



Merrymeeting Board (ME) Enhances New Library with Welcoming Outdoor Space – February 2015

Richmond, Maine is an idyllic New England village -- but its public library was in a sorry state of disrepair. So the town rebuilt it, and when the 3,000-square-foot facility was completed last fall, the local 213-member Merrymeeting Board of REALTORS® stepped forward with a Placemaking Grant from the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®. The Isaac F. Umberhine Public Library is now enhanced with an attractive new Reading Garden, sure to provide many 'merry meetings' and hours of enjoyment for years to come, right in the center of town.

Patti Lawton, a resident of Richmond and a REALTOR® member of the Merrymeeting Board, tells how the Reading Garden came about: "A thriving community needs a gathering place at its heart, and we knew that the library could serve that purpose." Lawton is also a member of the Richmond Comprehensive Planning Committee, which has had a Downtown Revitalization Plan in place for several years. "Richmond is becoming a more walkable town," she explains, "and the library's location within easy distance of the primary school, the middle school, and the high school gives it great value." So, the decision was made to tear down the old library, relocate the facility to a temporary storefront venue, and rebuild on the original location. The town had about \$250,000 for the construction, which was not going to be enough; fortunately, the project had great community support. Local architects, plumbers, electricians, and other contractors donated their time and skill. "One local couple even built the circulation desk!" notes Lawton.

Because there is no other community center in the town, a small room in the new library is dedicated for public use and meetings, and it soon became clear that a welcoming outdoor space could add significantly to the community gathering place. That's where the REALTORS® came in. Lawton has extensive experience on a number of NAR committees, but it was her recent participation on the Smart Growth Advisory Board that made her aware of the Placemaking 'micro-grants' available from the REALTOR® Party. On behalf of the Merrymeeting Board of REALTORS®, which donated \$500 of its own funds for the project, she applied for and received \$2,200 to create the Reading Garden.

"It was not at all daunting," says Lawton, "In fact, it was absolutely easy. I encourage any local association with a project in mind to give it a try." The funds were used to create a large stone patio with a stepping-stone pathway, a sturdy bench, and shrubbery to anchor the garden. An additional grant from the Lowe's Community Foundation helped to cover the cost of the pavers, and installation labor was donated by a local landscaping company. Residents of Richmond were delighted, and began using the Reading Garden right away, for reading, a children's story hour, and other activities. Come spring, hundreds of perennials that townspeople have donated from their own gardens will be transplanted to complete the setting. "The REALTOR® community will be hands-on involved in the spring planting," promises Lawton. "The membership has been very excited about this," she says, noting that both the local board and NAR have gotten some nice press in the town newsletter.



In fact, the board is already looking for ways to use Placemaking Grants to help other towns that it serves in southern Maine. "We're considering a 'parklet' in a neighboring town," reveals Lawton, "for people, instead of cars!"

To learn more about how the REALTORS® of Merrymeeting, Maine are actively making places to enhance their communities, contact local board member Patti Lawton at 207.729.2820.

Before the Merrymeeting Board got involved, there was only the new library...



The Isaac F. Umberhine Public Library is now enhanced with an attractive new Reading Garden

