

# Green Scene: Celebrate Trees at Riverview's TreeFest

## by Elaine Golds

(published in The Tri-City News - Friday, September 15, 2006, page A18)

[photograph]

[caption: Local photographer Kiyoshi Takahashi took this picture of Riverview's stately historic buildings and grand species trees. This Sunday, Treefest will be held on the site, featuring art, music, a Blackberry Tea, and tours of the grounds.

Kiyoshi Takahashi photo]

[Title in Tri-City News: Festival honours trees on Riverview property]

I must confess to a certain fondness for trees. In southern Saskatchewan where I grew up, trees created an oasis of calm from the ceaseless winds. During the summer, prairie poplars provided welcome relief from the scorching sun. Now that I live in a rainforest, my enjoyment and understanding of trees have grown considerably.

You don't have to be a tree-hugger to appreciate trees. Most people enjoy living in a well-treed neighbourhood. There is a sense of graciousness and well-being that comes from strolling down a shady street. Trees add value to a property – a residential lot with mature trees can be worth up to 20% more in some parts of the country. Apparently, commercial areas planted with trees and shrubs draw more business than those surrounded by bare concrete. Apartments in treed neighbourhoods are reported to rent more quickly to tenants who stay longer. So there's an economic value to trees as well.

Of course, trees do far more than improve our frame of mind or the condition of our pocketbook; they also enhance the quality of the air we breathe and dampen the irksome sounds of urban life. One wooded hectare of land will generate enough oxygen for 45 people and absorb all the carbon dioxide a car will produce in 40,000 kilometres of travel. A buffer of trees 30 meters wide and 15 meters tall reduces road noise by at least 50%.

Trees also promote healing. A study in Texas found that hospital patients recovered from surgery more quickly when they had a view of trees from their window. I suppose that's what the planners of Riverview Hospital had in mind when this wonderful site was created a century ago for mental health care. Originally called Essondale, the new hospital was designed with airy buildings replete with balconies and sweeping views of grounds landscaped in the naturalistic tradition of Frederick Olmsted – the landscape architect who created Central Park in New York City and Mont Royal Park in the heart of Montreal.

John Davidson, the province's first botanist, established a nursery at Essondale which, with the help of patients, grew to cover 5 hectares and provided trees for other sites around the province such as the Legislative Buildings in Victoria. After Davidson moved to the newly-formed University of British Columbia in 1916, tree planting continued under the guidance of Head Gardener, Jack Renton, who had trained at the world-renowned Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew in England. By the time Renton retired in

1947, the grounds at Essondale were graced with almost two thousand trees and contained a dazzling variety of over 160 species.

Today, these trees have grown to splendid maturity and now constitute the oldest arboretum in western Canada. The original Essondale site was 400 hectares including forests (now Riverview Forest Park and the Riverview Heights residential area) and farmed areas (now Colony Farm Regional Park). The remaining 98 hectares of the Riverview Hospital grounds became a deliberately created landscape of stately buildings and panoramic vistas complemented by majestic trees. The site is now recognized to be quite unique in the way that it so magically combines the soothing presence of towering trees with buildings constructed in the grand architectural styles of earlier eras.

This Sunday afternoon, the 13<sup>th</sup> annual TreeFest event at Riverview Hospital provides an opportunity for everyone to explore this marvellous site. Guided tours of the trees and heritage buildings will help visitors to understand why Riverview Hospital remains as one of the City of Coquitlam's most significant heritage features.