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City's greenhouse crew turns Syracuse into Flower City each spring and summer

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Photo by Frank Ordonez / The Post-Standard

Left to right Bellevue second graders Zaniyah Bullock, Ralasia Gregory look at Braniya McMullen as she smells a geranium during a tour Friday afternoon of the Onodaga Park Greenhouse. Bullock, Gregory and McMullen are students in Alicia Mahoney's class that toured the greenhouse.

Spring is bustin' out all over Syracuse.

It's the flowers.

Daffodils and tulips, to be exact.

Jim Cowburn and his crew at the city greenhouse on Onondaga Avenue have planted the spring blooms in close to 400 beds all over Syracuse. Due to our pre-spring warm weather, the blooms popped out earlier and are lasting longer. Next week, the city's flower crew will set out to dead-head the beds and plant the summer crop of flowers: petunias, begonias, marigolds, salvia...

Isn't it nice to have so many splashes of color in so many places. We could call ourselves the Flower City, if someone else didn't have the title already.

At least, we're green. Right? "The Emerald City." It says so on the official signs.

Ask the second grade pupils of Alicia Mahaney at Bellevue School in Syracuse. They got a tour of the city greenhouse from Jim Cowburn and his helpers Friday. The crew is three strong: Paul Russell, John Bialy and Barry Dixon.

Jim has help planting the beds from volunteer gardeners around our town. They start picking up the new plants this week and next. After that, the city supplies mulch and watering. It now has two water trucks with large tanks.

Folks in the Meadowbrook neighborhood are a good example of citizen gardeners. They plant their beds in the so-called end-caps along the county's Meadowbrook Drive Drainage project. The Meadowbrooks also sport those beautiful, and creative, birdhouses, about 15 along the roadway so far.

Another helper is the Zerrillo's Greenhouse in Bridgeport. They donated hundreds of plants to Jim Cowburn's

campaign to brighten up Syracuse. Some of Jim's beds in the city became "rock gardens" courtesy of the large rocks he got from the county cemetery at Loomis Hill in 2011.

"I think we make a difference," Jim says of his beds. "I'm trying to make it nice for everybody in the city."

We appreciate the effort. Neighbors often write and call the greenhouse with compliments. One grateful Syracusan recently baked cookies and sent them to the crew.

Loomis Hill II

Last week, I wrote about Alex Cuttler's Explorer Scout spruce-up project at the county cemetery. Bill Ainsley of the Parks Department chipped in with details about the two burial grounds there, which come under his department. There are 5,094 burials in the pauper's field at Loomis and 5,061 in the veterans cemetery next door.

Bill also explains the former office-morgue and chapel Alex worked on was put up when the county opened the cemetery back in 1936. Bricks for the building came from the retired power house of the Rochester and Syracuse trolley line on Power House Road in Peru.

Onondaga's first jail-break?

Jon Anderson, the Onondaga sheriff's department historian, contributes a story that connects to the Onondaga Arsenal I wrote about Sunday:

"James Beebe, a Revolutionary War veteran is listed as our first jailer, serving under the sheriff at the county jail at Onondaga Hill...Beebe also served as custodian of the arsenal..."

"In September of 1812 he took part in the transfer of munitions from the arsenal to Oswego....during the detail, Beebe drowned in an accident in the Seneca River. He was buried in Walnut Grove Cemetery at Onondaga Hill.

"During the hour of Beebe's funeral, several debtors escaped from the county jail. Specifics are not known. Since deputies were responsible for paying the debts of debtors who might escape, Beebe's heirs reportedly settled these debts."

Rick G Street?

My e-mail pal, Robert "Tank" Steingraber, ran into an interesting Syracuse street name in his family research: Rick G. Street.

Not even the ace researcher, Pam Priest at the Onondaga Historical Association, could track it down. Tank says Rick G. Street was the 1880s name for the short thoroughfare that ran between South Geddes and Delaware Streets. That short block now is part of Grand Avenue.

Anyone ever heard of the street? Or who the heck Rick G. was?

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