

Lucia's Butterfly Garden project helps winged friends

Port Chester Middle School eighth-grader Lucia Giordano has been busy with remote learning this year but was able to visit her school in person during a special day.

She never set foot in her school building, but she did visit the Giving Garden located on campus. While there, she presented information on a special project—she has been involved in for two years — her butterfly garden.

Butterflies, and their plight, first came to her attention several years ago when she heard a presentation at the local library. The speaker discussed how butterflies were an endangered species, particularly Monarch butterflies.

“He said it was likely you will not see one Monarch butterfly in your life,” Lucia said.

That shocking statement made a huge impact on her. She convinced her parents to plant a butterfly garden at their home. The garden includes specific plants that attract butterflies and gives them a safe place to feed and lay their eggs.

“It became a family project,” Lucia’s father, Sam Giordano, said.

When Lucia was introduced to the Giving Garden at the middle school, she became an active volunteer, helping teacher Allison Silverman care for the space.

She convinced Ms. Silverman to use a small portion of the garden as a butterfly garden. Not only would it help increase the butterfly population, but it would attract other pollinator species to help with the vegetable plants. It would also be the perfect project for her Girl

Scout Silver Award, an honor reserved for scouts in sixth, seventh or eighth grade.

Lucia is a member of Port Chester Girl Scout Troop 2601. In order to receive her award, she had to plan, develop a budget, find a mentor and document every step she took to make the garden a reality. The final step to complete her project was to host a presentation about her work, which she did on Sept. 11.

“We have a bunch of purple and white flowers over here, that is the butterfly bush, that is a nectar source,” Lucia told the small, masked group that gathered during her presentation. “All of these over here, these are all the milkweed, this is what the Monarch lay their eggs on.”

Butterfly bushes, milkweed, echinacea and sedum are some of the plants in the butterfly garden, Lucia said.

She explained how aphids can be problematic and how she made a spray to kill them and save the plants.

Lucia visited the garden at least once a week throughout the summer to weed the garden bed and water the plants. She also checked for any butterfly eggs.

She shared with guests each stage of a Monarch butterfly’s life — from an egg to a tiny caterpillar to the larger, colorful orange, white and black caterpillar, to a chrysalis. She had examples of each stage in a group of containers that guests could look at.

Lucia said she regularly inspected the plants to look for the miniscule eggs, a painstaking process as the underside of each leaf needed to be checked. She collected and carefully placed them in a container where they were safe from predators and able to hatch,

which can take three or four days. During the “teenager” stage, Lucia said, they eat a ton of milkweed, which she had to gather for them. Once they begin to form a chrysalis, it can take about a week for them to hatch as a butterfly.

“We’ve released 12 Monarch butterflies out of this garden,” Lucia said.

“Wow, you are amazing,” commented one guest after Lucia shared her project.

As the Giving Garden has grown, Ms. Silverman developed an interest in incorporating a pollinator garden to benefit the vegetable plants and fruit trees that are there.

“I knew the importance of it,” she said, adding that the Giving Garden grew more than 1,000 pounds of food for the community this year.

When Lucia approached her about adding the butterfly garden to the space, Ms. Silverman decided it would be the perfect thing for her former sixth-grade student to oversee.

“When she first asked me to put the butterfly garden here, I was like sure,” Ms. Silverman said, admitting that she is a bit afraid of butterflies. She has gotten used to having the fluttering guests in the Giving Garden.