

The Common Wealth Award Committee is proud to announce five finalists for the 2018 Common Wealth Award. The Garden Club of Virginia member clubs will vote on the winner(s) at the Board of Governors meeting in October. Winners and monetary awards will be announced at this meeting. A description of each project is listed below:

**Project Dogwood- A Hundred Year Journey  
submitted by The Augusta Garden Club**

Habitat for Humanity is initiating a whole neighborhood approach as it buys homes and lots in a five-block area of downtown Staunton. The Augusta Garden Club will donate dogwoods for yards and planned common spaces to beautify and build equity in this formerly blighted area. Habitat will oversee green spaces and provide tools and instruction to homeowners on successful care of the trees.

Montgomery Hall Park, one of Virginia's first African-American parks, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is experiencing renewed recognition and improvements. The Club will provide dogwoods, to be planted and maintained by the City of Staunton, to enhance the park's manor house and nature trails.

Since its 1919 founding, the Club has planted dogwoods along city streets, parks, and public spaces. In the last five years, we used grants and club funds to plant over 100 dogwood trees and develop a "teaching arboretum" focused on disease-resistant cultivars. As our centennial approaches, the Club hopes to expand community partnerships and bring this project to two diverse and historic areas. The Common Wealth Award will allow the Club to increase the presence of our state tree by planting over 40 dogwoods in these underserved areas of Staunton.

**Urban Garden Invites Youth to "Dream a Different Future"  
submitted by The Elizabeth River Garden Club**

Paradise Creek in Portsmouth was once so polluted that the EPA named three "Superfund" or worst-of-the-worst sites in this area. One shore has been transformed into an urban oasis, Paradise Creek Nature Park, where at-risk youth, in particular, can discover hope.

This plan for an outdoor classroom is the second phase of the landscaping around the new UVA designed River Academy building. Children will go from the Academy to the adjacent outdoor classroom where native flowers, shrubs, trees, a sensory garden, outdoor art, and more will enliven their learning experience. They can view a solar-powered building with cisterns to provide water for plants and with sustainable materials used throughout.

Thousands of people visit this 40-acre park created by the non-profit Elizabeth River Project with help from the community. With a revitalized forest and a created wetland, this park teaches environmental stewardship of the Elizabeth River and Chesapeake Bay. But those who may benefit the most are the children from the nearby neighborhoods with inner-city challenges. "Just walking among the trees and seeing the herons takes these children out of their bleak daily lives. It gives them a chance to dream a different future," said a teacher with Young Life.

**The Paw Path Pollinator Garden at Smith River Sports Complex  
submitted by The Martinsville Garden Club and The Garden Study Club**

Our clubs collaborated to create a pollinator sanctuary. With help from Master Naturalists, the Dan River Basin Association, and Eagle, Boy and Girl scouts, we created gardens rich with native plants and information signs at either end of the popular Paw Path and along the riverside dog-walking trail.

Our vision is to offer a new approach to learning. We are seeking support for creation of elementary-level, SOL-based educational materials – say a coloring book or a storybook that uses the gardens and their plants to introduce pollinators and the importance of conservation to a young audience.

Meanwhile, high-school teachers are already creating assignments that use this outdoor classroom as a living workbook. One includes creating QR codes for our plant signs; another involved building insect hotels.

We wish to expand upon students' development of a website (PawPath.org), now underway. They have designed a site format. We would like to build on their foundation to broaden our audience.

Ultimately, we envision the need for informational/ directional signage in prominent visitor locations to draw visitors to the gardens and path.

We are gifting what we hope will be a beautiful, serene and emotionally moving destination for visitors to our area's second largest tourist attraction.

**Strengthening Our Roots:  
Improving Access to a Native Garden  
submitted by Mill Mountain Garden Club**

Just off the Blue Ridge Parkway, Mill Mountain Park is a popular Roanoke mountaintop recreation area. In the heart of the park, lies the Mill Mountain Wildflower Garden. The Mill Mountain Garden Club has worked 40+ years and 80,000+ hours to reverse non-optimal development. Today, the 2.5-acre garden is a native plant sanctuary situated between the Mill Mountain Discovery Center and the Mill Mountain Zoo. Sadly, more than half of the 70,000 annual park visitors cannot access the garden because current garden paths are not stroller and wheelchair accessible. The alternate route is a bumpy, peripheral service road.

The Common Wealth Award combined with \$10,000 raised and restricted by MMGC would provide funds to install an accessible pathway for families with strollers and visitors with disabilities. The wildflower garden is a legacy project, with roots deep and wide. Improved access will open the garden and highlight environmental stewardship, education, and conservation: a mission match with GCV. It is our hope that funds will be granted to improve garden access, allowing everyone to benefit from the beauty and lessons of a native summit garden.

**Save the Rain  
submitted by Roanoke Valley Garden Club**

The Virginia Museum of Transportation honors the history of all forms of transportation throughout our state. VMT is a multi-cultural and multi-generational museum that hosts 50,000 visitors annually. Daily the museum is filled with happy noise – school groups, grandparents with grandchildren, veterans, and history buffs. VMT serves over 15,000 school age children each year with STEM oriented classes matched to SOLS.

Beautifying and maintaining the VMT railyard area has been Roanoke Valley Garden Club's signature project since the early 1970s. The railyards behind VMT contain beautiful beds and twenty planter boxes, which we designed and have maintained since 1985. The front of the museum, however, is bleak. Six empty, brick beds there need planting to distinguish the entrance. The building's overhang blocks rainfall from this area. Being listed on the National Historic Register prevents us from altering the building. Our beautification plan includes the addition of rain barrels and rain gardens to conserve and supply rainwater to the beds as well as signage to educate visitors on rain barrel usage and storm water management. RVGC requests your support to bring beauty to this Commonwealth museum of historical and educational importance.