

# NEWS<sup>2</sup>

## Landscaping, benches: Community effort for community center

**By Margaret McKenzie**

CONWAY — They say a garden is a friend you can visit anytime. In that case, feel free to visit a new friend — the brand-new flower garden at the \$1.35 million North Conway Community Center, which opened last November.

While you're there, be sure to take in the new foot path, streambed, wooden bridge, sod and sprinkler system, edging and benches, all thanks to an \$8,500 Team Depot grant from Home Depot, \$5,000 in donations acquired by the Mountain Garden Club, many other donations of materials and labor, and most especially the vision and energy of local Home Depot Manager Brad Bousquet of Conway and garden club member extraordinaire Bob Santoro of Jackson.

Both were almost too busy to talk on Thursday, where the front of the site south of Schouler Park was a sea of orange T-shirts worn by Home Depot associates, who were helping to install five benches, along with a crew of vets from the American Legion.

Each bench represents a different branch of the service: Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard, with a plaque on each.

"Home Depot is all about assisting veterans," said the tall, sunburned Bousquet, taking a break to explain the project, where Assistant Store Managers Stasha MacDougall and Krista Ames, along with his wife, Colleen, were pitching in. "When I called up Ryan (Sommer, executive director of the community center), I said, 'Why can't we involve the vets?'"

It was Bousquet's brainchild to help beautify the grounds at the center, which was built entirely through grants and individual donations, and will be debt-free by next year when a bridge loan is paid off. But no money was left over for the grounds, and when the snow melted in March, the beautiful green building was surrounded by a sea of hard-packed clay and sand.



**Mountain Garden Club members surround Ryan Sommer at the North Conway Community Center on Thursday. (JAMIE GEMMITI PHOTO)**

"I saw the need, and I had a vision," Bousquet said, noting that Home Depot has helped with plantings at the old community center as well. He looked on with satisfaction as a group of Home Depot associates worked on the sturdy wooden



**Home eot associates and eterans construct one o ie benches at the community center. (JAMIE GEMMITI PHOTO)**

bridge that will cross the streambed over to the children's sprayground. And yes, the river rock in the bed is from Home Depot, too.

"It truly does take a community," Bousquet marveled. "I like that the vets will be able to enjoy all of this and know they played a part in it, too."

The grant provided not only funding for the concrete-and-wood benches but also for tools, such as spades and lawnmowers materials, such as the pressure-treated lumber for the benches and foot bridge and numerous flowering plants, including purple and white salvia, yellow coreopsis, and sunflower-like echinacea purpurea.

"They look great and also attract bees and butterflies," explained Mountain Garden Club President Wendy Mcey, who added, "Bob picked them out."

"Bob" was a name on everyone's lips Thursday because while the grant may have been Bousquet's vision, the project was pure Santoro, from designing the undulating walkway that goes around the building to installing the sprinkler system and working with suppliers to get materials, either at a discount, at cost or even at no cost.

For instance, the stone dust for the walkways, plus use of trenchers and power equipment, was donated by Alvin J. Coleman Son of Albany.

Doug and Paula Albert, owners of Maine Turf in Fryeburg, provided the sod at 50 percent off, and the Pequawket Foundation gave a \$1,000 grant to help defray the cost. The sod will be delivered next week.

Paris Farmer's nion in North Conway gave fertiler for the garden.

The Gro Max premium soil is from Casella Resource Solutions of South Portland, Maine.

Eastern Green Landscapers from Intervale helped in numerous ways, including moving bricks for the garden.

And Flatbread Company donated enough pia to feed the entire hungry crew.

Santoro, who's been working at the site with other volunteers since June, even tracked down the commercial-grade steel edging for the walkway to a company in Garland, Texas, Collier Metal Specialties, which agreed to ship it for free.

"He's amaing," said garden club ice President Deb Holmes, who said that initially the club's involvement was going to simply be a memorial garden for longtime assistant community center director Roger Grucel, who died this year.

Then Santoro started digging trenches, installing the sprinklers (and timers), creating walkways from front to back of the building, prepping the lawn area, laying the soil and the sod.

She added that the project is "a multiyear undertaking with many community partners and donors." For example, the garden club is also working on a small memorial to Grucel, complete with a marker made from Redstone uarry granite.

As for Sommer, he said he's blown away by the project.

"I love what a collaborative approach it is," he said. "Seeing a big business and a local organization working hand in hand — it's phenomenal. That's what a community is all about."

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