

Painting the town yellow

Atkinson Daffodil Project plants nearly 19,000 flowers in celebration of town's 250th anniversary

- By Kiera Blessing kblessing@eagletribune.com Oct 24, 2016



Courtesy photo/Linda JetteVolunteers plant daffodils on the side of the road in Atkinson as part of the town's Daffodil Project.

ATKINSON — The Atkinson Garden Club, with the help of dozens of volunteers, painted the town yellow on Saturday — but don't expect to see the results any time soon.

This weekend marked the club's first planting excursion for the Atkinson Daffodil Project, a town-wide effort to "highlight" the community's streets and lawns by planting nearly 19,000 flower bulbs — at a cost of \$7,000 — that will bloom in the spring in celebration of the 250th anniversary of the town's founding.

Saturday, more than 40 volunteers from across town gathered at the town garage to pick up their share of the 8,000 bulbs to be planted that day, and to learn their planting assignment. They then went their separate ways — some to the byway, some to Town Hall, the Police Department, Fire Department, the library and so on — to get digging.

"My goal was 10,000 bulbs to plant in town this year, and we're going to plant 18,900," said Linda Jette, president of the garden club and the project's coordinator. "I'm really proud of my town. They are coming through and it's really going to make our town really special next spring."

The group managed to plant 6,240 bulbs despite the dreary weather, Jette said. The remaining bulbs -- about 12,660 of them -- will be planted either by volunteers finishing off the 1,760 that were not planted Saturday, or by citizens who purchased their own bulbs from the garden club's fundraiser.

"In spite of the weather, it was fabulous," Jette said. There were "very enthusiastic, smiling, excited crews around town."

The garden club began fundraising for the project in May by selling daffodil bulbs for \$20 per pack and by collecting monetary donations. They sold nearly 11,000 bulbs; that money was then reinvested in more flowers to be planted throughout town by the volunteers.

Jette said she came up with the bright idea while thinking about how the Atkinson Byway Committee — of which she is also a member — could beautify its portion of the designated New Hampshire Scenic Byway along Route 121.

"We had done nothing to highlight it," Jette said. "When I think highlight, yellow pops into my mind. And then I thought, yellow, daffodils — that would highlight our byway."

The byway is a route recognized by the state and the U.S. Department of Transportation for its scenic, historic, recreational, natural, cultural or archaeological qualities.

After getting the byway committee's approval, Jette spoke with the selectmen and the 250th Anniversary Planning Committee, as well as a second byway committee. Just about everyone was in favor.

The project and the plantings were supported by groups like the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, the Atkinson Lions Club, the recreation commission, the civic club, the historical society, the selectmen and more.

Daffodils specifically were chosen for their vivid color and rich history — according to Jette, colonists brought the flower from Europe. As a bonus, the flowers are not eaten by deer, moles or voles.

Plus, Jette said, "they come back and multiply each year. So the money we spend...should last and even multiply."

Selectman Chair Harold Morse said he was in favor of the project.

"I think it's a great project put on by the garden club," Morse said. "I think this project will help bring the town together to celebrate the town's anniversary next year."

Jette said she plans on holding another planting day in the fall of 2017, during the anniversary year.

"It's a great project that involves the whole community," Jette said. "Communities doing things together creates such a warm feeling."

That warmth will be felt in the spring, when thousands of daffodils bloom across town. Jette hopes a good bloom will create momentum for an even bigger planting next year, perhaps even getting private neighborhoods involved.

"We're going to make our town visible," she said. "People are going to want to drive here to see what a beautiful place it is."