

Oak Ridge Garden Club – Trish Jones' perspective

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on November 8, 2011)

This week *Historically Speaking* will feature a personal note from the Oak Ridge Garden Club's current President, Trish Jones. These last few articles have been presented with the express intent to help readers better understand this unique historical asset that is the Oak Ridge Garden Club.

It is volunteers like this that will help make the preservation of our history come alive. Flowers convey much. Effective garden arrangements make us all feel good when we visit those carefully planned and maintained gardens.

Trish says, "I have been interested in gardening since I was a child but I learned to love gardening while I was raising my mother. She had suffered a stroke and was living with us. I became a shut-in with her evenings and weekends. Gardening had been her passion in retirement and it was something for her to share with me."

"Over the next ten years, under Mom's watchful eye and guidance my cottage garden grew and so did my interest. When Mom was gone I still wanted advice and companionship in the garden. That is when I invited myself to an Oak Ridge Garden Club meeting. Even though I had not retired from my job as a stock broker/investment advisor, I began to attend the monthly meetings.

"I found I was with "My People" at the meetings. The members love flowers and are so knowledgeable and eager to share that knowledge. It quickly became apparent that this club is not just about a little gardening blended with teas, luncheons, and flower arranging.

"This group is mission driven to share and refine their knowledge of gardening. But the biggest mission is the continued maintenance and development of the Emma Spray Garden. It is the Oak Ridge Garden Club's gift to the community and a salute to the spirit of Emma Lee Spray.

The club has two master flower show judges and many of the members enjoy and excel at flower arranging. I was eager to become involved in flower arranging only to find it doesn't come easy to me. There are elements of design to master and shows to participate in.

"Fortunately, there are members with years of experience and oh, so many blue ribbons. Sara Aldridge and Barbara Mannes Schmidt have been in demand as flower arranging teachers and judges throughout District IV of the Tennessee Federation of Garden Clubs for years.

"There is a civic side to the garden club of which most people are unaware. Over the years the members have been teaching gardening to children, landscaping Habitat for Humanity houses with follow-up coaching for the owner, contributing to the TN River Gorge Land Trust and decorating the American Museum of Science and Energy for the holidays for 30 years. We practice living clean, living green and this year we have an emphasis on protecting aquatic ecosystems. We financially support Blue Star Memorials found along the interstate highway honoring service men and women.

"The annual wild flower and plant sale held in April in Jackson Square provides the club with the assets to keep up the garden and to do our civic work. The time spent in late February and March digging in our yards and the yards of friends of the garden club and then potting and pricing is time well spent.

"I don't know what the future of Emma Lee Spray Garden will be, but gardeners know about and live with change. We are well aware our membership is aging. Our two oldest members are 92 and 89. The gardening season is long and hot. It's challenging to find new members.

"At this time, we are working very hard to add to our male members. Also, if the city is successful in their bid for the Tennessee Department Of Transportation grant that will bring welcome

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improvements to Historic Jackson Square, will Emma Lee Spray Garden then be repurposed at some point?

“The club doesn’t want to stand in the way of progress but hopes the designers would find a way to preserve all or at least a part of the garden. In the mean while, we’ll be in the garden honoring all the ‘Emma Lee Spray’s’ among us and sharing our garden with the community.

“Kindest Regards,
Trish Jones
President
Oak Ridge Garden Club

The historic and consistent preservation efforts of the Oak Ridge Garden Club certainly contributed to the effective beautification of our city. We owe them a lot.



Emma Lee Spray Garden showing the historical time capsule, a sign noting the maintenance activities of the Oak Ridge Garden Club with the fountain in the background