

Bird-watching and a 'gold rush' at the gardens

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Pascack Valley Community Life
OF COMMUNITY LIFE

Hillsdale – The Sapienza Gardens are in bloom. Two years ago, volunteers planted more than 13,000 daffodil bulbs throughout the multi-acre park. They were in full bloom when the gardens were officially opened a year ago.



The nearly three-acre Sapienza Gardens in Hillsdale are awash in yellow this spring. Hundreds and hundreds of daffodils dot the landscape. This is the second spring they have bloomed at the site; in the fall of 2008, volunteers planted 13,000 bulbs throughout the area.

The gardens' namesake, Barbara Sapienza, was the principal of Pascack Valley High School at the time of her untimely death in March of 2008. In a concerted effort to honor her memory, and contributions to the district throughout her more than 30 years at PV, several local entities, including the municipal governments and boards of education of Hillsdale and River Vale, as well as her family and friends, worked together to create the gardens. By April, a committee had been formed and the site for the gardens identified. In May, volunteer professionals cleared the site of decaying logs, and appliances dumped at the site over the years, and a large group of volunteers cleared the area of garbage that had also accumulated. Once the area was cleared of debris, the first dogwood trees were planted.

Last week, the first daffodils of the season – hundreds and hundreds of them – dotted the hillsides and cleared spaces near the brook. Some are in large clumps, others in neat rows, and others seemingly "sprinkled" throughout the area. How many of the bulbs helped woodland creatures winter-over can't be counted but certainly not enough to diminish the beauty the blooms contribute to this gem of nature.

The trustees have scheduled a number of events this month. On Saturday and Sunday, April 17 and 18 from 9:30 to 11 a.m., area birdwatchers are invited to the gardens. Birders from the Hackensack Riverkeeper will guide attendees and point out different species of birds that frequent the area. Another bird-watching event is also planned for Saturday, April 24 from 8:30 to 10 a.m., again with staff from the Hackensack Riverkeeper. It is recommended that participants wear footwear appropriate for walking in the woods. For more information about these events, contact Sue Vaccaro at scvaccarod@verizon.net.

Families from Hillsdale and River Vale are invited to a "Klondike Gold Rush" on Sunday, April 18 starting at 2 p.m. The children will search areas of the gardens to find "gold" which they can then trade in for gold chocolate coins. For more information about this event, contact Ginna Sapanara at jsapa@aol.com.

Plans are underway to create a Reading Garden and a Children's Learning Garden – appropriate choices to honor life and work of a dedicated educator who touched so many young lives.

The Sapienza Gardens are located at the eastern terminus of St. Nicholas Avenue, off Kinderkamack Road: traveling north on Kinderkamack, after crossing Piermont Avenue, make the first right onto St. Nicholas, which terminates in a gravel cul de sac at the pedestrian-only entrance to the gardens.

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STAFF PHOTOS BY KATHRYN A. BURGER

These daffodils, with their 'faces' to the sun, are among those planted in neat rows at the Sapienza Gardens. Their arrangement brought to mind children sitting in rows of desks in a classroom with their faces upturned to listen to their teacher.