

Gear Garden Germinates from County's Industrial History

A new breed of blossoms sprouted this spring in York, PA cultivated from gears, sprockets, railroad spikes and other recycled metal items. So far, seven 10-foot-tall flowers, four 6-foot-tall flowers and a toadstool have burgeoned out of 12 sprockets or gears. Other metal parts used include a rock drill bit and electric motor housing as the toadstool's stem and cap, respectively. Railroad spikes were used to decorate the flowers, and other items were taken from a closed pottery plant including plate molds, propeller-shaped clay mixers and gears from the drying ovens, according to city council member Genevieve Ray. "Flowers are made to order, with each flower sponsored by a donor. Sponsors' contributions cover design, fabrication, installation, lighting and long-term maintenance."

And who would pass up the opportunity to buy a giant gear-flower? Ray, in charge of the sales effort, didn't expect the cash to roll right in considering the \$5,000 price tag. She was pleasantly surprised to receive six orders right off the bat. There is space in the garden for at least a dozen more flowers or two dozen smaller three-foot flowers, which will fill the garden in and are selling for \$750 each. Ray hopes more people will be drawn towards the more economical buds, especially now that the project has been such a success, which she believes is due to the fact that "It's locally grown. The gears and other artifacts are all from local industries, the artists are York County residents, and other elements of the park reflect York County industrial heritage."

York County is known as the factory tour capital of the world with doors open for visitors at more than 15 factories, including the Harley-Davidson York Vehicle Operations, Snyder's of Hanover and Hope Acres—one of the first robotic milking dairy farms in the U.S. The county was home to the York Motor Car Company, which created the Pullman automobile, a six-wheeled

vehicle produced between 1905 and 1917. Today in York, you can find the North American headquarters for Voith Siemens Hydro, the only turbine manufacturer in the United States with a hydraulic laboratory, according to its website.

Blacksmith Tom Moore and sculptor Bob Machovec are responsible for sowing the gear garden. Machovec is known for sculpting creatures from metal objects he has found, like a blue heron made of shovel blades with a pickaxe head, horseshoes and rebar. Moore began blacksmithing in 1976 after working as a high school metal shop teacher. He invited Machovec to tour an abandoned quarry site Ray had learned of where the owner was willing to give away discarded industrial relics. The idea was born while the three of them were surveying the deteriorating quarry grounds. Machovec looked down at a sprocket and had a vision, "You could make a flower out of that."

"A Gear Garden!" Ray exclaimed.

The city of York was looking to re-design the downtown Foundry Park, which is on a main road but has been obscured by a parking lot. Ray and urban designer Robert F. Brown were searching for an entrance to entice passers-by and make the park more visible. "The Gear Garden was designed to provide a highly visible entry to the reconfigured park. It sits right on the street, and its giant flowers invite pedestrians into the park," Ray says.

A ribbon-cutting event took place June 12 while a series of day and evening events was organized to introduce the new park to the public. Activities featured musicians ranging from symphonic to hip-hop genres, and a kayak slalom race was sponsored by the local canoe club.

Urban renewal design, fine arts sculpture, fashion, whatever the medium, gears continue to evoke inspiration and find new avenues for expression. Those interested in sponsoring a gear flower should contact Genevieve Ray at (717) 848-3320.



Photos courtesy of Tim Diener.