Lots of Flowers bringing a little color to vacant Hilltop properties

Carolyn Holmes tends to the minion in the "tire garden" she and Shirley Wood created on Zara Street in Knoxville. The wildflower garden is one of 15 created in the "Lots of Flowers" program with the Hilltop Alliance.

There are "Lots of Flowers" still blooming throughout out the Hilltop neighborhoods.

Take a walk through Allentown, Beltzhoover, Knoxville or Mt. Oliver City and you're likely to see one of the Hilltop Alliance's (HA) Lots of Flowers greening project lots, still filled with wild flower colors.

According to Sarah Ashley Baxendell, project manager, green space development for the Alliance, the purpose of the program was to beautify vacant lots with low maintenance flower installations. It also serves to improve stormwater holding capacity, beautify the community and diminish vacant lot maintenance.

The Alliance funded installations that neighborhood stewards identified as the lots they wanted to have replanted. One to three stewards from the community planted and maintain each site.

Additional support was provided by the Alliance to ensure sufficient water access, Adopt-A-Lot assistance and to schedule work days with site stewards to maintain the quality of each wildflower planting.

Go Supreme, a Beltzhoover-based landscape contractor, was hired for the Lots of Flowers installations. At each site, the existing brush was cut and removed, tilled and new wildflower or grass seeds were planted. The wildflowers are a mix of 31 native Pennsylvania perennial and annual seeds.

Carolyn Holmes joined with Shirley Wood to create their "tire garden" in the 200 block of Zara Street in Knoxville.
Enlisting relatives and neighbors, the women used donated used tires from Pinnacle Auto in Carrick to create a minion, caterpillar, frog, bee and more in their wildflower garden. Ms. Holmes said it took a lot of hard work, including washing and painting the tires, but they wanted to do something different.

"I think it makes our neighborhood look better," Ms. Holmes said. Prior to planting their unique garden, they were paying people to come and cut the lot. Now, a neighbor helps keep the lot mowed around the garden.

In addition to the assistance from the Hilltop Alliance, they received some funding from Councilman Bruce Kraus and mulch was donated by a woman on Northside.

Over on Beltzhoover Avenue in Beltzhoover, a "senior from Beltzhoover" asked to not be identified for his work on the lots at 134 Beltzhoover Avenue.

He says he worked on the lot to the "glory of the Lord" and to lift up his neighborhood. If anyone wanted to know who he was, he said his name is on the sign on the lots.

The wildflower lot is a "tribute to my childhood" he explains. He wanted people to know what the neighborhood was like when he was growing up, "it was more of a community, people cared."

When he was working on the garden, he said he was assisted by "wonderful" volunteers. One woman stopped by and gave him her grandfather's weed-whacker and the "Mayor of Beltzhoover" came and cut the grass.

He hoped the bit of beauty would help lift up the Hilltop and he wanted to leave something beautiful for the people who would follow him.

The senior said he plans to participate in more uplifting projects in the community.

Bill Davis took on four lots as his Lots of Flowers project in the 300 block of Beltzhoover Avenue in Allentown.

"Most people like it," he said. "It's a heck of a lot of work, though."

Mr. Davis said he "kind of did it for myself," but then a few of the "little people in the neighborhood" starting coming over to help. He likes that the neighborhood kids that helped now stop and pick flowers for their moms.

He decided to participate in the Lots of Flowers program after living in the neighborhood for six years. "I was tired of looking at the weeds."

Mr. Davis is looking forward to next year, some of the wildflowers that he planted won't come up until the spring.

"Hopefully, come springtime I can do a few more things to it," he said.

Additional Lots of Flowers sites, and their stewards, are located at:

439 Jucunda Street, Sarlee Ellison, Lemona Wrencher-strong and Rosa Nelson; 426 Jucunda Street, Lemona Wrencher-Strong; 236 Chalfont Street, Callowee Bey; 529 Ormsby Avenue, John Niederberger; 719 Excelsior Street, Linda Klein; 50 Millbridge Street, Billie Vaughn; Warrington Avenue (flower plot), Nancy
Lomasney; Warrington Avenue (flower plot), Stuart Day; and, Orchard Street, Pastor Cheryl Ruffin.

Each of the locations has two sets of signs: one to describe and identify the project as a "Lots of Flowers" participant and describe the program and the second to help engage the public learn to identify the different types of native Pennsylvania wildflowers that were planted in each lot.

Lots of Flowers was supported by the Colcom Foundation and PNC Foundation.

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