

MA non-profit hopes to fight cancer in PA

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In the past three decades, there has been much progress in the understanding, diagnosis, treatment and prevention of cancer. However despite advances the disease continues to kill with the same efficiency at the same rate as in the 1950's. 1,479,350 people will be diagnosed this year alone and of those diagnosed 562,340 will probably succumb to their illness. The battle is waged on multiple fronts around the world in laboratories and hospitals. But just as important as any research is the fight occurring at the grass roots level. It's one that can be made by anybody and everybody. One such battle rages now in Dedham, Massachusetts.

Hope in Bloom is a non-profit organization that builds gardens for men and women undergoing treatment for breast cancer. Founded by Roberta Dehman Hershon in 2007, the organization enjoys over 650 planters in their database along with landscape designers and architects who volunteer their time to provide the service. Inspired by a quote from Lady Bird Johnson, "where flowers bloom, so does hope", Ms. Hershon feels that gardens are a low maintenance way to "...bring color back into people's lives". Hope in Bloom volunteers typically plant the garden and then maintain it, free of charge, for a one year period. After which, the garden owner is then responsible for the site maintenance and upkeep. Since its inception in 2007, Hope in Bloom has planted 73 gardens across Massachusetts and currently has a waiting list of over 100 persons.



While it began as a way to honor the passing of her lifelong friend, Ms. Hershon envisions the organization growing in all the states of the union. The problem is the same as in most non-profit entities: money, or rather the lack of it. Most, if not all supplies are purchased wholesale yet the average cost of a garden measuring simply 10 ft. x 10 ft. can



An Echinacea Purpurea at NY Botanical Garden — New York, NY

run anywhere from \$1,500 to \$3,000. Donations are secured from private citizens, large businesses or corporations, cancer organizations, healthcare providers and garden or horticultural societies.

Currently the organization is based in Dedham and works primarily throughout Massachusetts. But the circle is growing and interest is being shown right here in Pennsylvania. Master Gardener Rose Romboski of Cranbury Township, PA is looking to start a chapter in her community and seeks any and all interested individuals. A platoon of willing volunteers is needed but more important, donations are necessary to secure a start up budget in the amount of \$250,000. If there's anyone in the Cranbury Township area looking to volunteer or better still, to contribute, they should contact Ms. Romboski. Her contact information will be listed at the end of this article.

The American Cancer Society estimates that there will be 36,080 new cancer cases occurring in the state of Massachusetts this year, resulting in 13,140 deaths. Here in Pennsylvania expect as many as 74,170 new cancer cases ending in 28,690 deaths. With the estimated new cases and corresponding deaths occurring in Pennsylvania double to those occurring in Massachusetts, it's fitting that the battle front shifts to our Delaware Valley. Everyone from the recently starting amateur to the seasoned gardener can relate to the joy one experiences when a new garden is planted and the results bloom. That emotional satisfaction you get is literally unequalled. Think of that joy tenfold and you'll get an idea of what Hope in Bloom brings to its recipients. Roberta Hershon says it best that "gardens are like lipstick for their souls". It's time now to take those beauty secrets on the road.