



Worcester (MA) REALTORS® Use Placemaking Grant to Restore Local Veterans' Memorial Triggering a Surge of Civic Pride—April 2015

Some 65 years ago, a stunning black granite eagle monument was erected in the Greendale section of Worcester, Massachusetts as a memorial for all veterans. Time and neglect over recent decades, however, had rendered the surrounding park area more an eyesore than a place of honor in its West Boylston Street community. Using a Placemaking Grant from the REALTOR® Party, members of the Worcester Regional Association of REALTORS® (WRAR) have restored the area, and triggered a surge of local civic pride in the process.

Colleen Pappas, Executive Vice President of the 1,500-member organization, explains that a REALTOR® who serves on Worcester's City Council is also a member of WRAR's Government Affairs Committee. Because of his respective involvements, he knew that the city had cut funding to maintain this park, and was also aware the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® offers Placemaking Grants for just such projects. "It's nice that we have this link to the city government," notes Pappas, adding, "this was an ideal project for our first time trying out the Placemaking Grant program."

The dramatic eagle monument had begun with the vision of an official of the Norton Company, a major manufacturer that was central to the Worcester economy back in the day. He organized a committee of local businesses, and collected subscriptions from public-spirited members of the community. Carl Milles, a renowned sculptor of Swedish birth, was commissioned to create the monument.

Unbeknownst to WRAR when it launched its revitalization effort last year, the local branch of the Swedish National Federation was also seeking to restore the beauty and dignity of the monument grounds. WRAR secured a \$2,500 Placemaking Grant from NAR, and was delighted when the Swedish group came forward to lend some elbow grease to the project.

"It was a beautiful September morning," says Pappas, "and 15 of our REALTOR® members, plus some staff and our new Swedish friends, were out in full force, cleaning up and landscaping. When -- if! -- spring arrives, we'll be installing park benches and a plaque commemorating the monument itself. We will have really given this area the help it so badly needed."

When local residents and businesses along the nearby commercial stretch of West Boylston Street realized that the gardening effort was in progress, they came out to show support. Elderly citizens shared memories of the original monument effort, and others lent a hand with the landscaping. When the project was complete, the onlookers gave the volunteers a heartfelt ovation, and some businesses even distributed gift cards with their thanks.

Says Pappas, "We really didn't know what to expect when we set out to accomplish this. But everyone involved now shares a great sense of accomplishment in having given



back to the community. The Placemaking Grant enabled us to show the power of our REALTOR® organization at its finest, at a real grassroots level."

She adds: "It truly was a wonderful experience and if this first project is an example of what to expect from these grants, we will certainly be doing many more."

To learn more about how the REALTORS® of the Worcester region are using the REALTOR® Party's Placemaking Grants to revitalize key pockets of their communities, contact Colleen Pappas, Executive Vice President of the Worcester Regional Association of REALTORS® at cpappas@WRAR.ORG or 508-832-6600.

