

THE EMERALD NECKLACE CONSERVANCY CELEBRATES VOLUNTEERS DEDICATED TO HELP CARE FOR AND CHAMPION OUR PARKS

Boston, MA March 12, 2026 — The Emerald Necklace parks continue to thrive thanks to the passion, dedication, and generosity of the countless volunteers who help care for and champion these treasured green spaces year-round. On Tuesday, March 10, the [Emerald Necklace Conservancy](#) welcomed community members to the historic James Michael Curley House for a special celebration titled **“Growing Together: A Celebration of Volunteers.”**

Guests gathered for a joyful morning of coffee, pastries, and appreciation, honoring the many individuals and groups who contributed their time and energy to support the Emerald Necklace over the past year. The event brought together long-time volunteers and first-time helpers alike, creating an atmosphere of gratitude, connection, and shared pride in the parks.

During the celebration, the Conservancy recognized outstanding volunteers with a series of special awards highlighting different forms of service and impact. These included the **“Evergreen Award,”** honoring long-standing volunteer commitment; the **“Seedling Award,”** recognizing rising volunteer stars; and the **“Four Seasons Award,”** celebrating those who contribute their time and care throughout the year.

Additional recognitions included the **“Park Steward,”** **“Community Canopy,”** **“Park Advisor Impact,”** and **“Parks Champion”** Awards, each acknowledging exceptional contributions that help strengthen the parks and the community that surrounds them.

“Over the years, volunteers have supported our parks in countless ways. But what makes this community special is not just the work our volunteers do — it’s the spirit they bring to it,” said **Karen Mauney-Brodek, President of the Emerald Necklace Conservancy.** “They care deeply about these parks and about each other, and that sense of shared responsibility is what allows the Emerald Necklace to remain vibrant and welcoming for everyone — a place where people can gather, reflect, play, and feel connected to nature and to one another.”

Each award reflects a different kind of contribution, but all of them speak to the same values: stewardship, community, and care for our shared spaces.

The Four Seasons Award

This is presented in recognition of exceptional, year-round commitment to the stewardship and preservation of the parks. It celebrates volunteers whose unwavering service across all seasons ensures that our green spaces remain vibrant, welcoming, and well cared for throughout the year. This year, it was presented to **Sarah Freeman** and **Gerry Wright.**

Sarah Freeman has dedicated years of her time to stewarding the parks, consistently keeping a watchful eye on the Emerald Necklace. She is a Lifetime Member of the Conservancy’s Board of Directors, and widely known as one of the city’s most dedicated park advocates.

Whether it's broken fences or lighting issues — particularly along the Arborway Parkway — she helps ensure these spaces remain safe, cared for, and welcoming for everyone. She's always looking for ways to bring people together, build partnerships, and strengthen the parks we all love.

Gerry Wright is something of our very own Frederick Law Olmsted in the flesh — a passionate advocate for parks, history, and community. Gerry is a founding member of the Emerald Necklace Conservancy Board. He also helped bring national attention to Olmsted 200 and played an important role in the conversations that helped shape the Olmsted Network. Through Community Care Boston, he supports vital community organizations throughout District 6, and through Friends of Jamaica Pond, he helps protect and celebrate one of Boston's most treasured natural spaces.

The Seedling Award

This award celebrates a new volunteer who has quickly taken root and made a meaningful impact. It recognizes someone who has already demonstrated exceptional promise through their enthusiasm, work ethic, and eagerness to serve — the kind of vibrant new growth that strengthens and enriches our mission. This year's Seedling Award was presented to one of our volunteers (name withheld) who began volunteering with us halfway through the 2025 Tuesday with Roses season and ended up participating seven times that season. With the exceptionally hot summer in Boston, that was no small feat, helping make the season the success that it was.

The Community Canopy

The Community Canopy recognizes a group demonstrating the most significant collective contribute on to our parks. This year's award goes to **RWA Wealth Partners**, with special recognition to Michelle Knight.

RWA Wealth Partners has been one of the most consistent volunteer groups in recent years' thanks in no small part to Michelle's leadership. Their team have volunteered every year since 2022, tackling everything from invasive plant removal to raking leaves to pruning roses.

The Park Steward Award

The Park Steward Award is presented to the volunteer group whose dedication is reflected in their outstanding participation across the highest number of events in a single year. This year, the team is recognizing the **Northeastern University Community Volunteers Program**.

The Northeastern Community Volunteers Program is a semester-long weekly service initiative connecting students with Boston non-profits. This is the Conservancy's second year hosting a CVP cohort where each week the students take time away from their studies, sports, jobs, and families to give back to the Necklace.

The Evergreen Award

The Evergreen Award recognized many years of steadfast, reliable volunteer service. This year, the Conservancy recognizes **Karin Weaver** and **JoAnn Robinson**.

Karin Weaver is a near-constant presence at volunteer events and an invaluable source of knowledge about the parks. Whether she's pulling the toughest invasive plants, venturing off

the beaten path, or finding the most hidden pieces of trash, Karin's dedication helps make the Emerald Necklace healthier and more beautiful.

For the past decade, **JoAnn Robinson** has served as Chair of our Park Advisors — a committee that plays a critical liaison role between the Conservancy and communities along the Emerald Necklace. During this time, JoAnn has also helped lead numerous initiatives. Her expertise in landscape history and restoration has helped guide projects throughout the Necklace — from work along the Muddy River to restoration efforts like the Evans Way Bridge. Most importantly, JoAnn has worked tirelessly to ensure that community voices remain part of the conversation around how these parks evolve and grow.

The Parks Champion Award

This award recognizes individuals whose advocacy and leadership have helped advance the protection and long-term vitality of our parks. This year's award goes to the **Franklin Park Defenders**, with special recognition to **Melissa Hamel** and **Pamela Jones**.

Pam Jones, a Mattapan resident and member of the Greater Mattapan Neighborhood Council, has been deeply involved in advocacy efforts around Franklin Park and the Emerald Necklace. She has helped organize and lead important community conversations and continues to work tirelessly to protect her neighborhood and the park she loves.

Melissa Hamel, a long-time Jamaica Plain resident, activist, artist, and community leader, plays a key role with CORES, the Coalition for Region-wide Services Beyond Franklin Park. Through her organizing and advocacy, she brings together community park groups and works to ensure every voice is heard.

The Emerald Necklace Conservancy extends its heartfelt thanks to all volunteers who help steward the parks and ensure the Emerald Necklace remains a cherished resource for the Boston community.

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About Emerald Necklace Conservancy

The Emerald Necklace Conservancy is a non-profit organization founded in 1997 to steward and champion the Emerald Necklace, Boston's largest park system. The Conservancy protects, restores, helps maintain and promotes the Emerald Necklace's seven distinct parks designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, and comprises 1,100 acres of meadows, woodlands and paths. In collaboration with its public partners, the Conservancy provides maintenance of the parks and capital restoration projects, free cultural events, visitor services and environmental education. The parks serve as a respite from the city, a valuable commuting connector and a community convener for more than one million residents and tourists each year, and have taken on a special significance over the past year as a safe and socially distanced destination for local residents and regional visitors. www.emeraldnecklace.org