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Churchville Girl Scout creates 'Giving Garden' at Northampton Senior Center

► Taylor Smith achieved her Gold Award by building a space that's beneficial for pollinators and the community

By Samantha Bambino
The Times

After two-plus years and over 125 hours of work, not to mention a brief delay caused by a certain global pandemic, 17-year-old Taylor Smith, of Churchville, feels accomplished.

The Council Rock South junior and National Honor Society member recently finished building at the Northampton Township Senior Center a scenic "Giving Garden," which serves as a safe haven for various pollinators to thrive, as well as a serene, outdoor escape for the seniors and other community members.

Smith's project earned her a coveted Gold Award, the highest and most prestigious honor one can achieve as a Girl Scout. Previously, Smith, a member of local Troop #2385, achieved the Bronze and Silver awards by helping children with reading and donating clothes to a non-profit rehabilitation center, respectively.

"Once I did my Bronze Award, I wanted to do my Silver and Gold. I didn't want



SOURCE: KELLY SMITH

Job well done: Council Rock South junior Taylor Smith, of Churchville, recently earned her Girl Scout Gold Award by building a "Giving Garden" at the Northampton Township Senior Center

to stop there," Smith told *The Times* in a recent Zoom interview.

However, this final step in her Girl Scout journey, which began in first grade, required much more time and dedication

to complete. It all started in late 2019/early 2020, when Smith and her mother Kelly, an avid gardener, began hearing about the massive decline of bees and

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other critical pollinators. Smith wanted to help and, with assistance from Kelly, decided that constructing a garden to benefit these tiny creatures and her community would be the perfect Gold Award initiative.

"We figured it would help all the pollinators, not just the bees. It would help the hummingbirds, butterflies, which were also having issues," Smith said.

It was then decided that an outside, shaded spot at the Senior Center would be the opportune location for the garden. Seniors could enjoy the thriving nature and the space would be safe from vandalism.

With the Senior Center on board and a hardworking team that encompassed her parents, relatives and friends behind her, Smith set to work on the "Giving Garden," the name of which is a nod to the fact that the plants rebloom every spring and don't require much upkeep. When the garden does need maintaining, students from Council Rock are invited to earn community service hours.

In addition to the physical aspects of building the garden, much research went into ensuring it would be an ideal place for pollinators. Smith installed a water fountain for the birds, rocks to keep the butterflies warm during the cold months and colorful flowers to attract the variety of critters.

While making the "Giving Garden," Smith even designed a website and hosted a community lecture about the conservation of these vital creatures. She also secured donations of plants, soil and other materials since fundraising is prohibited in the Gold Award process.

"It's beneficial not just for the community, but also the senior center and the pollinators. It's not just one thing. And it keeps coming back," said Smith of the garden. "It's not just going to die after the winter."

Though Smith experienced a few setbacks along the way, including the inability to visit the Senior Center when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, she was able to soar past every obstacle.

When the "Giving Garden" was officially done and approved, Smith breathed a sigh of relief.



SOURCE: KELLY SMITH

Multi-purpose: Taylor Smith's "Giving Garden" is not only a safe haven for bees and other pollinators, but also a relaxing outdoor space for seniors and other community members.

"It was a huge thing because sometimes I just felt like I was never going to finish. There was always something next," she said. "I felt very satisfied because it looked really good. I was happy. I saw the effects of it. You could see the bees and the butterflies especially, which are really pretty."

On May 22, Smith will be recognized for her Gold Award status, which she explained is the equivalent of the boys' Eagle Scout rank, something not many even attempt to reach.

"Our troop, when I was very young, had 15 or 20 girls," said Smith. "Now, there's only two or three of us who actually completed the Gold Award."

As Smith prepares for her final year of high school and all that lies beyond, she feels her time spent on the "Giving Garden" will be a great benefit in what's to come.

"It taught me to not only look out for others in the community, but leadership skills, planning and organization, which are things I love doing. I love taking charge and being a leader, but now I actually applied it and could see the outcome," Smith said. "It was my team. I had to pick trustworthy people. Sometimes it didn't always work and I had to figure out something because it was my team. I couldn't not have it work. It definitely taught me skills that I'll need not only in school and college, but also in life."

She hopes that her efforts inspire other young people to get involved.

"Even if it's not Girl Scouts, do something beneficial for your community," she said. ♦♦



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