

this week's Conversation with Joan Jacobs

By Colleen McGrath

Joan Jacobs did not know a single person in Newport when she moved here from St. Louis. With a desire to become involved with the community, she joined a gym and started checking out local organizations. In addition to joining the board of the YMCA, she attended events hosted by Newport Contemporary Ballet, formerly known as Island Moving Company, and found there were many cultural opportunities in Newport.

About eight years ago, Jacobs received a flyer on Newport in Bloom's annual garden competition. She attended the awards ceremony and was impressed with what the organization did to encourage people to beautify their space, whether their garden was large or small, in a community housing project, a private property or a business.

Kiki McMahon, then president, urged her to join the organization and Jacobs now serves as the president of Newport in Bloom.

Have you always been into gardening?

My mother was a big gardener. She was president of the Missouri Garden Club. I got involved with garden club activities when I lived in Massachusetts. I attended garden tours that the Worcester Garden Club offered, then started planting my own gardens. The activities helped me to be more creative. When I moved to Newport, I downsized, but planted my small space. Being involved with Newport in Bloom allows me to see what other people are doing in their gardens, too.

What flowers do you look most forward to seeing in your garden?

Daffodils. When I moved here there weren't daffodils like now. It was before they were planting in big fields. It is extraordinary how much the program has grown. The daffodil bulb giveaway for residents has paid off. In my garden, peonies and dahlias are the ones I look forward to all summer and fall.

Where do you go for garden inspiration?

Green Animals gives me inspiration all the time. I also enjoy the Secret Garden Tours in Newport and Wickford. It is always a treat to see hidden gardens.



How often does Newport in Bloom meet? How do you get involved?

We have regular monthly meetings from March to December on the first Tuesday of the month. St. John's Church is kind enough to host us. Each meeting is focused on planning and coordinating a different event. March and April are dedicated to Daffy Days, while May is the plant sale. Anyone who is interested can reach out to us through our website and we'll invite them to attend a couple of meetings to see if it is a good fit.

Does one have to be a master gardener to join?

No. About a third of the members are master gardeners, but you really only need to have a love of flowers. Knowledge of flowers is good too, but a lot of what we do is organizing events, so there are lots of ways to get involved, and we need people with different kinds of skills. We'd love to have people who can help with marketing, designing brochures, fundraising, writing press releases or managing the database.

Tell us about Newport in Bloom's signature program, the decorative baskets hanging throughout the city.

There are 140 baskets hanging on Bellevue Avenue, Touro Street, Washington Square and Long Wharf. It is a huge amount of work. We choose the flowers, plant the baskets, hang them, pay for the watering and make sure the baskets are maintained, checking

each year to see if they need new chains or materials. The baskets are installed the first week of June and we prune them all summer. This will be the 41st year Newport in Bloom has installed the baskets.

What other activities is the organization involved with?

The annual citywide garden competition is held the last week of July. Awards will be given on Aug. 29.

Last year, the Preservation Society invited us to join the Flower Show. They provided us with arbors to plant. This year, they are giving us a pergola and we will have a booth at the show to promote the basket program and encourage people to sponsor a basket. The cost is \$300 and sponsors are recognized at the awards evening.

We're also do the Daffodil Days Bike Ride that Bike Newport organizes and other "daffy" events with the folks at Audrain. There's also daffodil bulb giveaways on Oct. 21 and at the Broadway Street Fair, and we host Santa at Long Wharf Mall too and decorate the Christmas tree there. It is a nice event for kids and a nice way to wrap up our season.

Newport in Bloom's annual plant sale is May 21, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., at the Elks. Where do the plants come from?

We purchase plants from a greenhouse grower in Medway, Massachusetts, called Berry's Nursery. We'll have a tremendous variety of plants you can't find on Aquidneck Island at the sale. Last year, we had lime green pansies that were a big hit. We also purchase plants from Maplewood Nursery on the island. Their herbs and tomatoes are very popular at the sale. We like to provide unique items and will have annuals, perennials, hanging baskets and succulents. The genesis of the plant sale was to encourage people to get their yards ready for the garden competition. It is the perfect time to buy plants.

Any tips for people attending the sale?

We sell out of plants before the end of the sale, so come early for the best selection.

Chambers Honors Business Excellence



The Chamber of Commerce presented Jackie Connor, owner of Bellevue Boards, with the Emerging Leader Award.



John and Paul Nunes, owners of Newport Vineyards were awarded the top prize in the category of Big Business.



Adam Thayer, event emcee, presented the best Small Business award to Michael and Meghan Napolitano, owners of Macray's Seafood.



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