

## GOOD-NEWS

# Dirty hands, caring hearts: Community rolls up sleeves on United Way's Day of Action

*Community rolls up sleeves around region on United Way's Day of Action*



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WORCESTER — Overlooking Polar Park, bright and early, community members gathered on the morning of Friday, Sept. 12, for United Way's Day of Action to share breakfast before heading out across Central Massachusetts for various volunteer projects.

People shared coffee and conversation about their plans for "the region's largest volunteer event."

Tim Garvin, president and CEO of United Way of Central Massachusetts, said the 2025 Day of Action was the 32nd annual event and that over 700 people signed up to work on 40 service projects.

Garvin emphasized the importance of community, saying, "These last few days have been really hard, and it doesn't matter what your political persuasion is, and I really mean that. There was a stabbing that people watched of a Ukrainian immigrant, there was another school shooting, there was a possible shooting at UMass Boston, there was a possible shooting in Annapolis at the Naval Academy and there was a political assassination. The last few days have been really hard. Today we take community back. We say we are here to help, we are here to heal, and we are giving hope to people in need."

One of those projects was volunteering for the New England Botanic Gardens at Tower Hill in Boylston.

Dawn Davies, formal gardens manager, said there are 14 full-time horticulturists on the site, which is just shy of 200 acres, as well as part-time and seasonal employees.

The botanic gardens rely on volunteers to help maintain the property.

Volunteer and Intern Coordinator Perry Ellis said that this year 136 people volunteered and put in over 4,000 hours of work into various projects.

The goal during Day of Action was to remove various types of mint from the vegetable garden.

Davies grew multiple varieties of mint, including chocolate mint, pineapple mint, spearmint and more, in the space to act as a ground cover that would stop weeds from growing. However, the mint, which Davies said is an aggressive grower, became too much recently, leading to the need to remove it from the garden.

One of the nonprofit's regular volunteer groups went out into the garden earlier in the day to cut down the overgrowth, and then those volunteering with United Way uprooted the rest of the plant.

On site there to help remove mint were employees from Imperial Distributors to volunteer as a part of Day of Action.

Prepared for the day with gardening gloves in hand, the group shared jokes about finding worms, snakes and spiders as they dug around in the dirt.

Hannah Grenier, one of the volunteers, said she grew up on a small farm in Maine and learned a lot about gardening, also noting that tending to plants used to be a chore for her but was now more enjoyable.

She pointed out heirloom tomatoes in a nearby gardening bed and noted how she could tell what type of mint she was digging based on the smell, at one point coming

across one she thought smelled like citrus.

Davies said with the mint out of the vegetable garden she plans to plant thyme in its place, which will serve the same purpose as the mint but will not be as aggressive a grower.

Other projects that took place during Day of Action included playground cleanups, volunteering at food pantries and priming for a mural YWCA is working on, among many other projects.

Volunteers across the region came back together at Polar Park in the afternoon for a community cookout to celebrate the hard work.