

## An unexpected surprise at SOS AGM



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Save Our Seine held its annual general meeting last week to inform its members and the community about its activities and plans.

The event was attended by over 70 people — many of whom were attracted to their current homes because of the Seine River, its parks, and its trails. I would like to thank everyone for coming out on a blustery evening to share their questions, ideas, and enthusiasm. It was also an opportunity to recognize the contributions of one of SOS's long-time volunteers and current treasurer — David Venema.

As everyone shared stories and ideas over coffee, it was clear that while much has been accomplished there is a lot more to do. People expressed concern about the management of the Bois-des-esprits forest, encroaching development along the river, pollution, and low water levels.

One of the surprises of the evening was an impromptu presentation by a long-time

resident of Guay Avenue who started a movement to clean up the Seine River in 1970. An avid canoeist, he dreamed of returning the river to its natural state and creating a canoe route from the floodway to the Red with landings and parks for public access. He posted a notice on his church bulletin board inviting people to a meeting to discuss the river.

This simple act led to hundreds of people coming out to clean the river. It also led to the formation of a group (Seine River Project Committee of Manitoba Pollution Probe) that pre-dated the formation of Save Our Seine by 20 years. He sadly gave up his volunteer work when given an ultimatum. He came to the SOS AGM, in part, to entrust the files documenting the efforts of this group to its natural successor.

As I poked through the yellowing letters, newspaper clippings, and photographs, I was struck by the similarities between SOS and its precursor. Articles spoke of the tireless efforts of volunteers who pulled truckloads of garbage from a small stretch of river. Many of the issues have not changed in a half-century: dumping, inadequate sewage infrastructure, poorly-planned development, and a need for local government to recognize



Supplied photo

### Community members want to return the Seine River to its natural state.

the value of conserving public park spaces along the river and to work with local residents to address park management issues.

Reflecting on the great attendance and animated discussions at the AGM, I realized that something else hasn't changed in 50 years — the desire and willingness of concerned individuals to create positive change.

*Michele Kading is a community correspondent for St. Vital and the executive director for Save Our Seine ([www.saveourseine.com](http://www.saveourseine.com)).*