

Lois James - Champion of the Rouge

For more than half a century, **Lois James** was actively involved in the preservation of the Rouge Valley area - the only viable wilderness watershed remaining in the Toronto Area.

History shows the establishment of Ganaraska Forest during WWII was the first model for the Rouge and other watersheds which followed it - and led to the establishment of the first conservation authorities.

Although there were many other volunteers, no one worked as hard, for as many years, as Lois James to save the Rouge Valley. In 2003, Lois James was awarded the Order of Canada with the following acclamation:



LOIS JAMES

1923 -

"Lois James is a champion of the environment and a nemesis to those who seek to destroy it. She rallied and sustained public and political support in order to safeguard the Rouge Valley's flora and fauna, watershed and wetlands. She inspired others to become involved in preserving the delicate habitat and natural beauty that is home to many endangered and rare species of plant and animal life. For over 50 years, this mild-mannered Canadian homemaker has been protecting the planet, one corner at a time."

Office of the **Governor General of Canada** on the appointment of
Lois James to the **Order of Canada** - August 5, 2003

More than any other single person, Lois helped light the fire which led to one of the largest urban wilderness parks in the world. In 2012, Rouge Park became known as *Rouge National Urban Park* - Canada's first national urban park.

Lois James educated politicians and the public and made them aware of the environment at a time when most people did not give it much thought. Her work in the environment, community planning, waste reduction, pollution, foodland, soil and water conservation, transportation and other environmental issues showed great breadth of view that were years ahead of her time.

Not only knowing but having nominated this remarkable woman for the country's highest honour was a great privilege. Her tireless efforts have helped perpetuate the urban wilderness experience for millions of people.



Ganaraska Forest
- conservation history -

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[Ganaraska History](#)

[V.B. Blake](#)
Pioneer Historian

[E. J. Zavitz](#)
Chief of Reforestation

[A.H. Richardson](#)
Forester

The mother of Rouge Park

SUSAN O'NEILL
September 14, 2003

When Lois James settled in Scarborough in the mid-1960s, the Detroit native had never heard of the park that surrounded her family's new home.

Today, almost four decades later, the 79-year-old dynamo is credited as being the mother of the that park, which many say would never have come into existence had it not been for her efforts to preserve the local watershed.

[Dr. R.C. Wallace](#)
"Wallace of Queen's"

[G.M. Wrong](#)
History Prof./Author

[Lois James](#)
Champion of the Rouge

[Port Hope: Nuclear](#)
Sacrifice Zone of
Canada

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Guardians of Walker Rd

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"I think she's one of those lightning rods that comes every now and then to a community and does so much, selflessly too," said Murray Johnston, president of the Rouge Valley Foundation. "She's untiring."

Over the years, James has been involved with countless community groups and organizations including Pollution Probe, Earth Week Scarborough, The Green Door Alliance, the Green Party of Ontario, People or Planes, the Rouge Park Alliance and the 407 Action Group.

She is also a founding member of the Rouge Valley Foundation, Save the Rouge Valley System and the Scarborough Environment Alliance.

ORDER OF CANADA

Last month it was announced that James has been named to the Order of Canada in recognition of her work to preserve the Rouge Park.

And those who have worked with her throughout the years say there is no one more deserving of the honour.

"We all appreciate her for the work she's done," Johnston said. "I can't think of anyone else who has even half her stature in the Rouge."

In a recent interview at the Meadowvale Road home she bought with her late husband Bob almost 40 years ago, James said she never set out to become an activist.

But, she conceded, it's not a role she fell into accidentally either.

"When you see things that are terribly important to the world, you get active and you bring some others with you," she said.

Thinking back, she said her love affair with nature began at the age of 21 when she enlisted in the U.S. Navy as an aerologist during the Second World War.

"They made a weather man out of me. That was marvelous," she said.

"Actually, that put me in touch with nature ... I never thought of that before. I never did."

James hadn't been living in the Rouge long before she became involved in the community.

"That's why we have a Rouge Park, because we settled here in 1965. Very quickly we knew no one was in charge of this river," she said. "The Beare Road landfill was coming in and we knew something was wrong."

It was through her research at the University of Toronto's Scarborough campus that James first became familiar with the issues in her community and the inner workings of local government, she said.

James and her husband Bob, a sociologist whom she met at Wayne State University in Michigan, moved to Scarborough with their four children in 1965, after spending time in Nevada, Montana and then Alberta.

"I loved the desert, just loved it. The spicy smell of the desert," James said of her years in Reno.

"It was 1950 something, three or four, and we had the McCarthy era starting up and we had a really conservative president of the university. He was having everybody sign loyalty oaths ... this was a call to arms for the social scientists," she said. "We were blackballed so we moved up to Montana ... freedom."

The couple stayed in Montana for a short period and then moved on to Alberta in 1956.

"I loved Alberta and they were ready for sociology so we brought American sociology up (from the U.S.)," she said, noting by then the University of Toronto was developing sub-campuses.

"Bob thought he would take a part-time position for a year and come to Toronto," she said.

"So he moved us all. He took the job to set sociology up at Scarborough."

James said she and her husband got a map of the area and drew a circle around the campus. It had always been a rule that they would live no further than five minutes from work.

That's when the family found the bungalow in Scarborough where James still resides.

"We didn't know the Rouge. We had never heard of it," she said. "I've been here 38 years and I can't believe it. I've never been anywhere that long in my life."

It wasn't long after her husband, who died about three years ago at the age of 75, took the job at UTSC that James began helping out with a socioeconomic study at the campus.

"I kind of knew my way politically when I finished that study," she said. "I thought I did a great job. It just makes you ready to tackle things politically."

U.S. NAVY TRAINING

James' initial foray into the world of public activism came in Oregon when she joined the League of Women Voters.

"That was my crash education really," she said.

James also said her training in the U.S. Navy was valuable.

"I learned a lot, not about the environment. That kind of creeps up on you," said the woman who ran but was defeated in the mayoralty race in Scarborough in 1978 and as a candidate for the Green Party in the Scarborough-Rouge River riding in 1988 federal election.

"I've never seen any one person so concerned about the environment ... I hope she'll be with us another 50 years," said Ward 42 Councillor Raymond Cho (Scarborough-Rouge River), who was James running opponent in 1988 as the NDP candidate for the riding, which was won by Liberal Derek Lee.

Cho, who's worked with James on a number of issues since he was elected to city hall 12 years ago, said he was "exceedingly happy" to hear James is receiving the Order of Canada.

"She is to me, and to a lot of people, the mother of the Rouge Park," Cho said.

Marian Martin, who nominated James for the national honour, said James is one of the most remarkable people she's ever met.

"It's my opinion that without Lois James, there wouldn't be a Rouge Park," she said.

"Years ago I was in India and I met Mother Teresa," Martin said. "Lois reminds me of her. She gives and gives so much without any compensation."

She added, "Lois, we can't get into sainthood, but we got her the Order of Canada."

James herself said she hasn't thought much about the significance of receiving the honour.

"I think it's very nice," she said.

When asked where she found the determination to tackle one project after another over the years, James said, "You just take it as it comes."

A LOT OF WORK

James said the establishment of the Rouge Park in 1995 was the realization of a lot of work, by a lot of people in the community.

"We had to campaign every inch of the way," she said.

James, who admitted her days of protesting in front of bulldozers are likely over, continues to work with the Green Party as well as several local environmental committees, including the Community Resource Centre of Scarborough, for which she is campaigning for a new headquarters.

James is also active in the La Belle, Florida where she spends her winters.

"We used to go to Florida every year," she said. "It's a totally different ecosystem.

"My father retired there," she said, adding the couple would visit him on holiday.

"I was stationed there during the war, isn't that an amazing chance?"

Despite the many years she's been visiting the Sunshine State, James has never been to Disney World.

"I like tenting and being with nature," said the woman who shows few signs of slowing down.

In recent years she has started an Earth Day program, launched a citizens group and brought the Green Party to La Belle, located between West Palm Beach and Fort Myers.

Last year, at 78, James travelled to South Africa to attend her first Earth Summit.

"I loved it. My first Earth Summit ... it was great."

A Common History (Ganaraska and Rouge)

History shows the establishment of Ganaraska Forest during WWII laid the early foundation for the Rouge and other watersheds which followed it. For the first time in Canadian history, the Ganaraska study provided a holistic rather than a piecemeal approach to conservation.

Selected as the first test project in Ontario, The Ganaraska Watershed Report (1944) provided a conservation template for not only Ganaraska, but for the Rouge and other watersheds in Southern Ontario. Its recommendations set in motion a whole series of events which transformed the approach to conservation in Canada. This included the creation of the conservation authorities in Ontario; the passing of the Conservation Authorities Act (which enabled the authorities the power to acquire lands) the establishment of watershed natural boundaries (instead of political), etc.

The most significant master plan and core document to protect the Rouge Valley was a huge publication entitled the *R.D.H.P. Conservation Report* (Rouge-Duffin-Highland-Petticoat) published in 1956 -- more than a decade after the Ganaraska report and two years after Hurricane Hazel (which really got things moving).

According to Lois, the conservation report was a wonderful thing because "*there was no other model to follow*" and it provided a direction for her citizens group. (she was one of the founders of Save the Rouge Valley).

The blueprint in the *R.D.H.P. Conservation Report* (1956) recommended "**a large-scale wilderness parkland and nature preserve**" in the Rouge Valley *half a century before* Rouge Park was created:

"This area contains the choicest block of natural unspoiled wilderness in the lower reaches of any of the valleys... This conservation area (Rouge) offers the best possibility of any of the valley lands immediately adjacent to Metropolitan Toronto for the development of a large-scale wilderness parkland and nature preserve".

A. H. Richardson, *R.D.H.P. Conservation Report* (1956)
Department of Planning and Development

Today, Ganaraska Forest and Rouge Park are similar in size (each 11,000 acres+). Ganaraska Forest and Rouge Park also form an important part of Ontario's Greenbelt (2005) - the world's

largest greenbelt - which might not exist without the far-reaching recommendations first set down in *The Ganaraska Watershed Report* (1944) and *R.D.H.P. Conservation Report* (1956) .

In both the Ganaraska and R.D.H.P. Conservation Reports, **V. B. Blake** wrote the historical backdrops as the lead historian.

Lois James - Bio.

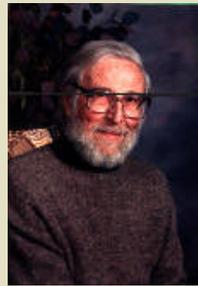
Lois James was born October 11, 1923 in Cleveland, Ohio. She was the second daughter of Owen and Mildred Fowler and of British and Welsh ancestry. From a young age, her parents and grandparents left an imprint which would follow Lois James throughout her life.

Her father was a Chiropractor and keenly interested in politics as a political delegate. He loved the great outdoors, or as Lois described "Papa's love of wilderness and country." Her Grandfather was a congregational Minister.

Lois James graduated from Alma College, Michigan in 1944 with Honours - Bachelor of Arts degree including three majors in Music, Biology and French.

During World War 1, she enlisted with the U.S. Navy as an Aerologist (1944-1945) and was placed at Lakehurst, New Jersey in the singing platoon - bootcamp. She was then sent to the torpedo bomber base at Opaloca, Florida for further training in aerology, flight plans and weather maps until 1946.

Under the G.I. Bill, Lois James received her Master's Degree (1948) in Music at Wayne State University, Michigan. While studying at this university, she fell in love with Robert James who would become her lifelong partner and husband. Lois Fowler and Robert (Bob) James were married September 3, 1948. They would later adopt four children, Katherine, John, Delores and Michael.



Prof. Robert James
(1924 - 2000)

(For over half a century, Bob would be her "rock and support" who provided Lois with her "car, food, shelter, encouragement and ideas" for her many causes. A great loss, Robert James passed away quietly as he had lived, at his home on March 6, 2000.)

In 1949, Lois James joined United Nations Globe of Citizens and this association would become the foundation of what was to come. It gave her the right vocabulary and understanding of citizenship, the world, and the role of citizens in all levels of government.

Lois James worked as a Research Assistant for various Professors at the University of Oregon where her husband was studying at the same university until 1950 when he graduated in 1950 with a PhD in Sociology under a Carnegie Fellowship. She was introduced to his fields, namely Sociology, Economics and History and found "she had a mind that seemed to go for science and research."

In 1950, Lois James and her family moved to Reno Nevada, where she became extremely interested in the democratic process, women's rights, and non-partisan issues at all levels (international, national and local). From 1951 to 1956, Lois James joined the League of Women Voters in Reno, Nevada, and later in Montana. The League was given a grant to fill in all chapters of the west. Lois entertained Eleanor Roosevelt at the University of Nevada, who she described as "a great lady - a pioneer with the United Nations in her work for human rights."

A pivotal point for Lois James came in 1956. The James family moved to Canada when her husband, Robert James accepted a post with The University of Alberta. Their move to Canada was prompted by the rise of "McCarthyism" in United States: "The rise of McCarthyism in the 1950's prompted the move to Canada... People were asking people to sign their loyalty everywhere, and for social scientists this was not tolerable..." (Robert James, 75 fought for the Rouge Sociology Pioneer set up university departments - The Toronto Star, March 15, 2000, GT05)

In the early years in Canada, Lois James provided great support to her husband as he established the field of sociology . Robert James was the first professor of sociology at both the University of

Alberta and at University of Toronto's Scarborough campus. "He was ahead of his time" according to his colleague, John Alan Lee: *"Sociology was (then) an American field and it hadn't really come to Canada as itself; it was always attached to the departments of political economy."*

In Edmonton, Lois James worked as a music teacher (choir and vocal) from 1956 to 1964. The natural talent and beautiful voice of Lois James was recognized from the time she was 4-1/2 years of age. In 1958, she sang with Robert Shaw in the Brahms Requiem in San Diego, and opera in Edmonton. In Toronto, she sang with the Mendelssohn Choir and joined its European tour in the early 1970's. She also sang with the Orpheus Choir in Toronto. Her beautiful voice is still heard in the United Church, where she remains a choir member. She has also published the Outreach Newsletter for the United Church on international and social issues.

The James family moved to Toronto in 1964 when Robert James joined the University of Scarborough's campus. After spending the first year in the Don Valley Village area of Toronto, they moved to a forested property on Meadowvale Road by the Rouge Valley in 1965, where Lois James continues to reside. On their move to the Rouge Valley area of Toronto, Lois felt *"God put Bob and I here accidentally. We didn't know where we were, or why we were here... but we soon found it."*

In their new home, the James family had hoped to live a quiet life in a rural setting but it was not to be amidst some of the regions top environmental controversies.

"They hoped to live a quiet life in what was then farm country, but almost immediately, the area became ground zero of some of the region's top environmental controversies."

Making a Difference – Activist 'couldn't avoid' role in defence of Rouge honoured for her 30-year fight against the valley's development...
Scarborough's Lois James is as vigilant and enthusiastic as ever
The Globe and Mail – December 21, 1999 by Wallace Immen

Lois James was well suited for the path she would follow:

"I was trained to keep my eye on government... I grew up in the United States and was trained as a citizen in the League of Women Voters which operates at a local, state and municipal level. When I moved to Canada, there was no league, no movement of that nature."

Lois James as quoted in *Rebels with a cause – Council Watchdogs keep a close eye on local governments across the GTA*
The Toronto Star – August 1, 1996 – NY1 by Tracy Hanes

Her campaigns over the next 35 years in the environment and community would be many. Even though she never intended to be an activist, she demonstrated amazing perseverance and selfless voluntarism.

"I never intended to be an activist. I couldn't avoid it. Especially since I lived in the middle of it."

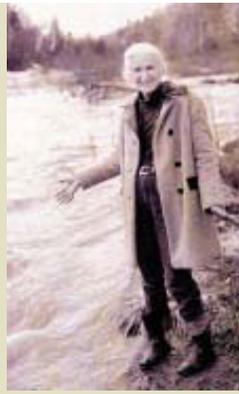
Lois James - Making a Difference
The Globe and Mail – December 21, 1999

The garbage crisis has always been a serious issue for Lois James. In the 1960's, she joined Pollution Probe and started questioning the throwaway society in a time when it was unpopular, because few could see the need.

For the next 30 years, Lois James and her group would be shunned while plans were developed for highways, subdivisions and a garbage dump in the last untouched greenspace in the Toronto area.

"We're the last river system in the Metro area that isn't a sewer. It isn't the amount of development but the fallout from it that will lead to the degradation of the park."

Lois James quoted in *Stay out of the Rouge, developer tells Crombie*
The Toronto Star – September 14, 1989 – E2 by Daniel Girard



The first big campaign for the Rouge was triggered in 1967 when Lois and her husband saw a dump built (Beare Road) in a gravel pit next to the Rouge River. She helped organize protests against the plan to dump garbage at the edge of the Rouge Valley. The dump was finally closed around 1984 and is now replaced by a methane plant generating electricity.

Another fight came with the dumping of radioactive soil at the Reesor Rd. dump and gravel pit in the 1970's. Lois and her community helped to raise \$100,000 (a huge amount in those days) to hire David Estrin as Legal Counsel (co-author of Ontario Environmental Law book entitled "Environment on Trial"). This trial resulted in longest court case of the time by a coalition of groups. The radioactive soil was never brought to the site.

Soon after, Lois James began challenging the loss of good farmland by the Rouge Valley with a big new Zoo for Toronto. With development of the zoo, the contour of the entire landscape was changed as many trees were cut down and heritage homes destroyed. *"The citizen protestors won some environmental concessions to safeguard the Rouge River, which ran through the site. But the zoo eventually went ahead bringing the traffic with it."* (Making a Difference – Activist 'couldn't avoid' role in defence of Rouge honoured for her 30-year fight against the valley's development... Scarborough's Lois James is as vigilant and enthusiastic as ever - The Globe and Mail – December 21, 1999 by Wallace Immen)

An even bigger challenge came in 1972 when the Federal Government began expropriating massive amounts of land for the proposed Pickering Airport, also located by the Rouge Valley. Lois James recalls the time as one that *"nearly killed the community."*

Some of the expropriated land was near the James's house. The Province gave the James the choice to sell immediately, or to hang on with an uncertain future.

Lois James did not want to see another Mirabel... *"Imagine what it would have been like with an airport here. It would have been a mess."* She chose to fight the proposed airport and became an officer of the citizen group "People or Planes". In 1975, the airport plan was shelved. (In 2001, the federal government announced its intention of giving much of the expropriated land to Rouge Park).

What would soon follow in its place was no better. Suburban developments and industrial areas were beginning *"to take the guts right out of the best farmland"* according to Lois James. The alumni of "People or Planes" formed the *"Green Door Alliance"* to try save disappearing farmland in the Greater Toronto area:

In the early 1970's, Lois James saw the need to put together an advocacy group to protect the Rouge Valley recognizing: *"We can't keep getting killed like this one community at a time. We need a watershed association."*

A full-time group was formed in 1975 named *Save the Rouge Valley System Inc. (SRVS)* with the mandate *"to preserve and enhance the Rouge watershed"*. Lois James and her husband were two of the founders - Lois James was the inspiration behind SRVS. They united a lot of good people (3,000 members) to preserve and enhance the Rouge watershed. One of those people was Fran Sainsbury who later became the Mayor of Whitchurch/Stouffville.

Lois James pioneered the concept of establishing a wilderness nature preserve. She wrote extensively and lobbied all levels of government. With a little ingenuity and a lot of hard work, she and her small group (SVRS) overcame the lack of resources.

"The fervour was for the whole planet, but we had our corner to defend."

Lois James - Making a Difference
The Globe and Mail – December 21, 1999

In her fight for the Rouge, Lois and her group began to lean heavily on the Ministry of Environment and The Toronto and Region Conservation Authority because she discovered nobody was in charge.

"It was like a swinging door going in and out of that Ministry of Environment office, every environment minister had to learn his job. They knew nothing."

Lois James as quoted in *The Band of Rebels who saved the Rouge*
The Toronto Star – March 31, 1990 – D5 by Lisa Wright

Lois James was vocal at countless federal, provincial, municipal, planning and other meetings. She was a lead council watchdog at the municipal level. It was a thankless job with countless unpaid hours making presentations, slogging through council minutes and consultant's reports.

"Councillors, I find, all over the world with issues can't become an expert on any one. Citizens have to do it. It's hard work but very rewarding. There are no big victories, but day to day little ones that build to something significant. You don't win many battles, but the educational process makes it worth the fight."

Lois James as quoted in *Rebels with a cause*
Council Watchdogs keep a close eye
on local governments across the GTA
Toronto Star – August 1, 1996 – NY1 by Tracy Hanes

By 1985, the tide began to turn when Canadians in general were starting to give high priority to environmental concerns. But there was yet another obstacle from an unexpected source to be overcome.

"It took two full decades of losses of wetlands, forests and farmland before the protection movement began to develop some muscle and have some heartening successes."

Lois James - Making a Difference
The Globe and Mail – December 21, 1999



Lois James

In 1988, the public agency that should have been fighting for protection of the Rouge Valley, namely The Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, took the position that the plan to preserve a large tract of tableland beside the Rouge River Valley (now Rouge Park) was *"not technically necessary, practical or affordable as an environmental protection measure."*

The characteristic response of Lois James, a Co-Founder of Save the Rouge Valley System was:

"It will be up to us to make the politicians and government agencies (such as the Authority) change their vision and widen the greenbelt corridor beyond the flood area."

Lois James as quoted in *No need seen to conserve it all*
The Toronto Star - July 19, 1988, E2 by Sterling Taylor

In the summer of 1988, nearly a thousand people filed into the Scarborough City Hall to ensure council's unanimous vote to zone 5,100 acres of Rouge land for natural and rural uses only. The concept of a natural heritage park started to snowball after this victory.

When Lois James ran for the Green Party of the riding of Scarborough-Rouge River in 1988, she was considered to be the "emotional choice" in her riding, for among other reasons:

"James was fighting to preserve the Rouge Valley...when most Metro residents thought Rouge was women's face coloring."

Will city swing next Monday?

The Toronto Star – November 15, 1988, E1 by Stan Josey

Raymond Cho (NDP) and Derek Lee (Liberal) who were then her running opponents, would later become her staunch supporters in her cause to preserve the Rouge Valley.

When Ontario Hydro proposed its power line to be strung across the Rouge River Valley in 1989 to serve Metro Zoo, Lois James called it:

"A callous disregard of the environment – a three-wire line on heavy poles... a blight on the Rouge Valley. It's absolutely obscene and we want something done about it."

Lois James as quoted in *Hydro Line called "obscene"*
The Toronto Star – January 17, 1989, E2 by Stan Josey

The power lines were subsequently installed but Ontario Hydro, the politicians and public had listened to Lois James.

"I have learned the compromise is not the way to protect the environment...as soon as you begin to compromise, it is degraded"...

Lois James - Making a Difference
Active Magazine, Spring/Summer, 1994 p.33

During the garbage crisis in 1989, she raised the specter on the Rouge National Heritage Park lands being considered and studied for a garbage dump site:

"To save these lands, Scarborough must set the highest standards for garbage reduction among its own people. Society must receive a clear message from its elected leaders in keeping with the changes required for reduction of garbage... We are all in this garbage crisis together... I, for my part, do not want to be ashamed of my city's leadership falling behind in doing all that must be done toward reduction.... We have allotted extra money to garbage collection, but let us not use it for unsorted waste. Let's use it for setting up composting sites for residents... for educational materials on how to reduce waste. Let us give a clear indication we know what this garbage crisis is all about."

Lois James as quoted in Councillors shunned recycling program
The Toronto Star – April 4, 1989, E4 - Lois James

Shortly thereafter, the proposal for a new garbage dump on Rouge area lands was scrapped.

When Scarborough's Social Planning Council held a panel in November of 1989 to discuss ways to reduce garbage in Metro before it reached a crisis point, speakers included representatives from the Ministry of Environment, Scarborough Works Dept., Solid Waste Environmental Assessment Plan and Lois James as Secretary of the City's Social Planning Council who said:

"People must change their habits to conserve in order to control the trash crisis... The first and last line of defense in the war against garbage is reduction."

Lois James as quoted in *Social planning council seeks garbage solution*
The Toronto Star – November 23, 1989 – E9 by Lisa Wright

In January of 1990, a 250 unit condominium development was approved by Scarborough City Council at the entrance to the Rouge Valley along Twyn Rivers Dr. (formerly known as the "Glen Eagles" site). It was the first highrise development in an environmentally sensitive area which Lois and her group (SVRS) tried to get set aside as part of the park:

"This is one of a long list of degrading developments on the edge of the Rouge. We've never been able to save a piece of that rim no matter how spectacular it was."

Lois James as quoted in *Scarborough approves Rouge Valley building*
The Globe and Mail – January 16, 1990, A17 by Larry Till

Several years later, with pressure from Lois, her group, politicians and the public, this important parcel of land with a panoramic view over the Rouge Valley was saved for future generations with funds received (\$6 Million) from three levels of government – federal, provincial and municipal. Today, this important site is part of Rouge Park.

By February 1990, The Toronto and Region Conservation Authority had come around and adopted the Rouge River watershed master plan. For the first time, recognition was given by the Authority to protection of the Rouge Valley on a watershed basis, rather than piecemeal basis, and to expand enforcement programs to ensure developers comply with regulations.

"It's a start. (The Plan) purports to have policies and technical standards and it is on a broad watershed basis. Up to now, it has been just piecemeal fashion... speedy action on the plan is needed to protect the area, now under growing pressure from developers."

Lois James as quoted in *Authority okays plan to protect the Rouge*
The Toronto Star – February 24, 1990, A4 by Bruce DeMara

A month later, another threat north of the Zoo followed as Rouge tablelands were considered as the site for another public golf course. Lois James as spokesperson for SRVS was emphatic in the need for environmental protection of the Rouge stating *"the Group does not want a Golf Course"* (14) (*Golf Rouge Tablelands eyed as site for another public course* - The Globe and Mail – March 28, 1990 – A18 by Lorne Rubenstein). The golf course proposal never proceeded.

Through the many obstacles and years, the vision of Lois James and Save the Rouge Valley System was simple and it was consistent:

"Future generations must be able to walk in a centuries-old forest, catch a glimpse of white-tailed deer and swim in an unpolluted river within Canada's most populous region."

Lois James as quoted in *The Band of Rebels who saved the Rouge*
The Toronto Star – March 31, 1990 – D5 by Lisa Wright

With the "vision" and Lois James to carry the group through many difficult years of being ignored, booed at public meetings, etc., "the band of rebels" (SRVS) would soon live up to its name. They had watched and struggled as the Rouge environment paid the price. Soon, the writing on the wall was starting to be read.

"In the '70's, people would make fun of you for your ideas. It was a terribly painful time... We lost a lot of battles in the first 10 years because the level of public awareness and political understanding just wasn't there...for instance, many ponds in the Rouge were destroyed over that decade (with) industrial and residential development... much of the wildlife habitat disappeared. The writing was on the wall."

Lois James as quoted in *The Band of Rebels who saved the Rouge*
The Toronto Star – March 31, 1990 – D5 by Lisa Wright

In September, 1989, the report of Commissioner David Crombie recommended the Rouge Wilderness area be protected as a natural heritage park and attacked the province's plan to build an eight-lane expressway and garbage dump. Certain prominent developers in Toronto like Joe Lebovic noted Crombie's report and publicly said Crombie *"should mind his own business."* Lois James was emphatic in her response:

"Development of a garbage dump, an expressway and housing would destroy the entire area, which is home to white-tailed deer, bald eagles, red foxes and rare plant species... we're the last river system in the Metro area that isn't a sewer. It isn't the amount of development but the fallout from it that will lead to the degradation of the park."

Lois James as quoted in *Stay out of the Rouge, developer tells Crombie*
The Toronto Star – September 14, 1989 – E2 by Daniel Girard

The Developer (Lebovic) was *"bloody unhappy"* with the proposal to create Rouge Park because it would interfere with his plans for executive housing in the Rouge Valley. He threatened to erect a huge sign along Highway 401 (Canada's busiest highway) with bold letter words which said:

"If it wasn't for the white tail deer, you would be home by now."

Celebrating Rouge Park Nature preserve backers pleased land set aside
The Toronto Star – August 1, 1996 - OS1 by Stan Josey

The intended highway sign was probably meant for commuters stuck in heavy rush hour traffic to suggest the extra distance would not have to be driven if housing were allowed in the Rouge Valley. Fortunately, Lebovic never carried through on his threat and eventually his land in the Rouge area was bought by the government.

In the fall of 1988, the Rouge Valley appeared to be saved when Ottawa offered the provincial government \$10 million to help create the park. Queen's Park dragged its feet. Finally in March, 1990 as a result of the public pressure generated by the SRVS group to keep developers out of the last wilderness area in Toronto, Premier David Peterson (Liberal) promised to save 10,500 acres of the Rouge River Valley as Canada's biggest urban park.

Rouge Park was officially opened on April 5, 1995 under former Premier Bob Rae, leader of the NDP Government who called the newly opened park:

"A symbol for the future... a place where nature takes priority... For the first time in Ontario, governments, agencies, groups, the local community and volunteers have come together to protect and rehabilitate a valuable natural resource."

New Rouge Park hailed as "Symbol for the Future"
The Toronto Star, April 6, 1995, A6 by Sterling Taylor

Scarborough Councillor Ron Moeser had earlier recognized:

"Anybody who's walked there has seen this is a unique area... the Rouge area could be as important to Toronto as Central Park is to New York, or Hyde Park is to London."

Stay out of the Rouge, developer tells Crombie
The Toronto Star – September 14, 1989 – E2 by
Daniel Girard

For her work, in 1995, Lois James was recognized with the Global Citizen's Challenge Award by the United Nations Association.

Even though Rouge Park had just officially opened, within months, other threats on the newly created park were soon looming.

With the destruction of mature maples to widen the road along Steeles Ave. in N.E. Toronto in September of 1995, there was heightened concerns for the ecological future of Rouge Park:

"It doesn't give us much confidence" says environmentalist Lois James, whose devotion to preserving the wilderness sanctuary was a driving force behind the creation of Canada's largest urban Park... Now we're more afraid for the future of the park than ever."

*Felling of maples raises concerns for Rouge Park
future as trees cut down to widen road*
The Toronto Star – September 8, 1995 – SC1 by
Sterling Taylor

Demands for environmental safeguards grew as work was about to commence along Steeles Ave. E. across Rouge Park between Toronto and Durham Region. A guarantee was wanted that the traffic increase to the area would not damage the sensitive ecological balance of Canada's largest urban park.

"Area resident Lois James wants the corridor declared a scenic heritage park road. That would ensure the section of Steeles would follow the contours of the land and not be just another arrow-straight highway ... It might not prevent the pollution, but it might instill a consciousness of the environment in the minds of motorists who travel the corridor regularly."

Rouge Park supporters seeking road safeguards
The Toronto Star – July 30, 1995 – SC1 by Sterling Taylor

With the threat of yet another major highway across the park, Lois James was instrumental in the establishment of the "407 Action Group" to try and stop an extension of Highway 407 across the Rouge Valley:

"Roads are so macho; they do more damage than almost anything".

Lois James - *Making a Difference* - Activist 'couldn't avoid' role in defense of Rouge honoured for her 30-year fight against the valley's development...
The Globe and Mail - December 21, 1999 by Wallace Immen

Lois James was the organizer of Canada's second Earth Day Celebrations in Scarborough (1991) and continues to help out in varying capacities at its annual events. (Earth Day was first celebrated in 1970 by Americans, but would not arrive in Canada until 1990, when it went global).

Earth Day celebrations now last a week and are important because they promote the need for environmental awareness and the dangers that threaten it through ecology walks, plays, as well as a series of other activities across Toronto.

"The goal of Earth Day Canada is to develop programs to enable people across the country to reduce their personal environmental impact... We are building a grassroots network across the country that can provide individuals with the kinds of help they require to reduce their impact without radically altering their lifestyles."

Lois James - *Take a hike, plant trees on Earth Day*
The Toronto Star - April 11, 1991 - E14 by Phinjo Gombu

Politicians from all levels of government have recognized the work of Lois James including Joyce Trimmer, the former Mayor of Scarborough, in 1996 who said:

"A lot of naysayers said it couldn't be done, Trimmer recalled as residents gathered last week to celebrate the creation of the giant Rouge Park... Dedicated volunteers like Lois James helped form the Save the Rouge Valley Group... just coming off the successful fight to block a proposed new international airport in Pickering in the mid 1970's."

Celebrating Rouge Park Nature preserve backers pleased land set aside
The Toronto Star - August 1, 1996 - OS1 by Stan Josey



Lois James (left) and Joyce Trimmer, former Mayor Scarborough

The dedication of Lois James to environmental protection was recognized in 1999 when she was awarded the Rouge Park Award for outstanding contribution, dedication and extraordinary achievements. On the occasion of the award presentation:

"For as long as I can remember, my mother has been a Don Quixote figure, tilting at the windmills of unrestrained urban sprawl in defense of the environment... fortunately for all of us, she has been much more successful than old Don... I believe that my Mom's genius is her ability to hold what are usually two polar positions, the idealism of youth and the practical exercise of real politic at the same time, without an ounce of logical incongruity."

Michael James

"This award is presented to those who have contributed to protecting, restoring and enhancing the Rouge Park, and you are an exemplary example of such an individual. Your tenacity and vision since the early 1970's has been a driving force behind the establishment and growth of the Rouge Park."

The Toronto and Region Conservation Authority
letter dated November 17, 1999

On June 15, 2001, Lois James was honoured with the Paul Harris Fellowship Award by the Rotary Club of North Scarborough even though she is not a Rotarian member. The last non-Rotarian to be given this honour was highly esteemed former Mayor Frank Faubert (dec'd.)

She has persistently kept a vigilant eye on the local governments and unhesitatingly did battle whenever there was an issue that needed challenging but never in a confrontational manner. Lois always stressed the *"educational approach"*.

"Municipal politicians are propelled into front ranks of environmental protection ill-prepared."

Lois James

"The first mistake was to think someone was in charge... We expected government to be aware, but after a few months we realized it isn't and that the job was ours to do. The thing that makes you irritable is that the government has the resources and volunteer groups have nothing."

Lois James as quoted in *Making a Difference*
Active Magazine, Spring/Summer, 1994 p.33

She has attended countless meetings at Metropolitan Toronto and City Councils to alert her interested groups to developments in urban politics, observe the effects of adopted policies, and comment on the decision-making process.

"She's kept a watchful eye on environmental and social planning issues... and calls her tangles with governments 'a great adventure'."

Rebels with a cause – Council Watchdogs keep a close eye on local governments across the GTA
Toronto Star – August 1, 1996 – NY1 by Tracy Hanes

Lois James has assisted dozens of groups in setting up own community and environmental groups. She recognized long ago the smaller groups that join networks and alliances, allowed the small group to gain the support of the larger ones. SRVS for example is a member of several groups, including the Federation of Ontario Naturalists, Canadian Environmental Network etc.

"For nearly three decades, her candid views and unstinting approach have been powerful weapons in her battle to preserve the Rouge River watershed... she has seen a lot of volunteers come and go, but James... is as committed as ever."

Making a Difference – Lois James
Active Magazine, Spring/Summer, 1994 p.33

One of the greatest assets of Lois James is the strength and "inspiring faith" she has given to others. She has amassed a large constituency of like people devoted to her aims. She has been a mentor and a role model to numerous environmentalists.

With a view to the "big picture", James took strong positions on major issues affecting the community, environment and Rouge Park and her achievements were achieved not by fighting City Hall, but by working with the system. She never got derailed with minor details. People like Lois James *"came not to bury City Hall, but to appraise it,"* to paraphrase a former president of the Association of Women Electors. With her sheer force of personality, she is still considered "an institution" at Scarborough and Metro Councils.

"She (James) is an institution at Scarborough and Metro Councils, a member of numerous coalitions who is known for her articulate presentations and her makeshift 'briefcases' – the plastic shopping bags she uses to carry her papers."

Rebels with a cause – Council Watchdogs keep a close eye on local governments across the GTA
The Toronto Star
August 1, 1996 – NY1 by Tracy Hanes

More great quotes from and about Lois...

"There are no big victories, but day to day little ones that build to something significant." (Lois James)

"The best volunteers find us themselves... it's our job to be visible and to be available for someone who might say, 'Hey, I'd like to do that.'" (Lois James - Making a Difference Active Magazine Spring/Summer, 1994 p.33)

"We haven't just inherited the earth from our forefathers, our society continues to borrow its endowments from our children." (Lois James)

"To do things that need doing, that nobody else will do..." (Lois James)

"I don't go to all the meetings – and we do have a lot of them. But I go where I can. I always want to be there when it gets to the moment of truth". (Lois James as quoted in Making a Difference – Lois James - Active Magazine, Spring/Summer, 1994 p.33)

"I don't think anyone could replace Lois James for what she does because her vision is so broad, and doesn't limit her scope... she is involved in so many issues...." (Murray Johnston, President of the Rouge Valley Foundation)

"Lois is the one that got things going." (Richard Schoffield, Chief Archivist of the Scarborough Historical Society)

"We need the Loises of the world. We can count on her to show up at meetings and make the right points". "She was always there and the one who got things wrapped up in the community." (Sue Russell, former Co-ordinator of Rouge Park)

With her priorities on the environment, in human welfare and citizen participation in community planning, Lois James has been committed to the following organizations and issues:

Association of Women Electors (AWE)
Cedar Grove Community Club
Coalition to preserve Foodland in Southern Ontario
Conservation Council of Ontario
Earth Week Scarborough
Federation of Ontario Naturalists
Green Door Alliance
Green Party of Ontario Heritage York
Hillside Community Association
It's not Garbage
Metropolitan Toronto Transportation Plan Review Group
Ontario Committee for World Food Day
People or Planes (POP)
Ride For The Rouge Rouge Park Advisory Committee
Rouge Park Alliance
Rouge Valley Foundation
Save the Rouge Valley System
Scarborough Citizen's Task Force on the Zoo
Scarborough Environment Alliance
Scarborough Environmental Committee
Scarborough Pollution Probe
Social Planning Council of Scarborough
Toronto Field Naturalists
Toronto Pedestrian Committee
United Church
United Nations Citizen Member
United Nations Association, Toronto Branch
United Way East
University Women's Club
Waste not Wanted
407 Action Group

On September 14, 2010, Lois James, recipient of the Order of Canada for her leadership in saving the Rouge Valley, spoke about work for the environment as work for peace at the Peace Day celebration in Mississauga (Canadian chapter of the Registry of World Citizens).

The greatest asset of Lois James has been her way of giving strength to others devoted to similar causes, of which there were many. The selfless volunteerism, dedication and vision of Lois over many years has had enormous impact on matters of the environment and the community. In her diplomatic way, she has educated politicians from all levels of government on the importance of a healthy environment.

Beginning with her work in 1949 as a citizen member with the United Nations, and throughout her life, she has demonstrated perseverance, strength and stamina, while living simply and humbly.

*"What you leave your children and grandchildren
is the result of your dedication.
It's going to take your life, nothing less.
I don't know any shortcuts."*

Making a Difference – Lois James
Active Magazine, Spring/Summer, 1994 p.33

Now almost 89 years of age, Lois remains active with various community organizations and maintains the optimism necessary to inspire others for societal and environmental change. She continues to "walk the talk of the long term vision" giving all any one person can possibly give to the environment, to the community, and especially, to young people as an inspiration, who frequently lean on her for advice and support.

*"We are not finished fighting. No way."
Lois James, 2003*

Highlights of what public officials from all levels of government have written:

"Lois James has never given up her dream of sustainable development in Pickering that respects the natural beauty of its natural world; particularly in the sensitive Rouge River Valley. Her devotion and dedication to ecology and the environment in this area goes back a half-century and is unmatched."

"She was articulate and passionate in her advocacy for the (Rouge Park) project and doubtless caused many to pause and begin to believe that just maybe this could be accomplished, even if unprecedented in size and scope... Lois was not alone in this endeavour, but she was distinguished by her persistence, her subscription to rational ecological principles and her own personal way of presenting a challenge from which there was no escape. There is a recognition here that our progress in dealing responsibly with urban development, protecting green space and educating our community would not have advanced so well and so far without two decades of dedicated commitment from Lois James."

"I have always been impressed with her tireless commitment to the preservation of our natural heritage. Through her work with Save the Rouge Valley System and a myriad of other environmental action groups... she has worked, tirelessly, to educate decision makers and the general population of the need to protect our dwindling supply of natural resources, particularly in the greater Toronto area".

"I have been privileged to work with and observe Lois in many activities for over thirty years and have been inspired by her competence, capacity, enthusiasm and sensitivity and I feel that her work, particularly on behalf of the environment, has had province wide implications."

"Lois James is a woman of vision, a great orator, a writer, a founding member of Save the Rouge Valley, a teacher, a defender and tireless advocate for the preservation of the environment in a great variety of ways, and an inspiration to all Canadians."

"Her enthusiasm and passion for the environment have swayed governments, inspired other volunteers and most importantly, have resulted in real and intangible protective action. Lois James is someone who truly epitomizes the Order's motto of a desire for a better country."

"I don't think there is anyone who is more committed to environmental protection... I along with many others have learned by examples set out by Ms. James, as to how everyone can become more involved in protecting our environment, both for our generation and those that follow us."

"In an age where an engaged citizenship is too frequently the only defense against the constant erosion of our natural areas, Lois stands tall as an example of environmental citizenship in Canada... Lois James is an ordinary citizen who challenges us to achieve the extraordinary."

"Lois has left an imprint upon the environmental community that will never be erased. Arousing a deep understanding of the conservation ethic... she has steadfastly conveyed the need to preserve the beauty and the value of our natural and cultural heritage, for our time and for the generations to come. As a dedicated community volunteer, her indefatigable, selfless efforts have attained the quality of folklore..."

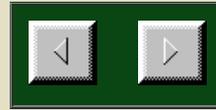
The respect Lois James commands among the politicians she so carefully scrutinizes is testament to the effectiveness of her candid diplomatic approach and non-partisan philosophy.

Lois James has made a huge difference.

"She gave all she could."

Murray Johnston,
President of the Rouge Valley Foundation, 2003

The end



Researcher: M. Martin
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