
GOVERNMENT

Little Falls Adds Additional Green Space to Woodcliff Avenue



Pictured is Little Falls Mayor James Damiano, along with Councilman Bill Leiss and volunteers of Anheuser-Busch, at the 5th annual Riverfront Beautification Day on June 1.

Credits: Tina Pappas

LITTLE FALLS, NJ - The Passaic River Coalition is aiming to keep the momentum of its ongoing efforts to beautify and maintain green space along flood-prone areas of the Passaic River, primarily in the Singac section of the township.

Last Friday, they returned once again for "Riverfront Beautification Day" in order to plant flowers and maintain shrubbery in those areas. The township acquired properties on Williams Street and Woodcliff Avenue in recent years, that were damaged due to flooding, in order to create open space areas. Some homes were removed due to the impact of recent flood events, such as Hurricane Irene.

Through the township's recently updated flood mitigation ordinance "repetitive loss properties" for acquiring and demolished properties, many areas will remain as open space. Some of the sections

planned under the ordinance are along Williams Street, Zeliff Avenue, Riverview Circle, and those in the Louis Street Park vicinity. Approximately 59 properties are slated to be acquired under the plan.

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The Passaic River Coalition, headquartered in Morristown, has been in existence for 50 years. The coalition has collaborated with the township through the years in order to acquire properties that are not buildable, according to John Veteri, trustee. The project was made possible through a grant from the the River Network, a national organization.

"We fill a need for residences that are not eligible flood mitigation or the Blue Acres program, and we may be their last resort depending on whether it fits the criteria," Veteri explained. "Our criteria right now is primarily Woodcliff Avenue along the river. The Passaic River Coalition is a member of the River Network and we've partnered with them on 'World Environment Day' for 15 years. For the past five years, we've partnered with them in Little Falls."

Veteri also said the coalition works with the township to see which lots need refurbishing and by purchasing several flood ravaged homes that are located along the riverbanks of the Passaic River. Some funding has come from Passaic County Open Space grants and through private donations.

"We have purchased several houses on the Passaic River," he added. " One foreclosed home was donated to us by a bank. We've been able to acquire properties that are not buildable and the owners of the lots have just decided to donate them to the Passaic River Coalition."

He also added that the coalition has been acquiring properties in Little Falls since 2009 and own nearly 2,000 acres of land in New Jersey that they have been responsible for preserving.

"This is our fifth annual event and it's supposed to jump around to different towns," Veteri said. "Lately it's been Little Falls, but we're happy about it. We were able to reforest a lot between Lewis and Williams Street in recent years and there are some really substantially large trees there. We feel it helps to rejuvenate those areas."

Another benefit the coalition provides is planting trees and rain gardens, which absorb river water, he said, in addition to removing dead trees that can fall into and snag the Passaic River.

"By eliminating the impervious coverage, these newly planted lots help to absorb water," he noted. "We've also removed some trees along the river with assistance from the Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission. They've removed two very large dead trees, of which a large branch had already fallen into the river. It's important to get those before they fall into the river and cause snagging."

Veteri also added that the open areas absorb the water and act like a basin. Several benches were also received from local donors, which face the river.

Steven Reynolds, also a trustee, said that the area has been a focal point for the coalition.

"We've been working here on this stretch for many years taking down houses and replacing it with open space," Reynolds.

Assisting with the project was the Little Falls Department of Public Works, which provided mulch and sod and cleared away brush from the park space area, and volunteers from the Newark branch of Anheuser-Busch, who came out to do the plantings. Part of their "Better World," vision community outreach program, the corporation aims to meet their global environment goals for 2017 through reforestation and continuing the upkeep of the lots around the Woodcliff Avenue corridor.

Mayor James Damiano, Councilman Bill Leiss and Councilwoman Maria Cordonnaire were on hand to see the landscape work being conducted. Damiano commented on the partnership that Little Falls has with the Passaic River Coalition and Anheuser-Busch over the past five years.

"It has been absolutely tremendous," Damiano said. "Their assistance helps bring the curb appeal back to the Singac area of town while creating a beautiful space that is functional in absorbing ground water in the future in the event that water levels begin to rise. This is just one more step in preventing any future flooding in Little Falls."