

Keeping #OurAlton beautiful: A reminder of the community behind the revolution

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ALTON - With the recent news of *The Small Business Revolution* coming to Alton for season three of its web-based show, many people are thinking of how Alton will be better (or worse) after the whirlwind of TV attention.

But, Alton would not have made the top five without already being a beautiful and vibrant community on the upswing. Anyone strolling through downtown during winter months can enjoy the sights and smells of beautiful flora bursting and blooming from curbside pocket gardens installed every few blocks. Many who enjoy them never realize the work gone into their upkeep and creation.

The first Thursday of the month, starting in February, a crew of various community organizations, headed by Monica Semnacher and Emily Keener who head the Design Committee of Alton Main Street, gathers in the streets of Downtown Alton for roughly an hour and a half to tend to more than a dozen little pocket gardens.

Called the Alton Main Street Garden League, the group is an offshoot of Alton Main Street created in the wake of the Alton Beautification Committee being dissolved. Alton Main Street is assisted by the Sierra Club, PRIDE, Inc. and the Coalition for Alton Beautification in the process.



That last group is comprised of several retired Altonians who don red shirts and ride golf carts throughout the area, tending to the gardens and watering plants. While the big work is done once a month, that upkeep is done twice a week by dedicated volunteers.

Alton Main Street Executive Director Sara McGibany said the project is completely volunteer based, with the city getting involved only to collect the waste from the cleanup process. The effort is completely grassroots.

When asked what may change in the gardens this year, McGibany and chief landscaper Suzanne Lagomarchino said more native plants.

"We're looking to get more black-eyed Susans and cone flowers for this year," McGibany said.

Look for those pocket gardens to burst and bloom as spring sun, rains and temperatures march into the Riverbend.

