

The Mission Hills Garden Club Presents Education, Beautification, and Fun

Barbara Strona | September 4, 2013 Presidio Sentinel



Cheryl Clark created t-shirts with a Mission Hills' personality, emphasizing gardens and community culture.

Over 14 years ago Mission Hills Garden Club had a fairly lengthy gestation period. However, once it was born, it grew by leaps and bounds. Its history begins before 1999 and continues today with a medley of traditions and changes.

In the beginning, **Fausto Palafox** posted a notice in the Mission Hills Nursery asking anyone interested in starting a local garden club to sign up. However, only **Donna Knierim**, **Cheryl Gaidmore**, and **Wendy Nash** and **Veronica Longstreth** signed the list. When **George** and **Marien Kissling** decided to create a garden walk, the few people on Fausto's list joined forces with Marien and George, and the now annual Mission Hills Garden Walk was born.

The first planning meeting took place at the nursery; subsequent meetings were held at Wendy Nash's home, **Jere McInerney** told me about the proposed club and encouraged me to attend the early meetings. Not being particularly interested in gardening, but trusting Jere's judgment since I'd known her since high school, I agreed to check it out.

By April, 1999 the original members were officers: Donna Knierim was president, Wendy Nash was vice president in charge of programs, **Sandy Rhatigan** (who has moved away) was membership chairman, and Cheryl Gaidmore was treasurer. McInerney, hospitality chair, organized volunteer for snacks; I was in charge of publicity. George and Marien had the Garden Walk which, by then, was part of the garden club. Veronica Longstreth, **Sherri Schottlaender**, and DonnaKnierim put together bi-laws from those of other garden clubs. Since many of us were working, we decided upon night meetings.

We met at the nursery for the first general meetings. We had round table discussions of what new members wanted to learn; we invited people whom we knew to speak, and Fausto filled in with educational talks from plants and planting to creating a garden pond. It was really fun to be a founding member; we took form as we grew. While we were so small, every single member pulled his or her weight.

That first year, spring of 1999 to spring of 2000, we had some interesting speakers: Pam Chapman spoke on use of color in the garden, Cynthia Drake, an arborist, took us on a walk around Mission Hills pointing out good and poor examples of tree choice, tree location, and tree pruning. Fausto spoke about fertilizer, and Pat Palowski spoke on the Grant School Gekko Garden, Butterflies, and fall planting. David Urban gave us a talk on decorating with natural foliage and Dick Streeper, rosarian, author, and speaker came to enlighten us about roses. We even went to Sandy Rhatigan's house to hear and see how John Holloway planned and executed the lighting in her garden. It was phenomenal! The club's first year finale was Pat Welsh, a Del Mar gardener and author of several garden books.

Our second year, 2000-2001, showed a growing membership with more exciting meetings. We not only had our second Garden Walk, but our program vice-president, **Barbara Schneider**, also found fabulous speakers. Jill Deming spoke on container gardening followed by a hands-on workshop led by Christi Palafox, and Fausto gave us information on various local gardens. Pam Chapman returned to give a chat on keeping a garden journal. One of that year's highlights was "Tool Man Bob," also known as Bob Denton. Sadly, he is no longer available for talks. From him we learned how important a well-made tool is as well as learning the value of having the right tool for the right job and the right fit for the person who will use it! Other topics ranged from ornamental grasses to the art of Bonsai. World famous Rene Van Rems spoke on floral arrangements to a standing room only crowd. Vince Lozaneo spoke on responsible pest control. We had the late Ron Searfoss speak on Ikebana and Pam Chapman returned to discuss "Sex in the Garden"! I see flowers quite differently since then; her talk verged on x rated!

Meanwhile, we were not only learning and growing; we were also helping the community. We began using our funds to enhance the local landscape and hardscape as well as contributing to education. The money we made on the first Garden Walk was used outside the tennis courts where a drab corner became an attractively landscaped asset. As the years passed, **Dick Disraeli** decided we needed a committee to decide what we should do with our money. **Mary Shelley** and **Don Rudesill** became champions of education programs such as the internship program at Palomar College. Even today we contribute to local schools' garden programs. The hanging baskets on Washington, Goldfinch, and Falcon are another contribution. We still allocate a portion of our budget to their maintenance. Today we have added tree plantings throughout our local parks and parking strips.

As our membership grew, so did our knowledge of running a club. Marien Kissling and **Barbara Schneider** suggested we became a non-profit organization. After many false starts, Sherri Schottlaender actually obtained our 501(c)3 status.

When we discovered that the Mission Hills Business District could not insure us, we became one of the clubs under the umbrella of the Palomar District which covers San Diego and part of Riverside County and is part of California Garden Clubs, Inc. which in turn is part of the National Garden Clubs, Inc. network. Under the guidance of **Meredith French**, the Mission Hills Garden Club's membership increased to over 250, and the club won the top state wide award for "Highest Membership Increase by a Club" for the state of California. The club was honored with a party hosted by Palomar District.

More than 14 years later, the Mission Hills Garden Club is thriving and looking for new ways to enhance our community. We need new members to broaden our horizons

Now it is time to renew your membership. If you are not a member it is time to join. For \$35 a year or \$50 for a couple in the same household, you have at least ten interesting meetings a year, many opportunities to enjoy coffee or wine in various members' gardens, special field trips (Some may require additional fees.) and a ten per cent discount at the Mission Hills Nursery. If you are not really a gardener, you can still learn, contribute to your community, and make new friends.

Our first meeting of the new fiscal year will feature Nancy Conney. She is an extremely funny and knowledgeable speaker about raptors which she rehabilitates. Come to hear her Wednesday, September 25, from 6 to 8 p.m. at the First United Church of Christ at 4070 Jackdaw. Members are free; guests pay \$10 which becomes part of the membership fee if they join that evening. Sandra Richardson will speak at October's meeting. She is with the Lakeside River Park Foundation. They have restored 100 acres to natural habitat.