

## Common Wealth Award Nominations Announced

*by Candy Carden, Common Wealth Award Committee Chairman  
The Garden Club of the Northern Neck*

The Common Wealth Award Committee is excited to announce six finalists for the 2017 Common Wealth Award. The Garden Club of Virginia established this award in 1979 to provide annual grants to fund community projects of member clubs in the areas of conservation, beautification, horticulture, preservation or education. The two-word name Common Wealth was chosen to describe the “wealth” that is “common” to all Virginians.

Garden Club of Virginia member clubs will vote on the projects at the Board of Governors meeting in October and grant winners will be announced then. The finalists under consideration are as follows:

### *Nature Plant Landscaping for the Fred W. Beazley River Academy at Paradise Creek Nature Park*

*Submitted by  
The Elizabeth River Garden Club*

Unlike most parks, Paradise Creek Nature Park is a unique model for urban river restoration showing how government, industry and a committed community can create a nature park from a once-polluted industrial area. This 40-acre site is located on Paradise Creek, a tributary of the Elizabeth River. The park, which is open and free to the public year round, is owned by the non-profit Elizabeth River Project and operated by the City of Portsmouth. Park programs educate more than 15,000 visitors each year, including 6,000 children from inner-city schools. The park features over two miles of handicapped-accessible nature trails, a canoe/kayak launch, an outdoor classroom, environmental art and a wetland footbridge.

The Elizabeth River Garden Club proposes providing native plants for a 6,500-square foot area surrounding the River Academy, an educational building set for completion in 2017. The building will provide indoor space for the Urban Park Ranger, a classroom, restrooms and educational displays. The plantings with educational signage will highlight the park’s natural environment with native trees, shrubs, perennials and grasses.

Surely this park that demonstrates conservation of our rivers and wetlands, and also teaches our children to care for them, is worthy of GCV support.

### *The Healing Grove at Boulder Crest Retreat*

*Submitted by  
Fauquier and Loudoun Garden Club*

Boulder Crest Retreat, located in the Piedmont of northern Virginia, is the nation’s first privately funded, completely free treatment facility dedicated to our wounded warriors and their families. The retreat focuses on individual and family recovery from the traumas of war, and the loss of limbs and comrades on the battlefield.

The Fauquier and Loudoun Garden Club proposes to continue our commitment to these remarkable individuals by planting a grove of trees that will create a soothing link between the lodges where warriors and their families stay during recovery and the walled garden already in place through the generosity of members of the club and

the community. Warriors and their families find the walled garden a tranquil place for meditation and healing. The addition of a grove of native trees will provide a much-needed transition to that space. The Common Wealth Award will make this possible.

The club believes there is no tribute too great for those who returned to us after sacrificing so much on our behalf.

### *Paw Path Pollinator Garden at the Smith River Sports Complex*

*Submitted by*

*The Martinsville Garden Club and The Garden Study Club*

To support life for pollinators and, thus, for our grandchildren and their grandchildren, the clubs created the Paw Path Pollinator Garden at the Smith River Sports Complex.

The Martinsville Garden Club and the Garden Study Club joined forces with Master Naturalists, Dan River Basin Association and 13 other organizations. The result: 300-plus plants from 50 native varieties in gardens that bookend and line a half-mile trail beside a serene, trout-rich river.

The path occupies a corner of the 90-acre complex which serves as a beacon in an economically challenged area, drawing 50,000 people a year. The Paw Path, created by a garden club member to honor her sister's memory, has been named a Virginia Treasure. Families, joggers, dog owners and others frequent the wooded path.

Signs about pollinators, the dangers they face and their pivotal role in the ecosystem that supports our lives will inform visitors. Student- and scout-made birdhouses, insect hotels and butterfly houses will dot the trail. Next, the hope is to install an information-rich interactive digital kiosk for visitors. The kiosk would connect to schools for classroom virtual tours, supplemented by educational materials.

Our pollinator gardens will outlast us as a living laboratory, resource and tranquil refuge.

### *The Lee Park Wildflower and Bird Sanctuary*

*Submitted by*

*The Petersburg Garden Club*

The Lee Park Wildflower and Bird Sanctuary is the heart of Lee Memorial Park, encompassing the environmental, historical and social significance of the park and, through its restoration and interpretation, offering a model for stewardship, education and environmental responsibility. During the 1930s, through a remarkable WPA project, Petersburg Garden Club members worked with African-American women of Petersburg to establish a botanical preserve in Lee Park. Species were identified, a herbarium collected, exquisite paintings executed and specimens planted and nurtured. Over 10 miles of paths were developed.

Although in continuous use as a city park and recreation area, the 25-acre sanctuary has been virtually unmanaged for over a half a century. Yet much of the original flora and fauna documented and installed during the WPA project remain. As part of an ongoing effort to restore Lee Park, the club has established a new low-maintenance informational six-panel kiosk at the trailhead to the meadow and Wildflower and Bird Sanctuary.

The interpretive signage for the kiosk and an accompanying brochure and rack card will tell this important national story and promote the conservation of the sanctuary and create programs for at-risk youth.

## *Urban Re Leaf*

*Submitted by*

*Roanoke Valley Garden Club*

Roanoke Valley Garden Club's 91-year history encompasses planting gardens and trees throughout downtown Roanoke. Our signature project has beautified and maintained the Virginia Museum of Transportation's railyard beds since the 1970s. In 2016, the club planted nine trees approaching the museum in an industrial area gradually being revitalized.

Roanoke was developed as a railroad town and VMT honors that history. The official state museum of transportation, VMT is a multi-cultural and multi-generational museum that hosts 50,000 visitors annually from all over the world. The museum is filled with the happy sounds of school groups and grandparents with grandchildren, as well as transportation history buffs. In 2016, VMT served more than 15,000 school-age children with STEM-oriented classes matched to SOLs.

The barren beds in front of the museum need native shrubs and grasses to distinguish the entrance. These require soil and soaker hoses with timers because building overhangs block the rainfall. The museum building is on the National Historic Register and cannot be altered. Signage and rail walk memorabilia will be added to educate visitors. It is worth noting that in fall 2017, when Amtrak begins service to Roanoke, the museum and grounds will be visible from the new nearby passenger platform.

RVGC's project will bring beauty to this museum of historical and educational importance.

## *The Port Republic Riverside Graveyard*

*Submitted by*

*The Spotswood Garden Club*

The once abandoned Riverside Graveyard lies within the sleepy village of Port Republic. The Spotswood Garden Club wishes to facilitate the community's efforts to restore this historic treasure and create an inviting public green space while enhancing its use as an educational site, through artifact repairs and ecological rehabilitation. The riverside cleared of invasive overgrowth and planted for native riparian conservation would allow river access and views. Plantings will primarily serve two purposes: conservation and beautification. Plantings will stabilize the graveyard grounds as they meet with the riverbanks and aesthetically provide habitat for wildlife and pollinators. A peaceful respite will emerge on what was once a bustling street of river industry.

This restoration will amplify the site's usefulness as an educational resource. Port Republic is the destination for history-focused tour groups from elementary to collegiate, Smithsonian Institutes, international tours and genealogists. Geology and archeology departments also utilize the graveyard. The buried represent occupations such as boatman, blacksmith, saddler, tanner and cooper between 1767 and 1899.

The Riverside Project is a perfect blend of preservation, conservation, beautification and education, and would provide a tremendous gift for the present and future. ❁

The Editorial Board welcomes submissions and reserves the right to edit them.