

# CALGARY HERALD

# NEIGHBOURS

THE COMMUNITY WEEKLY

**PYRAMID SCAMS**  
**GIFTING CIRCLES ARE LATEST**  
**FRAUDULENT SCHEME** PAGE N3

**MILES OF SMILES**  
**TWINS KEEP MOM AND**  
**TOOTH FAIRY BUSY** PAGE N4



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this week

Page N2  
 Page N3  
 Page N2  
 Page N6  
 Page N4  
 Page N7



But the other day I decided to visit an old friend. But this old chum isn't a person. It's a place, and one of the most beautiful places in Calgary — the Devonian Gardens in the heart of the city.

A couple of weeks ago, the gardens reopened with much fanfare after a \$37-million redevelopment to the facility, which is attached to the CORE shopping centre. Unfortunately, the popular indoor public park — the city's only one — was closed for four years to undergo the massive renovation.

Like any old friend, the physical appearance may have changed but that special relationship remains.

I discovered Devonian Gardens when I first moved to Calgary in 1980 — the winter of 1980, I might add. By then, the gardens were three years old.

I instantly fell in love with the sanctuary.

It was truly a tropical



Dean Bicknell, Calgary Herald

paradise in the heart of the downtown concrete jungle.

I would often grab a book — or my favourite newspaper — lunch or coffee and head down to the gardens on typically cold or rainy days.

What an oasis it was. It offered a place of rest. It offered a place to just sit back and relax. It offered a place where I could simply hang out to people-watch or sit back and follow the fish as they meandered through the various ponds.

In those years, Devonian Gardens was truly the best place in the city for me.

So it was with great an-

guish that I learned a few years ago — along with many other Calgarians and visitors — that the gardens were shutting down for renovations.

"The former Devonian Gardens were beloved by Calgarians," says Anne Charlton, director of parks for the City.

"But they were tired, and most of the materials in the garden were aging and pushing toward the end of their life cycle. With the funding commitment from council, we were able to create a new, fresh, timeless look."

SEE GARDENS, PAGE N3

Diners enjoy a snack in the peaceful Devonian Gardens, left. Mayor Naheed Nenshi announces the reopening of the city's only indoor public park, below.



Dean Bicknell, Calgary Herald

## Tracking classes bring out the best in participants

ANGELA BLENKHORNE  
 FOR NEIGHBOURS

Whether you're searching for someone in the woods or co-operation in the boardroom, finding the solution has truly gone to the dogs.

With all the dog training options available in Calgary, it can be a challenge to know which one to choose. However, for a unique human-canine bonding experience that helps boost teamwork, try an On The Trail tracking class.

Frans Baars started the classes in 2002 when he began noticing how much



Courtesy, Frans Baars

Town of Cochrane employees enjoy a tracking class.

dogs enjoy using their brains in addition to just running around. As simple as it sounds, feeling useful

often resolves most of their issues of aggression and frustration.

An added bonus for han-

dlers is a dog that works with its instincts is more exhausted at the end of a session than dogs that experience only physical exercise — a tired dog is a happy, relaxed dog.

Baars, who grew up in the Netherlands and now lives in Canmore, explains tracking gives the dogs a purpose that allows them to use their natural abilities as opposed to being controlled by their handler for a desired outcome.

"Tracking is a unique form of training where we actually have to listen to the dog, not the other way

around," he says.

In addition to facilitating tracking seminars across Canada, Baars holds weekly sessions in Canmore and various locations throughout Calgary.

"This is teamwork at its best," says Baars, "and those who are able to allow the dog's natural abilities to flourish are rewarded with a skill few other partnerships can approach. It's highly effective in increasing a dog's confidence and fostering a stronger bond between dog and handler."

SEE SEMINAR, PAGE N3



FROM PAGE N1

# SEMINAR: Dogs of any shape or size can join

Baars' informal approach in running each session creates a relaxed social setting for those with fur and without. The socialization aspect is as important as the tracking itself. A typical class gives each dog/handler pair individual attention from Baars while they run their own track to find a hidden "stranger" — usually someone from the group or household items such as keys or socks.

Then the dogs all work as a team in a longer group track to close out the session. The tracking is for practice only and does not require participation in active search and rescue situations.

Handlers of any physical ability and dogs of any shape or size can participate — from tiny terriers to giant breeds. The two dogs in our household have been participating for several months — a shy deaf Saint Bernard and a nervous Swiss Mountain Dog. The turnaround in their confidence and desire to work are nothing short of remarkable. Our Saint Bernard now bounds around with other dogs in the group and our Swissy will let strangers pat her head — neither of these behaviours were evident before we started going to tracking sessions.

What I didn't count on was the change it also inspired in me in terms of giving up the outcome I wanted to control as opposed to the outcome that actually developed through trusting our dogs. Recognizing how this aspect of leadership translates in the bigger picture of business environments is what led Baars to begin offering corporate leadership and team-building workshops using certified search and rescue dogs in 2004.

Since then, Baars has delivered uniquely dynamic seminars with organizations ranging from the Town of Cochrane, Associate Veterinary Clinics, Shell Canada and Champion Technologies. The ultimate goal, no matter the group size, is to foster teamwork, increase harmony in the workplace and promote individual awareness.

Baars believes that "in the corporate environment, it's all about the habitual breakdowns in communication that come from a lack of trust — the work with the dogs exposes this lack of trust very quickly and without any of the underlying agendas that people have. The participants take the feedback from the dogs more easily too, leading to a big increase in insights. There are at least four different levels of communication that I address in the workshop-debrief and the one between human-canine sets the tone for all the others."

Navigating the path to finding your lost sunglasses or making a real difference in your workplace could be as easy as grabbing some sturdy shoes, a canine companion, and heading out On The Trail.

For more information, contact Frans Baars at [www.onthetrail.ca](http://www.onthetrail.ca).