A ROOM OF HIS OWN: THE LEGACY OF CHANIE WENJACK

BY CRAIG AND MARC KIELBURGER

A length of railway track evokes the tragic journey of Chanie Wenjack in this ‘Legacy Room’ created by landscaping company Genoscape at Canada Blooms national garden show. (Photo credit: McNeill Photography).

Googoo took his idea to Gord and Mike Downie. Why stop at a restaurant? Why not schools, libraries, corporate boardrooms—even garden shows? Putting Legacy Rooms in unexpected places encourages Canadians to talk about reconciliation in the course of their daily activities. Legacy rooms should inspire “reconcil-actions,” Downie suggests, like inviting a local First Nations elder to open staff meetings with a traditional smudge ceremony.

According to Downie and Googoo, there is already considerable interest from a diverse group of organizations. Dalhousie University, Halifax Waterfront Development, and a hotel in Kingston, Ontario, have all expressed interest in creating their own Legacy Rooms. For a $5,000 donation, the Downie-Wenjack Fund will provide an official plaque and signage explaining Chanie’s story to set the tone for the Legacy Room. The money raised supports initiatives to teach about residential schools in Canadian classrooms.

For landscaper Joe Genovese, the Canada Blooms show will definitely not be the end of his Legacy Room. He dreams of creating a permanent outdoor Chanie Wenjack garden where First Nations, Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians can come together in the spirit of reconciliation, nation to nation.

For more information about creating your own Legacy room, email: staff@downiewenjack.ca