

VOLUNTEERS MAKE THE WORLD GO ROUND

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April is Volunteer Month! Here at the UNH Cooperative Extension Office, volunteers are the backbone of our land grant university, spreading the latest word and research on youth development, agriculture, forestry, family resources and more! These are topics that greatly affect the quality of life in our communities. Extension agents and staff provide solid training, research, and support so volunteers can easily perform the volunteer tasks of their choosing. Here in Grafton County, the two largest volunteer groups are the Master Gardeners and 4-H. I would like to share examples of experiences I have had with these groups – one is an ongoing Master Gardener project right here at the County Complex, and the other, a one-time 4-H community service event. Both have given me a deeper awareness of how inspired volunteers affect communities in positive ways.

Driving by the Grafton County Complex on Dartmouth College Highway, one can see the beautiful gardens that the volunteer Master Gardeners (MGs) have created for the public's pleasure. Many years ago, this group decided to give back to the community by planting a sensory garden around the gazebo, located at the southern end of the nursing home. Nursing home residents and their families come to the garden to enjoy a full sensory experience. The MGs chose plants with interesting leaf textures to touch and flowers of many colors to delight the eyes. Herbs are growing that smell and taste good. Wind chimes are hung so the gentle breeze can be heard as well as felt. The plants are grown in raised beds, making them accessible whether one is standing or in a wheelchair. Nearby, the MGs planted the Birch garden to demonstrate how people in our community can landscape their homes at low cost, using local plants and simple maintenance techniques. Plans are underway this year for a memorial garden. As loved ones pass over, families can place a plaque in the garden, thereby keeping cherished memories of the loved one alive and beautiful. Donations given for this service will be used to upgrade and maintain this lovely space for years to come. MGs donate their time and expertise at Work Day at the complex using donations of plants and materials. This year the organizing committee includes Joan Pushee, Dick Flanders and Deb Blackey (all of Plymouth), Shirley Yorks (Bristol), Erika Krauss and Fran Krauss (Woodsville), Roger Merrill and Jane O'Donnell (Littleton), Bonnie Riberty (Thorton), Debbie Brown (Landaff), Marylena Sevigny (Holderness), Scott Rice (Woodstock), Leslie Hoyt (Waterville Valley), and Melanie Kerr (Sugar Hill). If you are interested in creating your own gardens, the Extension office - along with the MGs - are offering a summer gardening series. Please see our website or call the number given at the end of this article.

On Friday, April 15, the Hunt Mountain 4-H Club of Monroe gave the community a free spaghetti dinner complete with garlic bread, salad, lemonade, coffee or water, and a homemade cookie for dessert. To conclude the evening, they invited the local Back Shed Band to entertain. Many community members and groups got involved to create an extra-special evening.

I walked in the door of the Monroe Town Hall at 5:15 pm to be greeted by Cloverbud (4-Hers age 5 – 7) Delaney Smith who has large beautiful eyes and a shy smile. She quietly asked if she could lead me to my seat. With an affirmative answer from me, she took my hand and gently guided me to my chair, pulling it out, and waiting until I was seated—all the while still softly holding my hand. Immediately I knew I was in for a delightful evening. I watched while other community members were seated by other Cloverbud greeters – Christine Martin, Dayton Wagner, Isabella Cowell and Elizabeth LaFlamme. What a pleasure it was to see these young members handle their duties with poise, dignity, and respect.

I gazed at the tables beautifully set with fresh flower centerpieces created by the Monroe Garden Club. To set the tone of the evening, the 4-H'ers shared their tradition of beginning gatherings with the Pledge of

Allegiance and the 4-H Pledge. Our meal was served by Griffin Torres-Zuk, Jacob Geil, Danielle Martin, Alexander LaFlamme, Baylee Wagner, Monica Torres-Zuk, Julian Cowell, and two teenagers who came to the dinner as friends of the members, but then wanted to be part of the fun of serving! All our needs were catered to. Cookies were made by the members of the local church. Each 4-H'er held himself/herself with a subtle confidence that enveloped the atmosphere with grace. Amanda Geil took pictures and helped Monica cook the dinner. All of the food was donated by local community members for this occasion.

The Back Shed Band played into the evening with youth spinning and dancing. Laughter and good times filled the town hall that evening. I spoke with Sonia Zuk, 4-H Organizational Leader, about how this dinner came into being. She told me the club wanted to give a "gift to the town". This dinner was not a fundraiser; they did not want to collect money. They just wanted to give back to a community that had nurtured them so much. This truly is the spirit of community volunteering!

Volunteers seek to be helpful, friendly, and responsive and this creates a space that is both uplifting and inspiring to all. So get out and partake of the many free events offered by these volunteers. Check out the Events section on our website at <http://extension.unh.edu/Counties/Grafton/Grafton.htm> or call 603-787-6944 Monday thru Friday 8:00 am to 4:00 pm.

Here's to our wonderful volunteers. We honor you this month and throughout the year! You do make the world go 'round!