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The Norfolk Community Association, 125 Years Old and Going Strong

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By Ruth Melville

In 1895, the Norfolk Village Improvement Association was organized with the goal of preserving and enhancing the town's beauty. Their first project was to lay a flagstone walk from the library to the railroad bridge. The association went on to put in further sidewalks and, in 1911, to restore the Village Green at the cost of \$1,300.

The Village Improvement Association fell into desuetude in the mid-1950s but reappeared in the 1970s with the new name of the Norfolk Community Association. The Community Association took on the major task of rebuilding the railroad bridges, but by 2013 the group was on the verge of disbanding, and the number of members had dwindled to about a dozen.

Taking over as president, Joel Howard brought a new burst of energy and enthusiasm to the Community Association, and, with the help of Barbara Perkins, set about revitalizing the group. He decided that the best way to start would be with some highly visible projects, or as he says, "projects with bling."

These early efforts included refurbishing the World War II memorial on the Village Green, improving pathways on the green and adding two benches, repairing the Alfredo Taylor decorative railway gateway next to the library and putting in

planters and flower boxes throughout Station Place. The response to the new plantings in particular was enthusiastic. Howard says that people would stop him in town to tell him how much they liked the new look. “I knew then that people wanted the town to look good,” he says. “Everything blossomed from that.” Later, the dormant fountain in Robertson Plaza was filled in and planted with an eye-catching display.

About 18 months ago, Barry Webber and Doreen Kelly took over as copresidents, and Howard, who is staying on as vice president, is delighted. “Barry and Doreen have such a passion to make things look good,” he said. The group now numbers 21 people possessing a variety of relevant skills, and other individuals volunteer to help on particular projects.

Throughout the year, the Community Association sponsors a cycle of seasonal activities and displays. The first major event of their year is the annual cleanup day in April. This past year saw a particularly large turnout of volunteers, who collected over 100 bags of trash. Kelly and Webber have plans, which they’re not quite ready to divulge, to make this year’s event even bigger.

On Memorial Day, the association put up for the first time on the two village greens 51 American flags representing every fallen veteran from Norfolk. To finance this colorful and heartfelt tribute, the Community Association received a grant from the Evan Hughes Memorial Trust. During the summer, volunteers from the Community Association continued to take responsibility for planting and caring for the floral baskets and planters around Station Place.

To celebrate Veterans Day, the association funded and organized the installation of flags on the Village Green, one for each branch of the nation’s armed services. Most recently, 27 little Christmas trees with their sparkling white lights turned Norfolk into a wintery fairyland. This is the second time the association has put up the trees, but this year they were able to double the number. Webber and Kelly would like to have even more trees next year, and they’re considering extending them outside the town center, along Route 44 toward Laurel Way.

Projects like the flags and the Christmas trees not only make the town look festive and inviting but, it’s hoped that, by making the town more visible, they help slow traffic on Route 44.

Webber and Kelly would like to increase the Community Association’s visibility in town. They are in discussion with the Economic Development Commission and other town groups about future projects—perhaps something to do with City Meadow or in furtherance of the town’s recently approved 10-year Plan of Conservation and Development.

Kelly and Webber say that their next big effort is a three-year restoration of all of the six public monuments in Norfolk. The first, and most in need of work, is the World War I monument on Memorial Green. Although the monument has been patched up over the years, it now needs professional repair and conservation. At the same



Last year the Community Association doubled the number of Christmas trees around town.

Photo by Michael Kelly

time, in coordination with the Selectman’s Office, all the dead or dying trees on that green will be replaced. The new trees, along with the restored monument, will give Memorial Green a whole new look.

Doreen Kelly says that the Community Association “would like to have more awareness in town of who we are and what we do.” People may be delighted by new lights on the green or fresh flowers downtown without fully appreciating that these enhancements are made possible by Community Association donors and volunteers.

Even as early as 1895, there were people interested in making Norfolk a more beautiful place to live. Thanks to the work of the Community Association, that impulse is just as vigorous in 2020.

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