

## Long Island Volunteer Hall of Fame

### Archive Project

#### *Inception to Induction*

### Garden City Bird Sanctuary

#### **“Making Sump-thing Happen!”**

**Year of Founding:** 1995

**Issues Addressed:** Environmental issues, Sump clean-up, Nature preserve

**Induction Category & Year:** Environmental, 2008

**Founder:** Robert Alvey

**Personal Quote from Founder:** “Someone suggested a bird sanctuary and I said alright that’s easy...well, I didn’t know how hard that was going to be.”

**History:** The Garden City Bird Sanctuary is a nine-acre community nature preserve that is located at storm basin #232 in Garden City, NY. Storm basins or sumps are essential to every city in order to keep storm water out of the streets, and into wells that are discretely placed within communities. The Garden City Bird Sanctuary was created in 1995 by the eager actions of one person, Robert Alvey. Robert Alvey worked for the Village Environmental Board for Garden City. The board was getting complaints about children getting into the sump and throwing parties. The chain link fence that surrounded the sump made it particularly easy for these children to do so. Not too long after, people started to realize what was going on and the problem grew. This sump, in particular, is right next to a railroad track and right before 1995 the Long Island Railroad took down the fence around the sump in order to work on the rails. As Robert Alvey said, “Everybody started to come in and I started to get pictures of children crossing the tracks.” The last straw in the controversy, revolving around this sump, was when a fight broke out between two groups of young adults from different high schools and some of the students had to be sent to a nearby hospital.

Mr. Alvey realized that neither the county nor the village was going to do anything, so he took matters into his own hands. He realized he was not going to be able to catch the youth so he had to do something that would protect the land. Mr. Alvey started making phone calls and decided that he and a group of others were going to adopt the land. When asked what he was going to do with it, someone suggested a bird sanctuary, and as Robert Alvey said, “Well, I didn’t know how hard that was going to be.” The little group that he started went back to the site every week, to clean up, and renovate the storm basin. The group started to grow and schools started to get involved along with Audubon, another bird sanctuary. With the involvement with the bird sanctuary, Robert Alvey took a course at Nassau Community College because as he said, “I

needed to learn what a bird was first.” Right after he did this in 1998, the county shut down Mr. Alvey’s operation because the Audubon group had a permit for the land and Mr. Alvey’s work was getting too big. Nevertheless, he did not want to stop so he formed a board of directors, got all his paperwork in order, took out an insurance plan, and became a non-profit organization. As Mr. Alvey said, “Now the Audubon didn’t have the permit anymore, but we did.”

**Agency Mission:** The Garden City Bird sanctuary was formed to protect the local green space in the community, and to promote local volunteering and community service by having a place that people could clean up and partake in its activities. Also, its purpose is to protect local wildlife, birds in particular, and have a place that people and animals can both go and enjoy the outdoors.

**Population Served:** The Garden City Bird Sanctuary helps the local population by giving them a space to volunteer and get involved in the community. It helps a many local high schools such as Chaminade, Kellenberg, and Sacred Heart have a place to send their students to give a hand in volunteer work. Groups from the local colleges such as Nassau, Adelphi, and Hofstra also come and help out around the site. Finally, the sanctuary gives a place for the local birds to come a rest within the nine acres of gardens and bird baths.

**Scope of Activities:** The Garden City Bird Sanctuary is place where the local community can get together and partake in activities such as planting trees, building and maintaining gardens, cleaning garbage out of the wells, filling the bird feeds, maintaining the premises. It gives people community service hours and recognition for whatever requirements they need to fulfill.

**Volunteer Involvement:** The Garden City Bird Sanctuary can have up to a couple hundred volunteers at one time. Robert Alvey holds events to gather people to volunteer. For example, in the past, if you volunteered for a certain number of hours, you would get a free pass to Disney World, or he would give away coupons and things of that nature. The sanctuary caters to local people who need volunteer hours for occasions such as their confirmation, school, community service, and issues dealing with court. Some individuals even do it for local recognition in the Garden City patch. There are no paid employees in the agency but they do have a group of about 50–70 regulars who will come back about once or twice a month to do basic chores.

**Affiliate Organizations:** The Garden City Bird sanctuary works with different organizations and establishments that are in the community. They work with the local high schools such as Chaminade, Kellenberg, Sacred Heart, and Garden City High School. Furthermore they work with the local colleges such as Nassau Community, Adelphi and Hofstra University. They even work with some local law firms who send their employees to the site to help out with the chores that Mr. Alvey assigns. Along with the local community work the sanctuary does, they are also affiliated with, receive, and give help, to and from other environmental agencies such as the Floral Park Conservation Society and the new Hofstra bird sanctuary that was just built.

**Funding Sources:** The Garden City Bird Sanctuary receives their funding through a couple of different sources. Their primary source of funding is holding their own fundraisers. On April 9, 2011, they held a fundraiser where they collected about \$2,000 in donations. They have also received government grants in the past, but with the recent decline in the economy, they have

had to rely more on the fundraisers to collect funds. Additionally, they receive many donations, and though most of the time it is old gardening equipment such as shovels and buckets, sometimes they receive bigger donations. For example, this past weekend they received a donation of peat moss to spread around the nine acre site and have also received tractors and things of that nature in the past to help keep up the property. So if you enjoy nature, call the Bird Sanctuary and see how you can help!

**Contact Information:**

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Site is located opposite 181 Tanners Pond Road  
Nassau County Stormwater Storage Basin #232  
Garden City, New York  
(516) 326-1720  
<http://gcbirdsanctuary.org/index.html>  
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**Submitted by:**  
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