



Myra Takasaki, Ann Kotani and Christine Gribowski, decked out in fascinators, enjoy high tea at the anniversary celebration.

Friendships in bloom

Garden Club of Kitchener-Waterloo marks six decades

BY SANDRA WALNECK
PHOTOGRAPHY • TOMASZ ADAMSKI

It seemed only fitting that the sun shone brightly as the Garden Club of Kitchener-Waterloo celebrated 60 years of fantastic floral displays and friendship. The sunlight spilled through the tall windows of Kitchener's Victoria Park Pavilion, highlighting lovely arrangements of plants and flowers. There was everything from

small succulent gardens to towering vases of cut flowers, arranged according to strict judging criteria.

At a row of tables facing the park, several women wearing fascinators enjoyed high tea. Their hats were as eye-catching as the display entitled "Off to the Races," a collection of fascinators created entirely from plant material.

Gay Anderson, president of the garden club, says there are two important aspects to the organization – floral design and horticulture – and both were featured in the show.

Flower show chair Ann Diebel explained the biennial show was arranged to allow people to view the decades of changes in floral design as they toured the room.

In a display entitled "The Way We Were," many colourful blooms were placed in a pale vase with careful focus on gradations of colour and height. Although the stems



Flower and plant arrangements were on display at Victoria Park Pavilion.



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One of the entries in the class of Miniature Design at the club's anniversary Flower Show 'Garden Party.'

were plentiful, they were not to appear crowded.

The "Bold and Beautiful" display at the back of the room reflected more recent trends. Flowers were grouped in separate blocks of colour, and the container stood out.

Diebel, 76, who maintains an expansive garden at her Kitchener home, says both the floral and horticultural aspects of the club are vital. "I have always grown my own plants," she says. "You can't design without some knowledge of horticulture."

Diebel pointed out a lovely geranium she had grown from seed. "This is the first year that it has bloomed," she said. Her passion for gardening is matched by her success in this show, and in past competitions, including the prestigious Chelsea Flower Show in England.

But the awards are just the icing on the cake. "I do this because I love it," she says. "I truly couldn't exist without the flowers and the plants and the trees."

Established in 1957 by the late Helen Dier, the club began with 12 founding members focused on artistic beautification of their homes, internally and externally.

These days, the group meets on the third Monday of each month from 1 to 3:30 p.m. from September to June. Meetings include club business and presentations on floral design or horticulture. For example, September's guest is scheduled to be a photographer from the Canada Blooms garden and flower festival.

Over the years, the club has also contrib-

uted money and countless volunteer hours to the community. For example, members have prepared small floral arrangements to be delivered to hospitals and corsages for various organizations. They have also planted several trees in the region.

An annual scholarship has been awarded to a third- or fourth-year student in the Environmental Studies program at the University of Waterloo, where the club maintains a studio for seminars and projects on the west campus.

The club also holds an annual Christmas sale. This year's Holly and Ivy event will be held in November.

One of the club's largest projects was the establishment of Betty's Garden at the KidsAbility Centre in Waterloo, named in honour of long-standing member and past president Betty Thompson. When Thompson died in 1994, her husband, Donald Stuart, made a donation to the club that members matched to create the garden.

Walking through that garden today is a delight to the senses. It is well planned, with a beautiful variety of perennial beds carefully chosen to bloom throughout the season. Benches encourage visitors to stop and smell the lavender-scented walkway.

Betty's Garden requires constant weeding, watering, planting and pruning. "We maintain the garden every Tuesday throughout the growing season," Anderson says.

The garden club encourages both new gardeners and seasoned pros to join the group.

Anderson, 70, recalls with a smile the advice she received from a friend who had encouraged her to join. " 'This is a working club,' she warned me. 'If you're coming to be social don't even bother.' "

But friendships do blossom and, despite friendly competition at the shows, they flourish.

The club has 62 members, but once had as many as 125 with a waiting list. "Our membership numbers are a sign of the times," Anderson says.

But as more people retire, she hopes they see the club as a way of keeping active and



Flower show chair Ann Diebel poses with Ruby Bennett, a garden club member since 1959.

making new friends.

Judy Hahn-Yutzi of New Hamburg is one such person. She joined in March of this year after learning about the club at a Seedy Saturday event at the Kitchener Public Library. Already a member of the Wilmot Horticulture Society, the 66-year-old was drawn to the garden club's table where Anderson displayed tulips in a striking bark container.

Hahn-Yutzi attended a meeting at Anderson's urging and says she received such a warm welcome she did not hesitate to join. "All of those friendly faces," she notes. "You just get that welcoming feeling when you walk in. They came up to me to introduce themselves."

Ruby Bennett of Waterloo, who joined the group in 1959, is the longest-standing member and has seen a lot of change.

She says things used to be much more formal. Members were never addressed by their first names, they were always Mrs. or Miss. And although men are welcomed as members, very few have joined and stayed on over the years.

Bennett isn't the active gardener she once was but stays as involved in the club as she can, including attending the anniversary show.

"I liked all of the arrangements but I prefer the more traditional ones," she says. 



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