

FFWPU USA: CARP University of Bridgeport Service at Ruby and Calvin Fletcher African American History Museum

Naokimi Ushiroda
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Photos courtesy of CARP UB

"It's beautiful how service projects bring different people together," says J. Sohn, president of the [CARP](#) chapter at the University of Bridgeport. "When you have the right purpose, people will come together naturally to achieve a goal."

In the fall of 2021, Connecticut's first African American history museum [opened](#) its doors to much fanfare and local media coverage. By the spring, the owner of the Ruby and Calvin Fletcher African American History [Museum](#) - an historic 1800s house in Stratford - wanted to spruce up the property with a garden to draw more visitors. It was the perfect opportunity for local CARP members to step in.

"The museum had a budget for the garden but didn't have the manpower," says J.. Community elder Roger Wetherall, a neighbor of the museum, suggested the service project to the group. "We connected with people who knew about gardening in our community," says J., "and we partnered with [YSP](#) to do this service project together."



On April 23, the volunteers picked out vibrant perennial and annual flowers from a nearby nursery before spending the day getting their hands dirty. "We had 16 people come out to help," says J.. "It was wonderful to see everyone coming together like a family to do this project."

A sophomore at UB, J. volunteers regularly and has participated in a range of service projects over the years. In 2019, she helped build a wall with murals around an elementary school in the Philippines to protect it during the monsoon season. She also planted mango saplings while cleaning up the area.



"I've planted trees before," she says, "but I've never planted flowers, so this was really cool. We were shown how to properly do it and carefully press down the soil."

The group planted a variety of colorful flowers, including geraniums, impatiens, marigolds, and honeysuckle, as the chapter's vice president, A. Takanashi, guided them through landscaping the garden.



"I knew what to do going into it because I've worked with my dad a lot, and he's a landscaper," says A..

"This service project was a nice reminder of my roots and how hard my dad worked starting off as the groundskeeper of the Belvedere property. I called him after the project, and he was really happy."

A., a native of New York, moved to the Bridgeport community last summer. He notes CARP's service projects have been a great way to connect and bond with new people. "We really try to focus on bringing people together and creating a great atmosphere," he says. "There is a lot of student diversity at UB, with international clubs and projects, so we wanted to tap into that as CARP, which is part of our international faith movement."



For J., serving the greater community has only inspired her to do more. "When you volunteer, it's so easy to forget the amount of sweat and hard work you put in because there is a higher purpose and goal," she says. "You forget yourself and become engrossed in serving."

"We grow our spirituality by giving back," adds A.. "And when we give back, we receive even more."

The group's efforts didn't go unnoticed. A local Subway donated sandwiches to feed everyone lunch. And UB students who previously attended a 'CARP Talk' session on campus showed up to help, too.

"We had three guests, all originally from Nepal, who came out to work on the garden with us," says A.. "They were feeling inspired, and one of them even expressed interest in potentially joining our movement. We also had some high school students help out who had never picked up a shovel before."

"Everyone was so focused and motivated," says J.. "It was amazing to work together, with a lot of laughter, jokes, and friendship. There were so many different elements involved, but we all finished the work within a day."

And the garden?

"It's eye-catching," says J., with a smile. "I'm grateful we could do this to attract more people to the museum."