

Editorial: Building civic pride in two Gateway Cities



From left, Greater Lowell Tech School Committee member Paul Morin, Superintendent Jill Davis and construction and carpentry students Jayden Ung, Alexander Meuk, Victoria Falcon, Morgan Lobas, Kayson Valiphanh, Juan Naut, Aiden Medina, Alexander Langlois, Gabriel Santos, Liam Duprez, Kyle Bussey, and instructor Bruce Brown pose in front of the newly unveiled welcome sign to Centralville at the intersection of Aiken Street and VFW Highway on June 13, 2022. MELANIE GILBERT / LOWELL SUN

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Every community, especially our state's Gateway Cities, count on civic-minded volunteers to help with the upkeep that enhances that city's or town's curb appeal.

The newspaper recently showcased two examples of that commitment and pride — one privately based and the other public.

In Lowell, a group of Greater-Lowell Technical High School students recently completed and installed a COVID-19-delayed replacement of one neighborhood's prominently displayed welcome sign.

In Fitchburg, wooden flower boxes around Upper Common and other areas of the city have again been filled with colorful floral blooms, thanks to the Fitchburg East Rotary

Club members and volunteers, who recently did the planting for this annual fundraiser.

Lowell's last Centralville sign at the intersection of Aiken Street and the VFW Highway was run over by a car; the new one was almost a victim of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Bruce Brown, an instructor at Greater Lowell Technical High School, said COVID-19 delayed the welcome-sign project for more than two years due to virus-related school shutdowns and disruptions.

"A couple of veterans approached School Committee member Paul Morin about replacing the sign that used to be here," said Brown. "This year, the kids finished it, and got it ready to go."

Students from the Tyngsboro-based school's construction and carpentry program completed the large neighborhood sign as part of their junior year studies.

"We put it all together, and we came out last week to set it in the ground for today's ceremony," Juan Naut, of Lowell, told the newspaper at the sign's June 6 rededication.

Aiding in the effort was Boston Concrete, which donated the materials to anchor the two sturdy posts for the 15-foot-long structure.

In a speech after the unveiling, School Superintendent Jill Davis spoke of how projects like this "give students the opportunity to practice their hands-on, authentic, real-world skills."

Lowell City Manager Tom Golden mingled with the students, admiring the detailed handiwork that went into the sign.

"The (city) council's been talking about trying to engage the talent at the vocational school," Golden said. "... We're looking to tap into that talent and have them work right here in the city."

Meanwhile, the Fitchburg East Rotary Club fundraiser relies on local businesses, organizations, individuals and families to sponsor a box for a \$125 donation.

It comes with a plaque recognizing the sponsorship, which the donor can help design, be it a business name and logo, in memory of someone, or a family wishing to perpetuate its name.

Bill Walsh, a club member for 14 years, has spent at least half that time as chair of the flower project committee.

Prepping the boxes begins once spring arrives. After pulling all the weeds and adding topsoil, it's time for the flowers, courtesy ATM Greenhouse in Lunenburg.

He said in addition to community donations, some of the funds raised this year will go toward a water project in Uganda; past funds have been donated to Habitat for Humanity and local Eagle Scouts.

Club Vice President Bob Campbell said Fitchburg East, “a younger club,” was established in 1981 “by people who wanted to bring in more professionals, teachers, police officers, to accommodate members in the evenings.”

The club meets at Slattery’s Restaurant at 106 Lunenburg St. on the first and third Tuesdays of the month at 6:15 p.m.

The flower boxes are one of two major fundraisers the club does annually, the other one being the Super Bowl brunch.

A significant portion of the money raised goes toward thousands in annual scholarships to students at city schools, including Fitchburg High School and Goodrich Academy.

While it’s hard to put a price tag on the kind of these two selfless acts, they represent two no-cost projects that make these two old mills towns just a little more livable.