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It must be spring, Jim Cowburn's giant bouquet is near bloom

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Photo by Frank Ordonez / The
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Roberts Elementary second-grade teacher Maribeth DiFlorio shows her
student Ja-Heam Peck a flower while touring the the city of Syracuse's
greenhouse Friday.

We know it's really spring when Jim Cowburn calls
and says the tulips are pushing up out of the
ground.

"Any day now," Jim says with his usual
enthusiasm. "They should be popping."

Spreading a glorious rainbow of tulips across our
town.

Jim manages the city greenhouse on Onondaga
Avenue for the Parks Department. He's the guy
who is responsible for turning Syracuse's green
spaces into One Big Bouquet of Flowers this time of
year. He and his crew planted more than 80,000

bulbs last fall. Now they're good to grow.

All of this works because Jim's built up a network of neighborhood helpers during the nearly 20 years he's been
gardening for Syracuse. The city plants, then Jim hopes a crew from the neighborhood will take over with weeding
and watering.

Some of the neighborhood leaders even come in to the greenhouse to get plants started.

Jim's up for this. He's excited because Mayor Stephanie Miner got him two more watering trucks to do the job of
keeping the beds moist and green. That's three vehicles, each equipped with a 210-gallon tank in the back of a
pickup truck.

He's also excited about the new challenges he adds to the job each year. In 2010, it was a planting of bulbs to
brighten the way-in to Hancock International Field. The crew put in 7,000 bulbs at the airport.

The expanded plantings in our city started a few years ago when Alix Krueger was in charge of the greenhouse. She
put in beds beyond the few at city parks entrances. Jim's expanded on that, adding a few personal touches like the
boulders he gets courtesy of Joanie Mahoney, the county executive. They're from the county cemetery at Loomis Hill.

Several of Jim's flower beds around the city are now "rock gardens."

The next step comes after the tulips bloom; that's replacing the bulbs with annuals and perennials. This usually happens after Mother's Day. Many of the plants are donated to the city by George Zerrillo, whose greenhouses at on East Taft Road.

"I'm trying to make it nice for everybody in the city," Cowburn explained. He says Mayor Miner calls him "my quarterback."

"I want her to know my arm's getting a little sore," he joked Monday.

The greenhouse is open for tours, by appointment. Friday, it was visited by a group of second graders and their teachers from nearby Roberts School. Jim and his crew — John Bialy, Paul Russell and Barry Dixon — have about 800,000 seeds in the soil, from which they'll harvest about 200,000 plants to be set out.

Curtiss-Gale Forest

þReaders, including George Wise of Fulton, reminded me that there is a state wildlife management area along Route 57 just south of Fulton named for the Gale family of Liverpool, who ran our last salt yard in the neighborhood known as Galeville.

The area was donated to the state by Ida and Thomas Gale in 1936 and H. Salem Curtiss in 1918 with the stipulation that it be used as a "wildlife and bird sanctuary" and "remain forever natural and untouched." The sanctuary, which borders the Oswego River, includes an old-growth forest segment.

Oops ýOur hands got crossed in editing last week's column about the Twitter Project by Onondaga Historical Association. Jeanne Phillips is kin to the Phillips brothers mentioned as a source of material on the Civil War. Jeanne points out that is was brother John, not James, who was a substitute for another local man who paid him $700 to take his place as a soldier.

Also, in the column on the loss of the Syracuse Symphony Orchestra, the name of the author of the new Melville Clark biography is Linda Kaiser.

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