



Park Employee Spotlight:

Meet Dan Urkevich, *Park and Recreation Specialist*, Interviewed on June 4, 2026

Dan's official title does not do him justice, in my opinion. I think of him as the "Master of the Gardens" or "The Garden Maestro." I had the privilege to interview Dan when the gardens out front were almost done being planted. The plants looked so much smaller than they do now, living proof of the rapid changes that occur here during the growing season.

Dan has been working at the park since 1978, all because a friend needed a ride to work. He thought the park looked like a nice place and decided to put in an application. Dan started as a greenskeeper on the state run golf courses planting flowers around all the tee boxes. When the golf courses became privatized, he began to work on the park gardens.

Standing by the garden at the Route 9 and Avenue of the Pines entrance, Dan said, "This used to be nothing." That all changed in 2000, when the garden space as we know it today was created. Dan has been working on these gardens ever since and says his goal is make each garden better than the previous one.

How does each seasonal garden come to fruition? Walk me through the process. Do you start with a drawing?

Dan starts by making a list of plants in the fall for the following year and brings it to Sunnyside Gardens who grow the plants on the list. He looks for low maintenance, drought tolerant plants, even if he doesn't like them personally and is always thinking about plants with colors that can work with the fall display. He takes plants from other gardens within the park to fill in the fall display because the budget is low. He also grows the sunflowers from seed himself in the garden, 10% are mammoth, the rest are the multiblossom variety. He doesn't always follow the rules of design, he likes to mix up the plant heights and says, "It never turns out as good as I want it to."

What does your typical day look like?

Right now it's crazy with the short season for planting in all the locations. He does the flag pole, Peerless and Victoria Pools, in addition to the main entrance. Also, the gardens on the way to, and the pots outside, the Park office. Days are spent planting, watering and maintaining, and repairing the never ending animal damage on the north side main entrance garden. September

is the slowest month but then it ramps up for the fall display. The main entrance gardens are not done yet as of the date of this interview.

Favorite plant/flower?

Sunflowers, especially the ones with the big heads that flop over. "Have to think of the birds too."

Most dreaded task?

Weeding in the high heat and humidity. It can feel like a jungle sometimes in the tall plants and you wouldn't even know a person was in there. Also, repairing animal damage, last year was a bad year for rabbit damage.

Favorite task?

Watering, because it's easy, planting and seeing his vision come to life, also meeting nice people who stop to view the gardens.

Were you always interested in gardening?

Yes, he always had a garden at home even when he rented

What advice would you give someone just starting in a job like this or a new employee at the park?

The job is all about prep and planning, and you must have a good soil mix. It's a lot of hard work, some days you just have to push through because you want it to look good.

What is your favorite way to unwind after a day working in the park?

Kayak fishing for small mouth bass, especially with his son, biking, taking a walk, and playing pickleball.

What is a hidden talent or fun fact about you that most people working at the park don't know?

He is good at basketball.

Is there one project or achievement during your time here that you are most proud of?

The Front Entrance, especially the south side, any time of year

Favorite garden or spot in the park?

In the summer, it's the "Vic Pool" because it's a beautiful garden and the building provides a beautiful backdrop. Dan likes that it is easy to work because he can reach all around it. In the fall, it's the main entrance, of course!

We have Dan to thank for the beautiful display of color, texture and interest he creates in the gardens throughout the park year after year. They may not turn out the way he wants them to but I think they are spectacular and I can't wait to see the current gardens continue to grow and what he has in store for us in the fall!

The Friends are extremely grateful to Dan for all his help in providing a temporary home for our five (5) live holiday trees in the south front garden until they were moved into the permanent location this spring.