

## **Industrial Bloom**

Project Proposal by Kathryn Yeaton

"Flowers... are a proud assertion that a ray of beauty outvalues all the utilities of the world." - Ralph Waldo Emerson

The American people have a strong appreciation for flowers. They are purchased to commemorate the most significant milestones in our lives, totaling to an astounding \$6.2 billion dollars per year spent on cut flowers in the United States annually. We buy more flowers in a year than we do Big Macs. We also enjoy visiting gardens just to look at flowers. In fact, garden tourism is the fastest-growing segment of today's tourism industry; more individuals visit gardens in the United States than Disney World and Disneyland combined! These industries are inextricably linked to the environment and provide a powerful platform for environmental awareness and activism.

One Rhode Island non-profit is harnessing the power of flowers to transform their local environment for the better. What Cheer Flower Farm operates in an abandoned factory complex on the south side of Providence's blighted Olneyville neighborhood. Spanning 2.7 acres, the urban site was predominantly covered in pavement, decaying structures, and contaminants left behind from its former life as a knife factory. The farm is undergoing the massive task of removing all the derelict buildings, making way for their mission to grow flowers and donate them to those in need of a little joy. Last year alone they donated over 100,000 flower stems to local shelters, hospitals, and food pantries.

As a URI Master Gardener, I had the privilege of touring the farm in 2022. During my visit, I was captivated by the eerily beautiful sight of an island of flowers amidst a sea of abandoned factory buildings. I was compelled to photograph the transformation of the site using color images to accentuate the contemporary nature of this solution to a historical problem. I am using a mix of documentary images and composite images to highlight the juxtaposition between nature vs. industry and how the site is evolving over time. Through my photographs, I intend to showcase the impact that flowers have on this once-industrial location and the surrounding neighborhood. Ultimately, the images should inspire viewers to consider the potential for nature to rejuvenate other polluted or abandoned areas.

Looking ahead, I plan to photograph the farm as it expands flower production to 300,000 stems per year, establish a community flower garden, and launch a floristry job training center. Lofty goals considering an employee recently told me that "broken glass is what we grow the most around here."

