

Donated Plants To Mark 9/11

BY KITTY MERRILL

A partnership forged in loss and survival, horror and hope — plus 5,000 crocus bulbs — deepened in May when members of the Westhampton Garden Club traveled to Lower Manhattan to the garden at The Battery — which honors those lost on the September 11 terrorist attacks.

Lynda Confessore, Joy Flynn, Inger Mejean, and Joan Reilly, from the Garden Club, and Dave Schaffauer made the trek to New York City to pick up plants grown at The Battery Gardens of Remembrance for transport back to the Quogue Fire Department's own blossoming Garden of Remembrance.

The group met Warrie Price, who founded the Battery Conservancy in 1984, and developed the gardens after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. A fellow garden club member had introduced her to Ms. Meejan and the pair conceived the idea of sister gardens.

"Her vision and belief that 'the power of nature's beauty can never be underestimated' is what inspired this collaboration and connection to the WGC effort to create a memorial garden as a place of peaceful respite and contemplation. Her belief has never wavered and now downtown has this park oasis," Ms. Confessore related.

The Battery Gardens of Remembrance is a commemorative space dedicated to those who lost their lives on September 11, and the survivors, many of whom fled to The Battery after the terrorist attack. A plaque at the site extends the dedication to "all who come seeking renewed optimism and hope."

At the Quogue Fire Department, club members hope to create a similar, if smaller space for reflection, optimism and hope at the department's 9/11 memorial. Back in 2011, volunteer firefighters, clad in their dress uniforms drove to the city to receive a steel beam that is the focal point of the monument. "As one of the responding fire departments to the tragedy, the Quogue Fire department was given a 6-foot I-beam from one of the towers," Ms. Confessore explained.

Draped in an American flag, the twisted steel was brought back to the village in a solemn motorcade. Garden Club Project Leader Inger Mejeana recalled that the beam was transported to Quogue on May 19, 2011. The group planned to make their trip to the city on May 19, 2021, exactly 10 years later.

At home in Quogue, the beam rests atop a stone base and features a fountain and lighting as part of an overall installation. Bricks, some purchased and inscribed in honor of lost loved ones, surround the



Garden Club and fire department members, front row, left to right, Lynda Confessore, Luciana Gomes, Gabriela Marin, Joy Flynn, Inger Mejean, Michael McMahon; and back row, left to right, Phillip Condyles, Sean Kiely, Warrie Price, Joan Reilly and Dave Schaffauer.



A long view of the two-tier garden at The Battery designed by the renowned Dutch garden designer Piet Oudolf, who went on to create the landscape of the High Line. Right, a memorial plaque at the garden at The Battery. Several of these plaques are embedded throughout the garden.



installation, with benches at either end of the 20-foot-by-10-foot patio. Nearby, closer to Jessup Avenue on the firehouse property, is a free-standing rock with a plaque attached to it honoring World War II veterans.

Last week, workers from Dragonfly Landscaping, which donated the work, installed the plantings "exchanged" from The Battery Gardens. A grant from the National Garden Clubs Inc.'s PLANT AMERICA project helped underwrite the project.

In the fall of 2019, Sean Kiely, who manages the Battery gardens recalled, members of the Westhampton Garden Club planted 5,000 crocus buds. They came up last spring, but the pandemic interfered with plans to divide and share them with eastern counterparts. This spring, he explained, garden-

ers divided perennials and grew them out for trade with Westhampton.

Mr. Kiely sent the Quogue contingent home with eight different kinds of plants: Panicum Northwind, Pennisetum Red Head, Calamintha nepeta, Stachys Hummelo, Agastache Blue Fortune, Amsonia hubrichtii, and Echinacea Magnus.

"It was tremendously satisfying to be there," said Ms. Mejean, of the visit to The Battery Gardens of Remembrance. "It was very emotional, but it gave me hope," she continued, "Like a new day's coming."

"The whole place engenders a sense of peace and serenity, even though it arose from a dark time," Ms. Confessore, who was in Manhattan during the attacks, recalled. During their trip, the East End visitors had time to reflect, looking out

over a landscape that offers views of New York Harbor.

The park was designed by Piet Oudolf, Mr. Kiely said, which Ms. Price "went to Holland and found." He was later tabbed to design New York's elevated linear park, the High Line. Ms. Price "put Piet on the map," Ms. Mejean opined. A drawing in the Oudolf design, which highlights perennials and native plants, was used to steer the plantings in Quogue.

The Gardens of Remembrance, at 195,000 square feet, are the largest perennial gardens in North America. With 113 species of native grasses and flowering perennials, its design is a departure from a typical public park that features annual plantings. Rather, the park calls forth an annual renewal and returns stronger than before, like New Yorkers after 9/11, according

to an article on the website totallandscape.com.

The Quogue Fire Department Garden of Remembrance will be dedicated this fall, on the 20th anniversary of 9/11. Department officials are working on tweaking the fountain and lighting, and a plaque is being made, Assistant Chief Schaffauer explained. About two years ago, he said the department picked up "a survivor," a sapling grown from the seeds of a tree at the World Trade Center. "I put it over to the side," he said, "It was such a little sapling."

Still, as the tree and the New York City transplants take root, he noted, "There's a lot of cool stuff going on around our monument." Thanking the Westhampton Garden Club for orchestrating this whole plan, he enthused, "What a beautiful thing to do!"