

VOL. 7 SPRING/SUMMER 2022

Downtown

with the Ridgewood Guild



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The Conservancy for Ridgewood Public Lands: 10 Years of Planting

and Much More to Come!

by Laura Prah

The Conservancy for Ridgewood Public Lands (CFRPL) is celebrating 10 years of beautifying and preserving Ridgewood's gardens and parks. It all started in 2012 when a group of residents decided to do something about the neglected area on North Broad Street.

"We were frustrated that the town was not putting enough money in the budget for the maintenance of public areas and we wanted to beautify some of them," said Cynthia Halaby, president and co-founder of CFRPL. "We realized how unattractive the area was on either side of the train station stairs on North Broad. We went to the village manager, and it started from there."

They had the support of Nancy Bigos, director of Parks and Recreation, who didn't have the budget to beautify the area or support programs about nature and sustainability.

"Parks and Rec is not public safety, it is not education, although very important to our quality of life. The tax dollar can only go so far," said Bigos, who is also a co-founder of CFRPL.

It took the group three years of meetings and planning to obtain its 501(c)3 status, assemble a board of directors, and complete the copious paperwork required to create the conservancy. Its mission is to preserve, renew, restore and rejuvenate Ridgewood's parks and public spaces.

The small group got to work removing overgrowth and

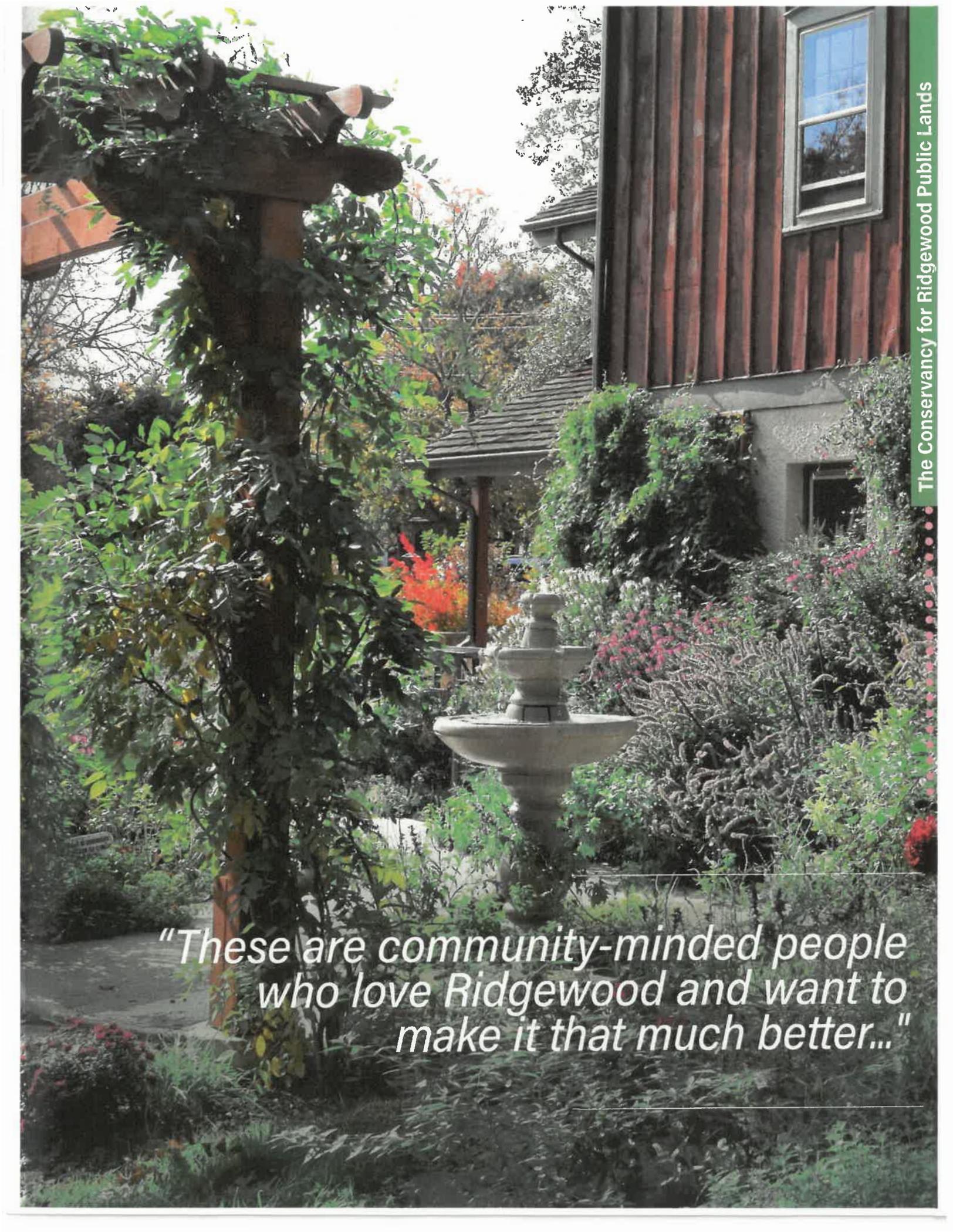
planting dogwood trees for what became the North Broad Street project.

"These are community-minded people who love Ridgewood and want to make it that much better. It's a gift and a pleasure to work with them," said Bigos. "Over the years, the conservancy has provided the financial and physical support to enhance our municipal parklands and gardens with the niceties that would go above and beyond the municipal tax dollar."

The conservancy is a dedicated group of people in the community, including 23 board members plus dozens of volunteers and donors. Since its inception, the organization has raised more than \$100,000 to fund projects such as a major renewal of Memorial Park at Van Neste Square, the inauguration of the Daffodil Festival in 2014 and the development of the Children's Sensory and Butterfly Garden at The Stable. Since 2013, CFRPL has planted 25,000 daffodil bulbs in town, one for each resident. This year, the conservancy is returning to the site of its first project with the 2022 Expansion of the North Broad Street Gardens and Parkland with plans to rejuvenate the area with trees, shrubs and flowers as well as the installation of park benches and planters. The project is scheduled for completion in May 2022.

The conservancy works closely with the Parks and Recreation Department to identify projects and then enlists Chris Raimondi of Raimondi Horticultural Group in Ho-Ho-Kus to design and oversee the work.





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All projects are fully funded by the conservancy. Upon completion, the conservancy hands the project over to the town for Parks and Recreation to maintain.

CFRPL also runs educational programs to help local students learn about sustainability and environmental preservation.

"In the very beginning we were just about enhancement, but we understand nature and sustainability," said Bigos. "How we educate our children is what the world will become. It's about respecting those things that these days we take for granted."

Perhaps the best example of beauty and education coming together is the 2021 Enhancement of the Children's Sensory and Butterfly Garden behind The Stable, which included new plantings, a seating area and the installation of interactive musical instruments. An area that had been a home for garbage cans is now a popular field trip location for local schools as well as the site of two recent weddings.

"This garden is truly magnificent in that it gives children an opportunity to use their senses. They have the ability to feel the fuzziness of the lamb's-ear leaf, or they can use their hearing to listen to birds and bees buzzing and the rippling of the water fountain. It's magical," said Bigos. "Those are the things, the gifts, that make the village so very special."

"I believe our residents are blessed with the volunteers we have, and I think that is one of the attributes that makes our community so very special," said Bigos. "The many ways that they provide their time, resources, expertise, education and finances to make a difference in our community—it sets us apart from so many others."

The Conservancy for Ridgewood Public Lands will celebrate its 10th anniversary with a Country Fair on June 9 from 4-6pm in the Children's Butterfly and Sensory Garden located at The Stable on Maple Ave. Come and celebrate with music, dance, crafts and the releasing of butterflies in the garden.

For more details and to learn how to get involved with CFRPL, visit www.cfrpl.org. 🐦