Green Thumbs



Slippery Rock University students with Greek organizations help Rotarians plant tulips Saturday at Slippery Rock Memorial Park.

JAMIE HUNT/SPECIAL TO THE EAGLE

Rotarians, SRU students beautify borough

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SLIPPERY ROCK — A biannual Rotary Club of Slippery Rock project that has worked toward making the borough's downtown more attractive since 2012 found partners in some of Slippery Rock University's student community three years ago.

Since then, Slippery Rock in Bloom has become a recurring community service project for the university's fraternities and sororities, said Regina Greenwald, secretary of the Rotary Club.

Saturday morning, once again, brought together hundreds of students to plant tulip bulbs and clean up the streets, starting at the borough's Memorial Park. Work was divvied up between participating organizations by sections on Main Street.

"I try to switch it up every year so it's not mundane," said SRU's Julia Rismiller Tangeman, one of the central figures who helped involve students.

As the assistant director of fraternity and sorority life for the university, one of Rismiller Tangeman's goals was to bridge the gap between SRU's Greek life and the community at large.

"Greek life traditionally gets a bad rap, known for partying and whatnot," she said. "But we really do Greek life right here, and our kids had an itch to help out the community that they live in."

The project has become part of the university's Greeks Give Back initiative, through which students help the Rotary Club plant tulip bulbs in the fall. They carry

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out a cleanup of the borough's Main Street at the same time, said Rismiller Tangeman.

Jacob Levy, president of the university's intrafraternity council, said the activities also showcase that SRU's fraternity and sorority culture stands out in contrast to broader stigma.

"We do things like this to promote that we are different, and that we are the better side of Greek life," he said.

"If our organizations aren't benefiting our community, then we're truly doing Greek Life wrong," said Owen Durka, an SRU student participant.

Helping during Halloweekend

Greenwald said the fall part of the project typically takes place close to the end of October.

If tulips are planted any earlier, they can bloom quickly — the goal is for the flowers to bloom in spring — and if planted too late, severe frost can cause trouble.

But a unique aspect about this year's project was that it fell exactly on the day of Halloween, unlike previous years.

Some students wore their costumes to celebrate the spooky season while getting the work done.

Saturday's planting helped the Rotary club reach a 100,000 mark for the number of tulips planted since the beginning of the initiative, Greenwald said. Shirts were distributed to volunteers to commemorate the milestone.

Rismiller Tangeman said despite a 20% required attendance from organizations this year instead of the usual 50%, attendance from fraternities and sororities ended up being way above that mark.

Waking up early on Saturday may have been less pleasant for students, but the fun began in the morning once they gathered at the park, she said.

Volunteers were told to prepare for more extreme weather, Greenwald said.

"Last year, we planted in pouring rain," she said. But this time, the skies were clear. "Fortunately, with this many students, it only takes about an hour."

Bolstering the community

Slippery Rock in Bloom is inspired by America in Bloom, a national organization that aims to form connections between communities and their environments. Each year, America in Bloom holds a competition known as the National Awards Program.

Slippery Rock participated in 2018, and the borough was awarded first place for communities of its size.

Besides crossing the 100,000 mark, the Rotary club initiative has impacted the borough's community in many ways, Greenwald said.





Above, Slippery Rock Rotarian Jeff Berta, right, and Slippery Rock Borough employee Owen Yeager take part in the planting Saturday. Below, SRU student Nate Waugaman digs up a flower bed.

When Owen Yeager first started as a part-time employee at the borough two years ago, he said many of the sections of the park were neglected. Flower beds did not have mulch, and there were weeds everywhere.

"Now that it's under control, it's been a lot better," he said.

At the heart of the project is building a community spirit, said Greenwald. Whether the judges stop by or not, the populace takes pride in sprucing up their town, she added.

"The entire thing behind it is: how can we help benefit our community here in Slippery Rock?" said Durka.

Rismiller Tangeman concurred, and said students taking an active role in polishing and tidying up their streets creates a better incentive to maintain them going forward.

The American Bloom Project at large, Greenwald added, has also shown that it builds tourism in places that participate.

"It works very well for overall improvement in the community, and student pride," she said.



From left, Slippery Rock University students, from left, Emily Dunlap, of Hookstown, Natalie Wilson, of Cranberry Township, Faith Garrison, of Monroeville, and Kiley Furman, of Washington, plant tulips on Saturday at Slippery Rock Memorial Park.

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