

SUMMER 2020

# Nashoba Valley

LIVING

## Tanks, Wings and Wheels

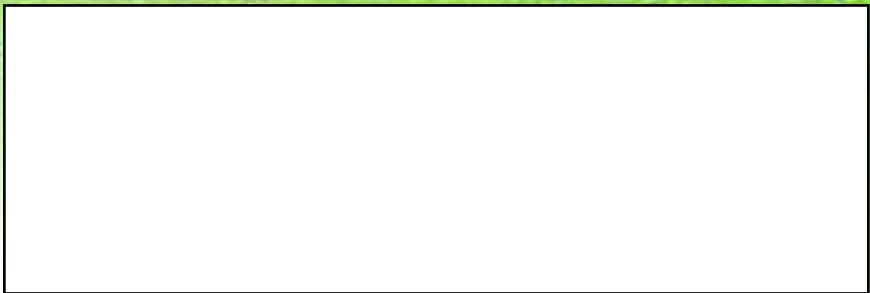
*The Collings Foundation  
and The American Heritage Museum*

## Virginia Thurston's Healing Garden

*People Come Before Pills*

## School Kids Learn with Legos

*Fun with STEM Projects*



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**Cover Photo by David Watts**

*Collings Foundation - 2009 Race of the Century-Rob Collings, piloting the 1909 Bleriot Type XI, and Kelsey Bjornson, on her horse, Comet, race for the finish line.*

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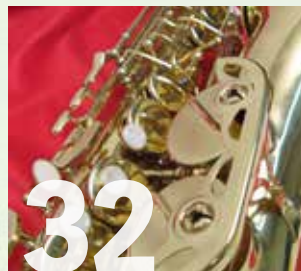
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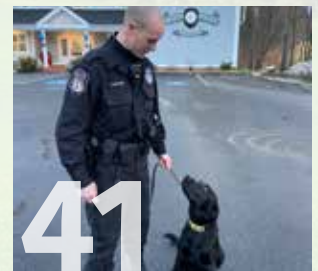
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The NASHOBA VALLEY. One of the many Native American names that dot the New England landscape, a reminder of the area's past, rich history. For many years, it was quiet and thinly populated, with large areas of farm land. But the creation of Route 128 began the urban spread, and the later building of Route 495 cemented it. The area now houses a large population with attendant residences and businesses as well as national corporations, and it has attracted recreation areas and entertainment centers as well.

In early Colonial times, the only towns within the Nashoba Valley were Bolton, Dunstable, Groton, Harvard, Stow and Townsend. But, in the 18th Century, Acton was separated from Concord; Ayer, Fort Devens, Pepperell and Shirley were cut out of Groton; Westford was divided from Chelmsford. Today the Nashoba Valley and its 13 towns have so much to offer, and we hope this magazine will give you a taste of the rich diversity and opportunity of our valley. *Enjoy!*

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# People, Not Pills, come first at the HEALING GARDEN

by Anne O'Connor

**HARVARD** -- Driving into the center of Harvard, the landscape eases from urban to small town. Keep going, down a road with no state number, and you have arrived in the country.

A turn off that road into a curving dirt driveway brings you to another place entirely: The Virginia Thurston Healing Garden Cancer Support Center. The 20-year-old community welcomes people with cancer with open arms.

“They can come here and just let it go,” said Executive Director Meg Koch. “Here you are minus the stress.” The non-hospital setting and therapies allow clients to be free to process their anger, their disappointment. It is place free from the pills and standard medical treatments that patients continue receive at a hospital.

The building, a renovated and expanded cottage donated by William Thurston after his wife Ginny died from cancer, sits in a weave of woodland paths. Artwork dots the landscape.

Each room has windows pulling the healing power of nature inside. The soothing sights are only one benefit of

the openness. In the summer, when classes meet outside, students might hear the brook or even neighboring horses snorting in rhythm to the movements, Koch said.

The Healing Garden offers about 50 percent of its services at no charge, thanks to the assistance of individuals, corporations and foundations. An initial free meeting with an oncology-certified social worker allows the patient to explore their goals of care in the physical, social, emotional and spiritual spheres.

Reaching that goal might require something as basic as help finding housing, or attending one of the free therapist-facilitated therapeutic groups. Perhaps the patient needs a touch therapy like massage. The Healing Garden offers a sliding scale. Koch laughed when she said none of the 35 therapists working at the center are there to get rich.

Even with the open-hearted generosity of the donors and therapists, patients can feel a reluctance to access free care, she said. Often that changes when the social worker tells them, “We believe this will enhance your health and well-being.”



**Face and path**

*Artwork and nature, with paths leading through gardens, enhance the well-being of people with cancer seeking help at the Virginia Thurston Healing Garden Cancer Support Center.*

**Chrystal**

*A giant crystal, dropped off in the middle of the night by an unknown donor, adds its energy to the front garden at The Virginia Thurston Healing Garden Cancer Support Center.*



**Therapy Room**

*Ensuring that nature was available to all in the building at the Virginia Thurston Healing Garden Cancer Support Center, the architect put windows in every room. The natural sights and sounds of the bucolic property are part of the renovated cottage donated by William Thurston after his wife Ginny died from cancer.*

The garden began as a breast cancer center and expanded its clientele in 2012. About 80 percent of the clients are women. Men are still in a phase of changing when it comes to the therapies offered at the Healing Garden, said Brianne Carter, the co-director of integrative care and a licensed social worker. “It takes a long time to feel this stuff isn’t a luxury.”

Scientists are proving the value of such integrative therapies. Running a standard, double-blind randomized study is hard, said Koch, a former oncology researcher. Even so, there is a tremendous amount of work examining therapies like those The Healing Garden offers. Think tanks, such as The Benson Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital, study how the mind and the body influence each other.

“This is a thing they should be paying attention to,” Koch said of the therapies which empower patients. The belief that someone can take a pill to cure a health problem is not a good thing.

The women and men at the Healing Garden help each other, Koch said. One person will see someone who has gone past the fear, the anger, the sadness and the sense of loss. “Maybe I can get where she is,” the patient thinks. And, with the help of others, she can.



*Executive Director Meg Koch, right, and Co-Director Brianne Carter are just two of the over 35 staff members and therapists who put the person first during a cancer journey. Nature and artwork offer their healing energies to all at the Virginia Thurston Healing Garden Cancer Support Center.*

Patient artwork, created as part of the therapy, is an integral part of the center. In January, one of the first pieces visible when entering was a bottom-heavy gourd, an open zipper surrounding an incision. A finger-poke revealed a hollow interior. Breast cancer survivor Mary M. created “All is revealed after coming undone.” The empty husk speaks for itself.