



Linda Smith (left) and Nancy Patteson clean up Greenfield's Energy Park on April 8.

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Small Change plays a concert at Greenfield's Energy Park.

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A community effort for nature's gem

Volunteers keep Greenfield's Energy Park full of botanical life

Greenfield's Energy Park is a gem in the center of town. Main Street is all hustle and work, but a short stroll down Miles Street takes you to the peaceful gardens and shade of a town park created in 1999.

Sandy Thomas was the director of the Northeast Sustainable Energy Association (NESEA) housed in the former railroad switch house building in the blighted area left by the demolition of the railroad station. In 1999, the town had a Master Plan that called for a public park.

"Overseeing the creation of the park fell to me, but it took hundreds of people to make it a reality," Thomas said.

Thomas was fortunate in learning that Kim Erslev, who was finishing her master's degree in landscape design at the University of Massachusetts, laid out a plan for a park for her studies.

"We took her plan which laid out the park with pedestrian walkways," Thomas said. "A park review committee was led by Bill Gran, the town planner. We also turned to the wider community, including children, for their ideas about what they wanted in a park."

Thomas remembered the committees that worked so long and thoughtfully.

"We formed lots of committees," she said. "It took us a year and a half to choose the trees for shade. The trees we planted were very small, but they have matured and now they

give the cooling shade we imagined. The architect, Bruce Coldham, provided an essential service and worked with the town on laying out wires and pipes."

Many volunteers worked to build and plant the park, including Nancy Hazard. Hazard continues to volunteer in the park and remembers those early days.

"It seemed like an incredible opportunity and I was really excited," she said. "There were only some trees and shrubs planted when I joined. I didn't know anything about gardening, but I like to do things I don't know anything about."

Volunteers have many ways of donating their labor. Hazard worked in the garden, but she also wrote grants and can laugh when she says she was known for asking people for things.

"And I get things," she said. "Nasami Farm was just starting up in

Whately and they very generously donated plants. Magic Wings Butterfly Conservatory also responded and gave us donations of plants, because it was our desire to welcome butterflies."

Thomas said the park's planners and volunteers operated under NESEA's philosophy of using recycled materials.

"We got a lot of old granite curbing that made the amphitheater seating for musical performances," she said. "Then we went to Ashfield Stone to make stone benches and found people who were willing to

sponsor the benches. Arjen Vriend of Pioneer Gardens in Deerfield donated many plants.

"Hundreds of people gave their money, their energy and their ideas," Thomas continued. "I wrote a lot of grants including infrastructure grants, and a Tree Trust grant. Grants paid for the sculptures. The caboose came later. We opened the stairs down to Bank Row and decorated them with rainbow tiles."

Construction moved apace, but an essential element was missing: safety for children.

"It was not a safe environment," Thomas said. "There were no fences and you could walk right over to the train tracks on both sides."

Iron railings were built for safety and to establish the park boundaries.

I asked Thomas about The Station, which acts as a stage.

"It was built in 2003, the 25th anniversary of Greenfield's founding," she said. "David Miller, who played trumpet in the Greenfield Military Band that gave concerts there, was an important part of that effort."

Thomas gave me so many names of those who helped bring the Energy Park into being that it is impossible to list them all. She concluded by saying "The man I cannot leave out is Al Dray. I couldn't have done it without Al. He kept things going and got the Kiwanis (Club) to help."

The Energy Park, like any garden, is always changing. There are additions and subtractions. Volunteers are always changing as well. I am pleased to be a part of the current group of volunteers who are supported by the Greenfield Garden Club with funds for the park gardens. The town does not have the money for the plantings. Nowadays, our goal continues to be to use native plants, but we have added an effort to support pollinators.

Hazard is still volunteering, too. Her love is the woodland.

"I work a lot in the grove of river

birches," she said. "It's the wildness that I love, and the spring ephemerals."

Wisty Rorabacher and Judy Draper have been working on the big Welcome Garden, along with Linda Smith and Nancy Patteson, who are members of the Greenfield Garden Club.

Patteson was eloquent about what it means to be a volunteer in a project like the Energy Park.

"As I quickly learned, gardening with people is very different than gardening alone," she said. "My way of doing things was not the only way! At the Energy Park, I have had the good fortune to be mentored by amazing gardeners and I have learned so much. I have been embraced by a supportive environment and enriched by a wonderful sense of community."

"I continue to work at the Energy

Park because of the friendships I have made with my fellow gardeners, and because of the rewards of watching an urban garden space come to life under the watchful eyes of a handful of volunteers," Patteson added.

I credit Smith with taking me under her wing, Hazard with being my role model for sustainable gardening, and Rorabacher and Draper for sharing their love and appreciation of native plants.

If you wish to donate to the plant fund, you can make a donation to the Greenfield Garden Club, making sure to note that it is for The Energy Park. And do visit the park to enjoy its beauty and peace.

Pat Leuchtmann has been writing and gardening since 1980. Readers can leave comments at her website: www.commonweeder.com.

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BETWEEN THE ROWS

Bloodroot blooms at Greenfield's Energy Park.

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