the work of people like Ingrid, Olga and Elizabeth and the many artists who pitched in, that trail is budding, not just with community gardens, but the beginnings of an impressive artistic imprint on the neighbourhood, one that promises to expand.

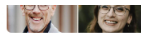


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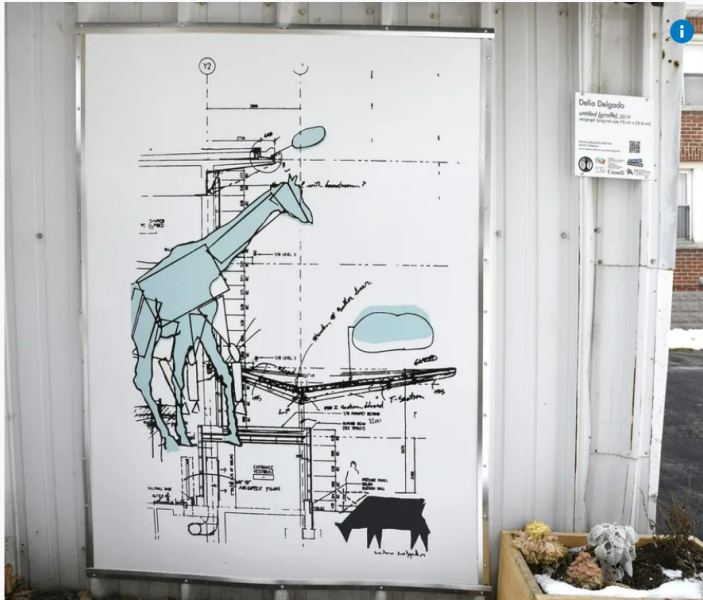
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“Imprint” is no idly chosen descriptive because the art work along the trail consists mostly of prints, rendered in vinyl for longer preservation. This is in part a reflection of Ingrid’s hand in the whole project as she is a consummate Hamilton printmaker (not to mention activist) – she had a solo show at the Art Gallery of Hamilton recently – and has helped with print and other art workshops for residents in the neighbourhoods around the trail.

We started our walk around London street between Main and Dunsmure and went out to Houghton between Dunsmure and Roxborough and beyond.

Of course, the community gardens weren’t in flower but you could still admire the promise of spring in the beds and planters full of dry stalks and stems, in pockets of dedicated ground all along the trail. Some are billed with posterlike signs with colourful pictures of insects, flora and fauna and phrases like “Pollination Paradise.”

The first piece of art we came across was one by Delio Delgado featuring a stylized angular cow in black at the bottom and a bluish Cubist giraffe floating over lines and figures as though from a blueprint.



“I think it is meant to represent the domestic and the exotic together,” said someone in our party. It is a thought-provoking and visually dynamic image with which to start the journey.

As we wend our way along Elizabeth explains something of the history of the pipeline, the trail and the steam-driven water works (now the Hamilton Museum of Steam & Technology on Woodward).

“There was an early trail,” she explains, “which was a kind of desire trail,” desire trails being originally unplanned small trails created as a result of human or animal foot traffic or mechanical erosion.





Over the decades this vital thread through the East Hamilton community and its history has experienced periods of health spelled with periods of neglect and decline but it is now flourishing.

We next arrive at “Resting With Warriors (Spirit),” by the acclaimed Indigenous artist/filmmaker Shelley Niro, a Governor General’s Award winner who grew up on the Six Nations of the Grand River. She agreed to contribute to this project and her work stands as a large and evocative flow of liquid lines and curves forming an Indigenous figure with the word SPIRIT belted across their waist.

These are the kinds of pauses that enliven the walk, and beyond the Shelley Niro print we encountered several other striking vinyl panels including Lava II by Damarys Sepulveda Lava II with its mix of geological and floral references and two by the historically renowned labour artist Leonard Hutchinson.

