

**Suburban Garden Club engaged in community**

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By Joy VanderLek The Cheshire Citizen

Often Suburban Garden Club members can be found elbow deep in potting soil, planting hundreds of veggie and flower trays and then lugging those trays to the annual garden sale on the town green. But there are many other activities the club has its hands in and which it accomplishes each year.

“What may surprise people about our club is the community involvement beyond Cheshire,” said Suburban Garden Club President Pat Archibald.

“At Christmas time, members travel to New Haven to decorate the Ronald McDonald House for the holidays. A few club members travel to hospice each month to create arrangements for the hospice patients, and we have given money to Common Ground High School in New Haven to help build their Education Pavilion.”

In the past year, the Suburban Garden Club awarded scholarships to students with Common Ground connections. One student entered Naugatuck Valley Community College’s Horticulture program, and the club awarded a scholarship to a graduating student this year, who will attend Clark University to study environmental science, Archibald said.

Within Cheshire, the group awarded a scholarship to Cheshire High school student, Aida Feng, who will pursue chemistry and environmental studies at Brown University.

The Suburban Garden Club’s work continues throughout town. It is instrumental in the Adopt-a-Spot program, a town-wide beautification effort. It also decorated and cares for flowerbeds and planters at the Cheshire Senior Center and Cheshire Historical Society.

Susan Dillman, a member of the group for more than a decade, likes the fact members do not have to be experienced gardeners or floral designers. Members have varied levels of expertise, she said. “I’ve always loved gardening and thought I was fairly knowledgeable, but I’ve learned so much more since joining the club, both from speakers at our monthly meetings and from other members. My husband used to be the gardening expert in the family, now he frequently asks me for advice.”

Past president and membership co-chair Mary Sullivan initially joined the group to get help with her yard. “I had a shady backyard, which is what most of Cheshire is anyway,” she said. She also liked the group’s commitment to civic activities.

The club’s founder, Josephine Kowalski, died in August. Early on, she’d held the meetings in her house and later the group organized in 1957, Sullivan said. “It was a way for women who loved gardening to meet in the evening, because more women were going into the workforce at that time.” More men are included in the membership, these days.

“Our members have very different job backgrounds, some of us are retired now and seem to be busier than when we were working and, this is what makes the club successful, I think, we possess varied interests and talents related to plants and their place in our community,” Archibald said.

The Suburban Garden Club’s next meeting, is scheduled for Wedneday, Sept. 18, at 7 p.m. at the Cheshire Senior Center. Call Mary Sullivan at (203) 881-1620 or Jessica Fischer at (203) 272-8315 for more information.