



## Planting Hope in Arlington

by Claire Lamb

On a muggy Friday night last June, hundreds of people wearing orange t-shirts placed hand-painted rocks around the newest public garden in Arlington County, Virginia. Many of the rocks, too, were orange, as were many of the plants in bloom, plants chosen specifically to attract butterflies and other pollinators.



*Image courtesy of ARLnow.com*

Orange is the signature color of the national movement to end gun violence, and the garden is a joint venture between the Arlington chapter of [Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America](#) and Arlington County. Local Moms Demand Action volunteers proposed the garden as part of the annual National Gun Violence Awareness / Wear Orange event. The County gave the group permission to plant on a 30'x 50' plot in north Arlington, just steps away from the Court House Metro Station in a neighborhood crowded with office buildings, restaurants and retail shops.

With the help of Master Gardener Kate Donohue, the chapter chose plants that would thrive in an urban environment. Because work on the garden started fairly late in the season, Donohue suggested fast-growing annuals that might not need as much water and would bloom in time for the June event. Two dozen volunteers broke ground on the garden in May, with topsoil and mulch donated by the county. Plants came from all over: black-eyed susans, echinacea, and lantana donated by volunteers; orange cosmos from the Arlington Central Library; Mexican sunflowers from Donohue. Hand-painted rocks surround the flower beds, commemorating lives lost both near and far.

Volunteers Susannah Dryden and Kathy Perry oversee maintenance, including watering, weeding, cleaning up trash, and restoring rocks that have moved from their intended spots. "I've been surprised at how much I enjoy gardening in Hope Garden," Perry says. "I find the time spent there to be pure joy." Dryden says that "Emotionally, it is totally different" from tending her own garden, "and I am struck every single time by sadness for those lost."

Keeping the garden watered has been a challenge, as the plot lacks its own water source. Volunteers bring 10-15 gallons of water about every other day, Perry says; Dryden describes "buckling five-gallon buckets into my car and praying the bucket tops will not loosen."

The garden's urban setting makes it uniquely accessible to the broader community. "One of the nicest aspects . . . is the hustle and bustle," Perry says. "I see all sorts of people speaking all sorts of languages . . . joggers, young professionals, students, everyone. Gardening in my own backyard wouldn't bring me in contact with such a wide swath of our community." Neighbors thank volunteers when they see them working, and Perry says a toddler even helped her water once.

"I feel like it is an honor to tend this garden and nourish the hope for change," Dryden says, and she hopes "it provides comfort to those in need and brings beauty to all." Perry looks ahead to a time when the Hope Garden has done its work: at some future point, "when America's gun laws will be sensible . . . there will no longer be a need for the Moms Demand Action group. Perhaps there won't even be a need for Hope Garden. That's a future I'd like to see."

*This content originally appeared in the September 2019 issue of the Mount Vernon Sierran, the Mount Vernon Group's quarterly newsletter. Opinions presented in the article are the author's and do not necessarily represent any official Sierra Club position. For more information about the Mount Vernon Group, please visit [virginia.sierraclub.org/mvg/](http://virginia.sierraclub.org/mvg/).*