



Gaylynn Long takes a rain wand to the flower beds in the United States 1812 Bicentennial Art of Peace Garden in Youngstown.

Harry Scull Jr. / Buffalo News

Peace Garden Trail links arts, cultural, tourism, on both sides of U. S.-Canada border

Honoring 200 years of friendship

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YOUNGSTOWN — Strolling through Falkner Park on a recent sunny afternoon with her two young children in tow, Youngstown resident Christine Connolly expressed her admiration and appreciation for the recently established United States 1812 Bicentennial Art of Peace Garden.

“I think this is beautiful,” she said, glancing at the carefully tended roses, bee balm, coneflowers and dozens of other blooming plants in the Main Street park.

“This is a wonderful addition to the park,” Connolly said. “The peace garden honors those who gave their lives for this country, while also recognizing our peacekeeping initiatives, as well.”

The handful of ambitious women who created this colorful, yet purposeful, garden would agree.

Gaylynn Long, Karen Noonan, Gretchen Duling, Ann Johnston, Janice Bush, Kathy Mahtook and Nancy Greulich took Tracy Lloyd's design and planted a beautiful, three-part garden along the red-brick pathway in the southeastern corner of this popular village park across the street from the Niagara River.

The group of eight Youngstown residents took the seeds of an idea from Arlene White of the Binational Economic and Tourism Alliance and, with the blessings of the Youngstown Village Board, began planting the garden in June. The garden was dedicated Saturday in a ceremony drawing dignitaries from both sides of the border.

This was fitting, as the goal is to create a cross-border Bicentennial Art of Peace Garden Trail commemorating 200 years of peace since the War of 1812, marking historic sites throughout the Niagara Frontier territory, and eventually, the entire southern Great Lakes. The gesture honors the legacy of friendship between the United States and Canada—which share the longest undefended border in the world.

“We are all really pleased with this garden,” said Long. “We are enjoying the bounty of the flowers now.”

Added Duling, one of her fellow gardeners, “We are commemorating 200 years of peace and this is very symbolic. I drive by the garden all of the time, and I usually see someone sitting on the bench, enjoying the garden. It gives you a quiet feeling. It's unique.”

Youngstown's garden is the fourth such garden established on the American side of the trail, which also includes three launched last year, including those planted behind the Little Yellow House on Center Street in Lewiston; at Niagara University; and at the corner of Dearborn and Hamilton streets in Buffalo's Black Rock section.

The Canadian side of the trail in-

cludes two gardens dedicated last year: in Grimsby and Amherstburg, Ont.

The dedication ceremony for the fifth U. S. 1812 Bicentennial Peace Garden and “Carvings for a Cause” historic figures Gen. Albert Myer and Buffalo Mayor Ebenezer Walden takes place at 2 p. m. today at the Hull Family Home and Farmstead, 5976 Genesee St., Lancaster.

White, who serves as peace garden project coordinator for the Binational Economic and Tourism Alliance, said, “Our goal is to have 30 peace gardens on each side of the border by June of 2012. Then, we will truly have created a Peace Garden Trail.”

The Peace Garden Trail project links arts, cultural, heritage, tourism, community and business sectors on both sides of the border, and is promoted by the tourism alliance and the Niagara 1812 Bicentennial Legacy Council. It is modeled on the International Peace Garden concept that originated in Canada in 1990.

White said the idea for an 1812 peace garden trail was first formed during brainstorming sessions with arts councils in Buffalo, and in Hamilton and St. Catharines, Ont.

“We wanted to bring in arts and culture for the young and old to tell a different story and focus on the 200 years of peace,” she recalled. “And rather than create simple gardens, we wanted to create spaces for cultural events, as well. The gardens are sanctuaries, but also places of celebration, and this isn't meant to end in 2014 [with the conclusion of the commemoration of the War of 1812]. This is a catalyst to continue the peace theme.”

White also spoke of the potential of garden tourism.

“We want a variety of gardens on this trail,” she said. “Each one tells a different story and that is what has linked our heritage trails. There is awareness- raising on many different levels.”

And, in drawing visitors to the gardens to honor local history, a community may “really turn this into an economic development project,” White said. “This is very, very exciting.”

White explained that while there are strict overall guidelines, the development of each garden “is very organic, very local, we don’t dictate the design — it’s whatever is authentic and important to you.”

And community partners involved in the project not only design and create the gardens, but they vow to maintain and promote local cultural events planned for the garden sites in the future.

White said the binational organization serves to raise sponsorships and partnerships on a higher level for small communities involved in the project.

“They do not pay us to be partners in this,” she said. “But we work to connect the gardens with resources, and we will provide signage and promotions and some major programming at these gardens. For instance, we’re looking at creating sort of a traveling road show for the trail, involving theater, poetry, musicians creating 1812 music or artists dealing in that milieu. The gardens could choose what they want to showcase locally.”

The first event planned for Youngstown’s 1812 Bicentennial Art of Peace Garden is set for 6 p. m. Sept. 16, when musician, historian and re-enactor Raya Lee presents a multigenerational, multimedia program titled “1812 — Who? What? When? Where? Why?” The event is free, and families are encouraged to attend. It is sponsored by the Village of Youngstown.

Long said her group has not received any outside funding to help finance the project and instead has relied on the sale of personalized bricks (donated by Youngstown resident Rick Lohr), placed along the three pathways leading to the garden. The organization is selling the bricks once again, and application forms may be found at Youngstown Village Hall and businesses in the community.

She said the group also created and sold floral arrangements during last December’s Youngstown Christmas celebration to help finance the project.

Organizers view the establishment and continued maintenance of the garden as a “very collaborative” effort, according to Duling. “We each have a day of the week to water (and weed), and things have just worked like clock work,” she said. “Someone is there every day because we want it to be just as nice as it can be.”

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