

Park a symbol of hope and unity

PACIFIC AVENUE GREEN SPACE NAMED AFTER AREA RESIDENT DESCRIBED AS 'A FORCE OF NATURE'

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The Ching Wu Athletic Association Lion Dance Troupe performs Saturday at the opening of Gord Dong Park.

Minutes after the construction fences came down at Gord Dong Park on Friday, people were flocking to the revitalized space on Pacific Avenue.

"Everybody has been waiting for this," said Gord Dong, a longtime resident in the Centennial neighbourhood after whom the park was named in 2017. "As soon as the fences came down, the park's been in use ever since — all day, all night."

Dong immigrated to Winnipeg's Centennial neighbourhood from Hong Kong with his family in the 1960s. He's been deeply involved with the community ever since and helped found the Centennial Community Improvement Association. The park's new look, complete with gathering spaces, community garden plots and an outdoor wood oven, was the result of more than two years of work by the association and the City of Winnipeg.

Winnipeg Mayor Brian Bowman was on hand for the park's grand opening and ribbon-cutting ceremony Saturday morning. He said it's rare for someone to still be around to see something named after them, and few people are more deserving of the honour than Dong.

"What an incredible transformation.... So many of our parks are dedicated to people who have served (their communities) and are long gone," said Bowman. "I'm told by many in the neighbourhood (Dong) is a force of nature."

For more than 30 years, the nearly one-acre area has been an under-used green space that few people in the neighbourhood spent much time at. Now, the people who made the new space happen — such as Dong and his wife, Alison Dong — are excited to see the new life it will bring to the neighbourhood.

"It used to just be flat, green space... There wasn't anybody coming here and just enjoying it," said Alison. "I think that this is actually going to bring more people in."

Alison said the final product of their years of work is a testament to what a community can accomplish together.

"When a community comes together and is extremely passionate about what we envision for our community and everything, we get the support, we get it done," she said. "And now we're going to be able to do so much more."

Alison Dong said she couldn't be prouder of her husband for helping make sure it happened.

"He really kept us going. And now look at it," she said, gesturing at the more than 100 people gathered to celebrate the space's grand opening. "This is going to be amazing, and it's going to bring us together and closer, stronger, and make us strive for higher. It's starting to look up. I'm excited."



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Gord and Alison Dong at the grand opening of Gord Dong Park on Pacific Avenue.

Gord Dong said he thinks the new space is going to transform the Centennial community, and he hopes it inspires people to dream big for their neighbourhoods.

"Gathering places are always important. That's where people get to know each other. That's what community is about," he said. "We're trying to make the place better for everyone that lives here... There's always hope for something better."

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