



# The Ottawa River Institute

*"Fostering sustainable communities in the Ottawa River watershed"*

[www.ottawariverinstitute.ca](http://www.ottawariverinstitute.ca)

## Ottawa River Institute Annual Report for 2011

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Ottawa River Institute, I am pleased to present this report on the activities of the calendar year 2011, our tenth year of operation.

### ORI's loss of founding board member Chris Michener

Ottawa River Institute founding member Chris Michener passed away on June 25, 2011. Chris's illness and passing made the year a very sad one for many ORI members. Chris was one of three signatories to the application for incorporation of the Ottawa River Institute ten years ago in November 2001. His integrity, profound love of nature and amazing knowledge of wildlife made him an inspiration and guiding light for many. We miss him very much.

### Watershed appreciation

One of ORI's key goals is to enhance appreciation of the Ottawa River watershed as a natural and cultural treasure. During the calendar year 2011, this goal was addressed through the activities of our new collaborative project with the Bonnechere River Watershed Project. The project is called "Nature in your Neighbourhood" and is funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF). The project promotes outdoor recreation while encouraging stewardship and conservation of the natural environment on which we all depend.

The NYN project was officially launched on May 20<sup>th</sup> in Eganville, with Bonnechere Valley Township Mayor Jennifer Murphy, OTF representative Guy Jamieson and MPP John Yakabuski in attendance.

While the adults listened to talks, fun was had by the grade six students of Eganville Public School who celebrated **International Day of Biodiversity** by participating in a conifer tree identification field trip and benthic water analysis of the Bonnechere River, led by ORI board member **John Kasaboski** and BRWP board chair **Kathy Lindsay**. The students also assisted in planting a commemorative maple tree on the Rotary Park grounds, supplied by the Township of Bonnechere Valley.

A very popular part of the NYN project is the presentation series, offered in partnership with the five libraries in the Bonnechere River watershed. The series has been very well received; over 130 people enjoyed presentations by guest speakers including famed Canadian photographer Mike Beedell, Ottawa Riverkeeper Meredith Brown, award-winning local farmer Bob Dobson, transcontinental canoeist and author Max Finklestein, and wildlife ecologist, Kathy Lindsay. Other initiatives of the NYN project include the creation of a **cablevision video series** (to be aired this autumn on TVCogeco), an **on-line community mapping tool**, and the development of a **Nature in Your Neighbourhood guide**, scheduled to be published in the summer of 2012.

### Celebration

Community drumming circles led by ORI founding member and drum circle facilitator, Jean Brereton, continued to be offered in 2011 as part of our collaborative project with the Pembroke Area Field Naturalists, funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation. Facilitated drum circles have many benefits. They increase teamwork and feelings of connectedness. In elderly groups they reduce isolation, depression and anxiety and promote physical coordination. Since the project started Jean has facilitated 20 drumming circles with several hundred participants of all age groups across the county. More drumming circles are being planned for 2012. The project also has a mentoring component for aspiring community drum circle leaders.

On September 7th, at the Horton Boat Launch on the Bonnechere River, Jean and other representatives from ORI along with local municipal officials and Kathy Lindsay of the BRWP drummed a welcome for the **Ottawa Riverkeeper's Great**

**River Excursion.** Skip Ross provided an Algonquin welcome and ceremony. The Ottawa Riverkeeper, Meredith Brown, spoke on the importance of the project and how synergistic collaboration with other organizations like ORI and BRWP play an important role in environmental work. Horton Township Mayor Don Eady, members of his council and several other guests enjoyed meeting the members of the excursion over a shore lunch.

## **Ecological integrity**

Part of ORI's mission is to foster ecological integrity in the Ottawa River watershed. Intact ecosystems are vital for healthy communities and provide many important services to the human communities that often unfortunately take them for granted.

During 2011 work continued on the Renfrew County Flora and Fauna Biotabase, the innovative and ambitious effort to catalogue the diversity and distribution of flora and fauna throughout the County. **This project is a collaborative initiative with the Pembroke Area Field Naturalists and is funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation. The Biotabase was conceived of and spearheaded by Chris Michener,** long-time PAFN member and ORI founding member. Chris saw a need for the public to know what flora and fauna occur in the county, and for naturalists to have a means to record, organize and map their field data for posterity. Information from the database will in turn be available to assist in the preservation of Renfrew County's rich biodiversity for future generations. The database itself is hosted by the highly respected organization Bird Studies Canada in partnership with ORI and PAFN. It now lists many different species (plants, birds, mammals, insects, reptiles, amphibians, fish, etc.) found in Renfrew County and is being populated with records for specific locations. Chris Michener served as biotabase coordinator on the project until his passing in June of 2011. Work is continuing on the biotabase; a committed group of volunteers has come forward to carry Chris's vision through to completion.

## **Renewable Energy**

On Oct 19, in partnership with the Ontario Sustainable Energy Association (OSEA), about 25 Renfrew County residents gathered at Whitewater Region Municipal Hall in Cobden to hear how they could develop community solar powered projects. The workshop, led by OSEA's Executive Director, Kris Stevens, outlined the workings of the Feed-in-Tariff Renewable Energy Program offered under the Ontario Green Energy Act, and offered hands-on exercises with the participants, providing them concrete data on organizing and initiating Community Energy projects in their communities.

## **Sustainable communities**

ORI member **Kathryn Kasaboski** continues to manage the **ORI Sustainable Living Book Collection**, which has its own shelf at the Bonnechere Union Public Library, in Eganville, and is accessible to people in other communities through inter-library loans. Donations to this collection are welcome at any time!

ORI member **Claire Lepine** is the organizer of **Seedy Sunday**, supported by ORI. These "Seedy" events highlight the importance of farmers and gardeners adapting food plant varieties to changing conditions by saving seeds, particularly heritage varieties, and using organic methods of food production. In the Ottawa Valley, Seedy Sunday also showcases local food producers and local foods. It includes an exchange table for swapping seeds, plants and other gardening goods. This event has been held every March since 2008, at Fellowes High School in Pembroke, averaging nearly 500 participants each year.

## **ORI's internet presence**

We're very grateful to ORI coordinator Cheryl Keetch for keeping our ORI website, Facebook and YouTube pages up to date. Our website also features our Watershed Ways columns, which cover a wide variety of topics on sustainable living and appear in a number of Ottawa Valley newspapers. As our coordinator, Cheryl also organizes ORI meetings, maintains our contact lists of members and donors, and provides ongoing support to ORI projects.

## **Conclusion**

The Ottawa River Institute has had a very successful tenth year of operation, thanks to the contributions of many people. We are very grateful to the Ontario Trillium Foundation, local donors, members, volunteers and staff for their support and assistance. We look forward to continued progress in the future toward sustainable communities and ecological integrity in the Ottawa River watershed!

*Ole Hendrickson, President - For the ORI Board of Directors*