

## Michael O'Brien by Ken Larsen

Michael O'Brien joined the RDRN in the 1970's. It would be difficult to prepare a complete list of his many contributions to environmental education and preservation over the years.

Michael was a pioneer in the use of video technology for education. He arranged the creation of the ACCESS television documentary on the bluebird conservationist, Charlie Ellis. It was also Michael's brainchild to create the Ellis Bird Farm to honour the work of the Ellises. Michael played a pivotal role in both its formation and the initial years of its operation. This is one of the first, and best, examples of the good that can come of cooperation between industry and environmental groups. Michael played a pivotal role in both its formation and the initial years of its operation. This is one of the first, and best, examples of the good that can come of cooperation between industry and environmental groups.



Michael was also instrumental in introducing computers to the executive of the RDRN when the first IBM PC came out in 1982. It was through his patient tutoring that many of us became computer literate.

Michael carefully organized the RDRN response to the large Waskasoo Park Project in the City of Red Deer. He insured that the message of wildlife habitat conservation and preservation was heard loud and clear by the planners and their political masters. The result is one of the best urban parks in Alberta. Michael's leadership on the various planning committees insured that preservation and enhancement of the Gaetz Lakes Sanctuary within the Waskasoo Park. Initial plans for the Kerry Wood Nature Centre were for little more than bathrooms and an information counter. Michael was instrumental in convincing Park Planers that the present well-staffed and funded centre was more appropriate for future demand. The 70,000 or more visitors who now visit the Nature Centre each year are certainly proof of Michael's vision.

The City of Red Deer's biological mosquito control program was also the creation of Michael. His careful research and patient lobbying convince the City to undertake this innovative and environmentally responsible program long before the environment became fashionable.

Michael was involved in many issues affecting the environment in past years and the City has more green space and a healthier environment as a result. He was working on the development of constructed wetlands at the time of his death.

One of Michael's greatest strengths was his ability to tactfully bring people around to a more environmentally responsible mind set without making them feel threatened. To work with Michael was to be enlightened by his knowledge and

delighted by his logic, wit and thoughtfulness. Over the years, Michael carried the RDRN's environmental message to many community organizations.