

## "Water Wizards of Fertilizer Friday" Fame

By Nancy Chennault, Castle Rock, Washington



Dateline Castle Rock, Washington. Any summer Friday morning about daybreak.

Just about the time the sun comes up you will see the cars of this dedicated band of Bloom Team volunteers begin to line up at Old Jail Park. Starting as early as 5:30, these "Water Wizards," as they are affectionately called, fill tubs and tanks with water and plant food. This has been happening most summer Fridays since 2012, when the Castle Rock Blooms Business Sponsored Planter (BSP) program began.

Castle Rock Blooms BSP was initiated after the main downtown Cowlitz Street renovation. New streets generated enthusiasm by the local business community and the city for a coordinated floral planter program that coincided with Castle Rock's first year of participation in the America in Bloom program. What began with 20 planters, placed and planted by volunteers, has blossomed into a city-wide program that has spread.



To provide some perspective to this growing program, in 2018 the Bloom Team planted 123 BSP planters, plus 20 more donated to City Hall, Visitor Information Center, Post Office, Senior Center, etc. and 35 city streetscape planters.

Bloom Team volunteers takes care of the donated planters and the city will water and fertilize the city planters one day a week when they feed the hanging baskets. If the city planters needed more attention, they were watered by the Bloom Team.

Businesses are given instructions and a jug of Nature's Source Plant Food, purchased with their sponsorship dollars. Nature's Source is our nutritional program

throughout our Blooms production and maintenance growing regimen because it is natural, doesn't leave chemical salts on the new sidewalks, and most importantly it WORKS! Businesses were asked to maintain their planters and feed them at least once a week. We assured them that the Bloom Team would do some 'wellness checks' and be there for support during extremely hot weather, especially weekends and when businesses were closed or on vacation.



Even in the earliest years, it was obvious that there needed to be a coordinated way for these investments in beautification to be maintained on a consistent basis. The first hot days of the first summer was a wake-up call for volunteers. Wellness checks revealed that not all watering practices were created equal. We provided watering cans for businesses that were using a latte cup to dump water in the middle of their planter. They would often express dismay when the plants did not thrive. We provided watering tips to encourage and teach. Some businesses did rise to the occasion and became successful "planter parents." But when some businesses still had Nature's Source left over at the end of the season we knew it was time to mobilize.



"Fertilizer Friday" was born of necessity and the dedicated volunteers are the "Water Wizards." This is a group of Bloom Teamers who don't mind the early hour when it is a peaceful, quiet time to navigate downtown streets. Some have joined because it is their window of time that they can give back. There are Water Wizards that don't necessarily appreciate the daybreak hour, but they embrace the



camaraderie of this reliable group of volunteers. New members participate each year. Some have stepped back as life happens; some have instead taken on the responsibility of an adopted garden space. However, the nucleus of the Water Wizards has stayed intact. Grandchildren, spouses, and visiting children and friends from out of town are often drafted to help out when needed.

The Water Wizards of Fertilizer Friday work in teams to efficiently check moisture and to water and fertilize when needed the 178 planters by zone. These volunteers work their magic and can complete their rounds in about 60-90 minutes and be home for breakfast by 8 AM.



The businesses appreciate the consistency because they know the Water Wizards will be there each Friday morning to make sure their planters make it through a hot, dry weekend. Special attention and extra water may be needed for holiday weekends and the Bloom Team is notified when a business' regular watering person is on vacation.

As with any volunteer program, it is the dedication of the people involved that is at the very core of the success, recruitment, and retention of the remarkable "Water Wizards of Fertilizer Friday" Fame. These community volunteers don't mind the early hour nor hauling tubs of water in the back of their SUV. Some even choose to install a tank with a pump in their new Subaru!

The heart of the program is the warm heart of the volunteers who appreciate the beauty of flowers. Water Wizards understand what these planters mean to the businesses of Castle Rock. We have become friends. We have fun. "Water Wizards" Rock!

