

# Garden offers bloom of hope

## Nonprofit provides cancer patients a tranquil place

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At Judith Griffin's home in Chelmsford the sounds of shovels scraping rock could be heard from the street on a recent morning. In her backyard hope was blooming thanks to a team of volunteers planting a garden specially designed for breast cancer patients.

The project was just one in a string of 62 gardens that have been planted by the Hope in Bloom foundation.

Run by Roberta Dehman Hershon, the organization seeks to comfort women and men struggling with breast cancer by providing them with tranquil, beautiful gardens at their own homes. They also offer indoor and patio gardens to those without outdoor space.

The service is a gift to the homeowner, funded in part by donations and installed by volunteers.

The idea took root in August 2005, in the aftermath of tragedy. It was the year that Hershon's life-long friend Beverly Eisenberg passed away after her battle with breast cancer. The two had grown up together in Sharon. After years of picking through catalogs, visiting nurseries and digging in the garden, Hershon knew that her friend would want others to experience the healing powers that plants have to offer.

"I knew what a difference [the garden] made for my friend when she was going through treatment and how it brightened her spirits," she said. "Gardens have their own special medicine, and doctors don't have that."

The name of the foundation was inspired by the words of former first lady Claudia Alta "Lady Bird" Johnson, "Where flowers bloom, there is hope."

Coincidentally, the first Hope in Bloom garden was planted the day Lady Bird Johnson died, July 11, 2007.

Griffin's yard transformation began last Thursday at 9:30 a.m. The main problem facing the volunteers: The rocky New England soil. The crew, in their sage green and maroon Hope in Bloom T-shirts, shuttled rocks out of the garden and cleverly reused them to form a wall around the perimeter.

The crash of Alison Tannenbaum's shovel resounded as another rock is discovered. Eventually the ground was cleared and the red rhododendron intended for that spot was planted, just as specified in Tannenbaum's blueprint. She meets with homeowners, like Griffin, and creates a custom garden to their desires and specifications.

Tannenbaum owns Maple Glade Garden Design in Chelmsford and offers her design services to Hope in Bloom, along with her helping hands, free of charge.

"I like the dirty work," she says. "Seeing it go from paper to reality is pretty fun."

Alison's husband, Alan Tannenbaum, volunteers his time as well. He



Pat Bateson and Catherine Shreve work on the garden behind Judith Griffin's home.

serves as the muscle of the crew, hauling the heavier rocks and running the wheelbarrow across the yard.

Volunteer Marilyn Sandison of Andover was drawn to the foundation because she has several friends afflicted with breast cancer and knows several people who have died from the disease. She is a gardener herself and grows colorful hybrid daylilies. She has vowed to donate as many of them as possible to Hope in Bloom's future projects.

Griffin was selected for a garden after filling out an application at the foundation's Web site, [hopeinbloom.org](http://hopeinbloom.org). A worthy candidate, she has been battling breast cancer for 13 years. She is quick to cite the exact date of

her diagnosis: Sept. 25, 1996. She was diagnosed immediately with stage-four breast cancer and since then has seen the spectrum of treatments and side effects.

Upon returning home from a doctor's appointment, she found the Hope in Bloom crew hard at work in her new garden.

She has good days and bad. Radiation to her spine left her disabled and she had to learn to walk again. She was bald for a year and a half. She has developed lymphedema and neuropathy as a result of her medications. Currently she goes for radiation treatment every three weeks and wakes up with nausea most days.

"You have hurdles to get over, but as long as you don't go through them and you jump over them, everything's OK," she said.

Last Thursday was one of her good days. She walked smiling into the back yard, meeting Roberta Hershon for the first time and received a

maroon T-shirt. The two began discussing a last minute change to the placement of the hydrangeas.

By noon the work is nearly complete. Two whiskey barrels, donated by Agway, were filled with flowers and set to flank a wooden bench. Stott's of Chelmsford donated many of the plants, and most of them have blooms. This was a specific request from Griffin. Here she will be surrounded by bright, cheerful colors.

This garden will offer Griffin a quiet place to draw, paint and make children's toys. It is another triumph for Hope in Bloom, which Hershon hopes will expand from a Massachusetts-based foundation to a national phenomenon. It is her hope that all of those struggling with breast cancer can find peace in their own back yard.