

A Floral Makeover

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Castle Rock, Washington, (population less than 2,000), is tucked along the shores of the Cowlitz River in Southwest Washington State, and has had its share of empty storefronts.

pictured: The 2012 version of "The Island" at the southern entrance to Castle Rock.

In the spring of 2011, Chamber of Commerce member Nancy Chennault of The Plant Station—with the help of high school student volunteers—took on the task of planting the southern entrance beds, known as "The Islands," during an annual community clean-up event. Nancy and her husband Jim sold their retail garden center six years prior and just retired from selling young plants for regional broker WeHoP (Western Horticultural Products).

"I was looking for a way to give back to our community," Nancy says. "I thought the best way to do that was to apply my career experience and do something I was passionate about at the same time."

The 2011 display of the "Island" plantings generated enthusiasm with the overall feeling being "we want more!" And a recent business district renovation sparked a desire to enhance the downtown with new landscaping, floral displays and hanging baskets. But where to start?

At the Proven Winners Road Show in the fall of 2011, Nancy asked how a town begins a flower and landscaping program. The Proven Winners partners all asked, "Have you heard of America In Bloom?" The suggestion planted an exciting idea in Nancy's head.

Further confirmation came in the form of WeHoP president Mike Cole asking if Castle Rock would be joining America In Bloom. The WeHoP trucking program was instrumental in safely transporting the thousands of plant liners from EuroAmerican Propagators that Castle Rock would need for the ambitious floral project.

The search began for vigorous, easy-to-grow plants. Nancy enlisted the help of local nurseries and growers, who graciously volunteered greenhouse space and heat. Almost 5,000 small starter plants were grown by area greenhouses and the horticultural department at Castle Rock High School. Some were destined to become components in more than 75 baskets that were hung throughout town, but most were planted during Clean-Up Day 2012.

Local garden enthusiasts, landscape professionals and casual home gardeners worked side-by-side throughout the city. Churches, service groups and businesses sent volunteers to participate in the project. Concrete planters, refurbished for the new street, were designed and planted by volunteers, as well as nearly 40 new containers purchased by businesses and service organizations as a Chamber of Commerce project.

Once again, "The Islands" welcome travelers taking the business loop off I-5 from the Portland, Oregon, area to the south. However, as visitors travel into town, it's apparent this is a community "blooming" with enthusiasm and hope. Hanging baskets overflowing with flowers combine with salmon art work to grace new lampposts. A complete renovation of the landscaping at the entrance to City Hall includes donated, repurposed, recycled and reused materials entirely constructed by volunteers.

Castle Rock, Washington, became a delightful floral stop in just one season for several reasons:

1. A dedicated team of enthusiastic volunteers and city staff that never fails to support their town's activities and events.
2. The commitment by local nurseries, greenhouses and the CRHS Horticulture Greenhouse Management class to grow the young plants.
3. The encouragement, feedback and critique of the staff, judges and volunteers at America In Bloom.
4. The amazing support from the corporate sponsors of America In Bloom and their willingness to be active participants.

Everyone worked together to create the vision to "plant the town with flowers." **GP**

the many community volunteers who worked on the America In Bloom project in Castle Rock.