



Bald Head Association ~ “The voice for BHI property owners”

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Bald Head Island’s Pollinator Garden: It Takes a Village

By Betsi Stephen, Education & Recreation (ER) Committee Chair

It all started with a simple question from Megan Stephenson to her employer, Harper Peterson. “Wouldn’t it be great to have a pollinator garden here in the Marina Park?” Megan has an MS degree in Conservation Medicine from Tufts University and is a critical part of Harper’s team, spending much of her time helping outfit Islanders and guests for excursions in the creek, so she has a lot of time to inspect the natural flora and fauna in Marina Park. But Megan had a vision for something more grand.

I happened to run into Harper Peterson just after Megan had posed her question, and he asked me how we could make a pollinator garden happen. Fortuitously BHA’s Education and Recreation (ER) Committee had just brought back the Garden Club, so I knew just the person — Grace Valentine, chair of that club — to lead the charge. To paraphrase a TV show, “And just like that,” the Pollinator Garden on BHI was born.

After two meetings with all potential stakeholders (the Village, BHA, BHI Conservancy and Garden Club), we were off and running. Megan had proposed seven zones for the Pollinator Garden, several of which already contained native plants. Zone 1 was designated as behind the bulwark to the left as one looks out to the creek, and we quickly determined that the perfect day for planting Zone 1 would be Earth Day, April 22, 2023.

After deciding on the depth of the planting area, BHA Board member and veteran gardener, John Kinney, and Megan consulted on the best plants — most of which are native to BHI — and developed a mock-up of plant locations. John not only bought all of the plants, primarily from Shelton Herb Garden in Leland, but he also transported them all to the Island and tended the plants until April 22, when we could plant them.

Meanwhile, Harper Peterson tilled the ground, and the newly formed Garden Club members prepared the bed, with Grace Valentine, Deb Feeney and Barbara Giera heading up the effort.

Each stakeholder was in their own lane, and since I’m not much of a gardener, I took up the task of fundraising. Two major efforts in the spring — BHI Trivia Night at Jailhouse Provisions and a honey-inspired talk by Desiree Bridge (from the BHI Conservancy) — brought us enough money to purchase the spring plants. We can’t thank the kind participants and donors enough for believing in us when all we had was some dirt and lots of ambition.

In addition, Ginny Wester Reeves needed to move the bricks that had lined her father’s (Thad Wester) walkway through his garden at their home on Bay Tree Trail. J.P. McCann, the Village’s Public Services Director, agreed to take the bricks, as long as they were put onto pallets. Ginny, Cam McIntyre, Elizabeth Kinney and I ended up filling four pallets of bricks — yes, they were laid one by one, all by hand. J.P.’s crew wrapped each pallet in shrink wrap and then delivered one of the four pallets to Marina Park. Dale and Barbara Giera, owners of Trinity Builders BHI, generously offered the services of their bricklayers to prepare and create the brick path.

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All was in place for planting on April 22. What we didn't quite plan on were the howling winds and driving rain! But the incredible volunteers from the Garden Club, Public Safety, the BHI Conservancy interns and homeowners persevered, and we got the plants in the ground in record time. Mayor Peter Quinn attended and thanked all the volunteers in his gracious remarks. In March Mayor Quinn had signed the Monarch Pledge for the Village, officially putting Bald Head Island on the Monarch Trail.

The plants needed tending, so J.P. McCann's staff installed a sprinkler system, and Grace Valentine arranged for a fabulous set of volunteers from the Garden Club to water on a rotating schedule throughout the summer and fall. J.P.'s staff also installed the roping next to the bricks. Although the roping doesn't keep out deer entirely, it does delimit the area beautifully for human guests.

Somewhat by chance, we later discovered that Gina Hinson, Accounting Technician for the Village, raises Mexican sunflowers. We were able to purchase more than a dozen Mexican sunflowers from her that were about 4" tall when they were planted behind the center bulwark. They are now about four feet tall and have attracted pollinators by the dozens all summer long.

Mike Harris of Public Works prepared the great signs at the entrance to the park and by the steps leading down to Zone 1. John Parker and his crew from Public Works have been instrumental in maintaining the entire Marina Park, with special attention given to our Pollinator Garden paradise.

The 21 types of plants have flourished, and the pollinators — especially bees and butterflies — have been abundant. All summer long, visitors have been entranced by the beauty of the plants and the variety of pollinators. We expect to see caterpillars soon, and I was enthralled to see a hummingbird one day. Perhaps bats are visiting the site at night; let us know if you see one.

The Conservancy staff has set up a website to document the butterflies and moths on the Island at www.inaturalist.org/projects/butterflies-and-moths-of-bald-head-island.

We are thrilled that we are going to be able to plant on the far-right side behind the bulwark this fall, so watch for that. It is obvious that although the Pollinator Garden came together quickly, it took an entire Village. We can't thank everyone enough, and we look forward to everyone's continued support! If you haven't been to see the garden, please come visit and be enthralled with the natural beauty of this special corner on our Island.