Watershed Council, and Southside Community Land Trust. Together, we gathered about 15 volunteers who cleared brush and invasive plants, cleaned the high tunnel hoop houses, and installed the fencing around the pollinator garden.

It took an intense eight hours on a chilly overcast day to build the cedar pergola that is the centerpiece of the garden. Bundled in coats and gloves, we took turns reading directions, using drills and rubber mallets to assemble the parts. Just as we set the pergola in place, a hard rain pounded the farm.

I was happy to receive the RIWPS grant early this year, as the money has funded the purchase of project materials, including signs, compost, trellises, gravel for the walkway, and butterfly boxes. A small bit has been saved to purchase plants in the spring. Melissa Guiliet, URI Master Gardener and Director of 15 Minute Field Trips, designed the garden and its planting schematic, based on my rough sketch on a torn scrap of paper.

In the spring, a soil analysis indicated that our garden soil had a pH of 5.7, and was very low in calcium, phosphorus, and potassium. Melissa's scaled planting schematic included the species and number of plants fitting my design idea. Southside Community Land Trust's Community Growers Coordinator, Andrew Cook, was a mentor to the project, assisting with a soil remediation plan and planting timeline. Planting would go on hold while we improved the soil.

With help from the tribal farm workers, Steven Smith, Lee Fry, Ralph Stanton, Khakhi Northup, and Lonny Brown Jr, we purchased and installed crushed stone for walkways and six inches of compost in each section of the garden.

"My childhood days with the tribe shaped my love of the land."

Ralph delivered load after load of stone and compost from Richmond Sand and Gravel. Steve manned the tractor, digging and moving soil. Lee, Lonny, and Khakhi shoveled and raked, laughed and sweated as they spread the gravel and soil. I had my hands in every aspect of work, fussing over site lines and laying pavers for the bee boxes to sit on, spending hours each day under the warm sun, watching a dream come to life. With the compost laid, the six of us spread clover seed while listening to music on the radio and talking about individual plans for the upcoming weekend. All this laughter and hard work helped me channel my energy into my own health while making sure that the guys had plenty to eat and drink as they worked in the hot sun.

In April 2021, TerraCorps returned with a new group of volunteers, along with students from Brown and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. These students worked with farm staff to assemble plastic trellises to separate the bees from the walkways and flowering plants so that a wall of plants keeps people from getting too close to the bee boxes. I planted butterfly bushes (Buddleia davidii) and took pictures of many of the visiting bees and butterflies including a tagged monarch and several bumblebee moths. However, I recently learned that butterfly bushes are not native and are harmful to monarchs. Monarchs lay their eggs on the leaves, which caterpillars are not able to eat, leading to their death. So now we will replace this nonnative species with another species that supports not only honeybees, but also native insects.

As spring turned to summer this year, two small gardens of naturally growing clasping milkweed (Asclepias amplexicaulis) and butterfly milkweed (Asclepias tuberosa) have bloomed and will nurture monarch butterflies and other wild species.

(Soon signage will welcome visitors and provide information about the garden, explaining its importance for pollinators and people, and thanking supporters.)

While the garden was made to honor our health and house the bees, it has been a space for me to grieve and heal. Seventeen months ago, my father, Macheece Spears Sr., died unexpectedly. For the last several months, I have worked to honor his memory by donating to organizations around the world, including funds for planting a tree in Sri Lanka (Save Simacik) to purchasing access to water for a family in Sudan (Water for Sudan). And I poured my heart and soul into making the pollinator garden.

When I was sad, my tears watered the soil; when I was angry, I dug deeper; and when I was happy, the sun radiated off my back and the butterflies floated around me. Through this energy I choose to dedicate the pergola and the space beneath it to my father.

My dad was a stone mason. The Spears family is known for stone masonry throughout New England and the country, though most notably in Rhode Island. To honor my father in this space, I installed a concrete paver patio, laying each stone individually and fussing over them being level and near perfect. I spoke to each stone with a memory of moments I spent with my father: walking in the woods, observing luna moths or praying mantises, or sitting in silence watching the sun set.

For me, this space will welcome folks from all walks of life, and when I stand here alone and watch the sunset, I know my dad is standing beside me, and this is where I heal.