



## REPORT TO THE LIBRARY BOARD

**MEETING DATE: June 18, 2008**

Session:	Public Session
Subject:	River Project: Exercise in Community Engagement
Prepared By:	Carolyn Doyle, Margaret Wilkinson
Presented By:	Carolyn Doyle, Margaret Wilkinson
Purpose of Report:	For Receipt and Information Only ✓

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### Recommendation

It is recommended that this report be received.

### Issue / Opportunity

London Public Library plays an integral role in the continuing development of London as a creative city. As a community hub, the Library also seeks opportunities to engage its community members in partnerships that enrich life for all citizens. LPL's "Celebrate the Thames 2008" aimed to meet both goals.

### Background & Review

In May, 2006 a staff team came together to explore the theme, "Creative City, Creative Library" and to explore avenues to support London in its creative city endeavours. The team became aware of a collective of local artists, coordinated by Londoner Kevin Bice, which was embarking on a project to creatively celebrate through their art the Thames River as it flows through the City of London. Mr. Bice was invited to attend one of the group's meetings to talk about the project. The culmination of the artists' work was to be an exhibition in the spring of 2008, accompanied by the publication of a book about the project. Recognizing this as an opportunity to engage Londoners in a city-wide celebration of the Thames, Library staff asked permission to work with the artists and other community partners to develop a calendar of events, activities and displays to celebrate the River through various themes such as the environment, the arts, recreation, ecology, history, literature and sports. The River Project artists welcomed the Library's involvement.

## Project Milestones

- May, 2007. LPL Thames River Project team formed. Members included: Sarah Andrews, Julie Brandl, Nancy Collister, Jacqui Denomme, Carolyn Doyle, Lynda Kirkham, Linda Ludke, Lisa Manax Skikos, Anita McCallum, Sarah Marienfeldt, Kevin Moore, Arthur McClelland, Reg Patterson, Brian Rhoden, Beth Whitney, and Margaret Wilkinson.
- June, 2007. LPL supported the artists' application to the Ontario Trillium Foundation for funding to produce the River Project book as a lasting tribute to the Thames River and their art project.
- August, 2007. Kevin Bice, Carolyn Doyle, Margaret Wilkinson met with *London Free Press* Editor-in-Chief, Paul Berton to seek support for this community Thames celebration. Mr. Berton endorsed the project enthusiastically with his commitment to publish a series of articles about the Thames River over several months beginning in the spring of 2008.
- October, 2007. LPL River Project team hosted the Celebrate the Thames 2008 Open House at the Landon Branch. Invitations were extended to groups and organizations across the City. More than 70 people attended representing 10 community groups and joined with Library staff, and a number of the artists to talk about the River Project and brainstorm ideas about ways to celebrate the Thames. LPL offered to promote and host upcoming events, exhibits, initiatives that highlight the Thames. Lindsay Sage facilitated the event.

## Outcomes

- "Go With the Flow" was the theme of LPL's 2008 March Break program. The Children's and Youth Services Committee embraced the concept wholeheartedly, offering many programs and activities related to the theme at Library locations across the City. One of the notable activities included a system-wide river mural project under the direction of LPL staff member, Sarah Marienfeldt. Each LPL location engaged children in painting their impressions of the river for a particular season. This mural with 16 panels will be on exhibit at many LPL locations. Another notable addition was a Celebrate the Thames activity sheet compiled by staff member Donovan Banerjee and Sarah Andrews. This was launched during March Break and used system-wide during the 4-month celebration.
- Hikers Day, March 22. Event planned by LPL staff member, Patrick Lewis, with the Thames Valley Trail Association, Elgin Hiking Club, Maitland Trail Association, Novacks, Healthy Living - Middlesex London Health Unit.
- Celebrate the Thames 2008 feature created for LPL website by LPL staff member, Lisa Manax Skikos.
- "Harris Park, Two Times" by Kevin Bice featured on the cover of *Access Magazine*, January/February 2008, and call for community participation featured inside. March Break programs and Celebrate the Thames community calendar featured in March/April issue of *Access Magazine*.
- Library events took place at various locations from March - June, including community art exhibits focusing on the river, Thames River film showings, Thames River storytelling program, talks by local historians, A Day in the Life: Early 18<sup>th</sup> Century Games and Activities for Children and Families in Partnership with Fanshawe Pioneer Village, McIlwraith Field Naturalists hikes from library locations.
- Travelling Thames River displays exhibited at each location highlighting the history, ecology, natural features and recreational uses of the Thames. These displays were provided by the Upper Thames Conservation Authority, City of London Watershed Management, McIlwraith Field Naturalists, Urban League, Brush and Palette Club,

private collectors. Special recognition to the LPL London Room for the creation of the displays, Mills of the Thames, Bridges over the Thames, Postcards of the Thames, Flood of 1937. The historical displays prepared by the London Room have generated great interest and brought attention to its rich resources and staff expertise.

- Media coverage of initiatives (*London Free Press, Londoner*) including the current series "A River" of articles and videos in the *London Free Press* and on their website.
- *River Project* book launch event, May 1. Boxes of the book are distributed at the event to various organizations from the back of the newly signed LPL van.
- LPL's Go With the Flow River Festival held in Hudson Bay Passageway, Central Library on May 10, 2008. Included poetry readings, art exhibits, various workshops, talks and displays. Participants included some of the River Project artists, Upper Thames River Conservation Authority, Friends of the Coves, McIlwraith Filed Naturalists, City of London, London Camera Club, Brush & Palette Club, London Canoe Club, and LPL staff.
- River Project Art Opening and Exhibit, McIntosh Gallery, May 15 – June 22; to be followed by exhibit at Woodstock Art Gallery, November 15, 2008 – January 10, 2009.
- Library staff requested and granted permission to make copies of several paintings in order to produce note cards. Six designs, including a couple of historical and copyright –free photographs from the London Room, are used. The cards will be available for sale at all locations. Additional cards will be produced in the future if these continue to be popular.
- *River Project* book. LPL receive 520 copies of the book (40 copies for LPL collections; 480 copies to be sold). By June 4 all copies have been sold. Proceeds from the sales remain with the Library (\$9600.00).

#### Benefits to the Library

- Affirmation that London Public Library is a community hub.
- Affirmation that London Public Library is a creative and collaborative force in the City.
- Affirmation of existing community relationships; development of many new ones.

#### Next Steps

- LPL's River Project team will submit recommendations for the use of funds raised. The Team hopes these funds will support upcoming LPL initiatives that reflect the spirit of the project to promote community art and environmental initiatives.