

Tupelo residents plant 12,000 daffodils

Community turns out to plant flowers in Veterans Park

ZACK ORSBORN

NORTHEAST MISSISSIPPI DAILY JOURNAL

TUPELO — Sherrie Cochran, director of Keep Tupelo Beautiful, and citizens of Tupelo had one goal on Nov. 21: to plant 12,000 daffodils in the raised brick planters in Veterans Park.

Since 2008, the initiative — conceived by former councilwoman Doyce Deas — has planted nearly 300,000 daffodils around Tupelo through the quality-of-life round-up bill and sponsors.

Tara Cayson, member of Southern Heights Neighborhood Association, brought Maddie Taylor and Lila Welch, both 6, to get involved with community beautification.

"They are excited to come back and see them in the spring," Cayson said.

Maddie and Lila diligently placed daffodils bulbs in the pre-dug holes, dusting off their hands after each placement.

"It's going to be beautiful," Maddie said. "I like flowers because they are colorful."

Around the time Deas served on the City Council, she met Lynden Miller, an esteemed landscape architect, in New York City through her son's college friend.

Miller became a designer for the conservatory garden in Central Park, as well as leading a daffodil initiative throughout the city's boroughs.

"In every gardening magazine I'd pick up, I'd see her name in there," Deas said.

Eventually, Deas asked Miller to visit her garden club and talk with the city about having a daffodil initiative.

Quality-of-life fund

The city agreed, devising a quality-of-life round-up bill.

"If you'll look at your water and light bill, on there it's got a round-up," Deas said. "If your water bill is \$25.42, and you agree to leave it that way, the few cents round up. Those few cents go into a fund every month called

the quality-of-life fund."

The city has received anywhere between \$80,000 to \$95,000 over the years to fund beautification, health and wellness and festivals.

This year, the quality-of-life fund totaled \$65,000.

In their first year, the daffodil project planted over 100,000 daffodils in areas like the MDOT hill and McCullough Boulevard.

"I'd like to see us get back to 100,000 because you can really make a statement with that many," Deas said. "We've got to continue. In a few years, the whole town can be covered in daffodils. After the winters that we have, it's just such a welcome on a bleak February day."

Business boost

Adding aesthetically pleasing landscapes can attract young, creative people to Tupelo, Deas said.

"Research shows that when a city is beautiful, especially in front of a business, it increases their business from 20 to 25 percent," she said. "It's truly economic development."

For now, Deas will wait patiently after planting the daffodils.

"I'm one of those people who can hardly stand waiting until spring (for the daffodils to bloom)," she said. "Just waiting and waiting."

Going forward, Cochran hopes to be able to plant daffodils alongside the flag-lined entrance to Veterans

Park.

"You'll be ushered by the daffodils under the flags," she said. "East Tupelo will be colorfully amazing."

She encouraged citizens to come participate to expand their gardening knowledge and give back to their community.

Cochran calls the daffodil project a legacy project, because once it's done, it's sustainable.

"You plant a tree when your child is born, and by the time he or she is 20, that tree is gracing you with its shade," she said. "It's the same way with this. You bring your kids out, have a great experience planting and bonding outside. Then they come back in the spring, and they'll say, 'I remember those, Mom! Look what happened!'"

The overflow daffodil bulbs will be distributed throughout the community to churches, neighborhoods and nonprofits.