

Vashon-Maury Garden Club: Passion in the Dirt

By Bruce Haulman and Terry Donnelly

Clubs and organization have always played an important role in developing Vashon-Maury Island's social network. Beginning in the 1880s as the Island was settled, churches, fraternal organizations, social groups, and community clubs all helped to provide the social glue that unified a diverse island of separate water-based communities. The first church was organized in 1884 (The Methodist Church) and the first fraternal organization was formed the same year when The Woodman of the World built their lodge at Burton (the current Masonic Hall). There have also been a number of horticultural and agricultural focused organizations on Vashon beginning with the formation of the Vashon Horticultural Society in 1892, the first in the State. But it is not until 1941 that a club focused only on gardens was formed as the Vashon-Maury Island Garden Club to bring together gardeners from all parts of the Island. Today, churches, clubs, organizations, and non-profits continue to hold us together as a community.

Since its formation, the Vashon-Maury Island Garden Club has been active in supporting gardeners and their passion for gardens through flower arranging demonstrations and contests, community beautification efforts, community garden awards, support of horticultural education, flower fairs, participation in the annual Strawberry Festival, and a variety of fun activities to enhance the fellowship among its members.

Flower arranging was such an important focus in the earlier days of the Club that in 1952, members were required to bring three flower arrangements to each meeting, with a fine of 25 cents per arrangement if they did not! The club participated in numerous regional and state flower arrangement competitions. While the club does not participate in off-island competitions today, they still have demonstrations of flower arranging at meetings and members take turns bringing in an arrangement for each of the lunch tables.

The Garden Club has always supported beautification of the Island and has used money from sales and flower shows to purchase plantings for gardens at the Food Bank, the Nike site, Vashon Town, the Vashon Library and others. The club has planted bulbs at Point Robinson, cleared brush and debris from Inspiration Point, landscaped the Island Club (now Ober Park), supported the Heron Rookery, supported purchasing the Glacier site, and cared for the gardens at the Community Care Center and the Health Center.



Paul Fitzpatrick wins \$5.00 Garden Club Prize in Garden Club Beautification Essay Contest

In 1974, the Garden Club started the annual Community Garden Awards. After a summer of garden visits, three residential gardens and one business garden are selected as winners. Photos of the gardens and their gardeners, and the garden's stories are submitted to the Beachcomber, all ending with an awards dinner celebrating the winners.

Flower Fairs and the annual Plant Sale have been an important part of the Garden Club. In 1948, the first plant sale earned \$8.65. That same year \$4.69 in donations was collected to purchase "Seeds For Peace," a program that sent seeds to a recovering post World War II Europe. Today the annual plant sale generates over \$7,000 each year to support many of the Garden Club's various activities.

Fun is an important part of the Garden Club. One member summed it up when she said: "We indulge in a lot of laughter and trading of ideas and plants." Life-long friendships have developed and flourished in this context of fun and fellowship.

Horticultural education has always been a priority for the Garden Club. This April 1962 photograph from the Beachcomber is of the award ceremony when Paul Fitzpatrick won

First Place and a prize of \$5 in the Garden Club sponsored essay contest for seventh and eighth graders on Island Beautification. Polly Helzer, from the Garden Club presented Paul the prize money. Looking on are Second Place and \$3 winner Pam Cornutt, and Third Place and \$2 winner John Montague.



Chautauqua Elementary Scholl Garden, Terry Donnelly

The Terry Donnelly photograph was taken in the Chautauqua Elementary School Garden, which has been generously supported by the Garden Club and other community volunteers. The garden functions as an outdoor classroom for Chautauqua students and is used as the basis for Chautauqua's inquiry science curriculum. Students read, write, build community, produce works of art, and do hands-on science, all within the confines of the garden. The garden was recognized with a King County Earth Hero Award. These three students; Aidan Holstrom, Shanikai Moon, and Levi Stahl, are reading on the steps of the Garden Shed, while other students are painting, weeding, watering, and planting in this magnificent example of a school garden.

The Vashon-Maury Island Garden Club has a long and distinguished history of demonstrating their passion for gardens.

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