

## >>> PORT EDWARDS EARNS MONARCH CROWN



Port Edwards, in central Wisconsin, has been recognized as a monarch-friendly community by Monarch City USA for efforts to create habitat and foster conservation.



Kathy McGrath has spent more than 17 years working on behalf of monarch butterflies including filling her living room with multiple aquariums containing insect eggs, caterpillars and milkweed leaves to feed them.

VERN BORTH

PAT MCGRATH

### RETIRED TEACHERS NET RECOGNITION FOR BUTTERFLY EFFORTS.

*Vern Borth*

Port Edwards, in central Wisconsin, has become the first spot in the United States to be designated a “Monarch Village USA.” The honor caps an effort of more than 17 years by now-retired Port Edwards schoolteachers Kathy and Pat McGrath to gather and raise caterpillars to become more than 6,000 new monarch butterflies.

It all began as a school project for Kathy’s kindergarten kids and the fourth-grade students of Beth Welniak (now Willcome) and Ann Pickett. The children became fascinated by the metamorphosis of butterfly eggs to new butterflies. And so did Kathy.

Imagine spending summer with five screen-covered aquariums at home — some on an end table in your tidy living room — each full of tiny insect eggs, caterpillars and milkweed leaves. Imagine foraging for hours in fields and woods searching for the eggs and caterpillars to foster in those aquariums, safe from spiders, stink bugs and birds.

Caterpillar hunting is “not for wimps,” said Kathy. “You have to put up with poison ivy, wood ticks, mosquitoes, flies and, of course, usually heat and humidity.”

Kathy recalled one year when she discovered both her pant legs full of wood ticks. “I just screamed.” Any ticks found are usually captured with clear tape on sheets of paper

to help remove the nuisance from the wild.

Over the years, the McGraths have encouraged friends and neighbors to grow milkweed, where monarchs lay their eggs and caterpillars munch leaves. Those folks let Kathy and Pat know when they see monarch eggs and caterpillars on the plants. Some acquaintances have even started collecting their own eggs and caterpillars to grow butterflies.

The McGraths give monarch demonstrations in central Wisconsin — in their driveway on occasion and other places upon request. In July last year they drew 350 people, ages 3 to 83, to their yard for a presentation during South Wood County’s annual garden walk.

Only one out of 100 monarch eggs survive to become butterflies in the wild. But Pat said, “We have a 90 percent survival rate” with their in-home nurturing.

In 2015, the McGraths hatched and released 990 monarchs. They put tiny round tags on 300 of the butterflies and, to date, four of those butterflies have been identified in a wooded area of Mexico. The tags are retrieved by Mexican residents who report them to Monarch Watch, an ecology program at the University of Kansas aimed at reversing a shrinking monarch population.

The McGraths’ yard is designated an official “Monarch Waystation” by Monarch Watch because the McGraths grow milkweeds and nectar sources

that feed butterflies and also provide shelter for migrating monarchs.

Monarch City USA, an organization headquartered in Washington state, has started a program for monarch-friendly communities. To be designated, a community must commit to work with its citizens and environmental groups to create butterfly habitat and foster conservation in land-use planning. The community also must investigate the creation of monarch sanctuary sites, hold a yearly butterfly festival and work with schools to promote land conservation.

In January, Kathy contacted a 79-year-old woman in Cole Camp, Missouri, who had managed to get her city named the first “Monarch City USA.”

“She’s the one that got me started” on the village designation for Port Edwards, Kathy said.

In mid-February, the Port Edwards Village Board approved the request from Kathy and Pat to seek “Monarch Village” status, and the first “Monarch Village” sign went up near the village limits on March 29.

On Aug. 12, the annual “Port Fun Fest” also will be labeled “Monarch Fest” and feature a tent where the McGraths and others will demonstrate monarch-saving efforts and provide butterfly-related activities. Kathy also may have tiny envelopes of milkweed seeds to hand out.

Since the “Monarch Village” designation, about 40 people have told Kathy they’re interested in forming a “Friends of the Monarch” group in the Port Edwards area. The message they’re sending, Kathy said: “This is so cool!”

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