

Enjoy special bounty of Garden Park

BY MARTY FIGLEY
SPECIAL WRITER

How does one plant a 70-acre-plus garden? Jim Hilty and Evelyn Raskin, with the help of his family, Loren, Monroe, Alon and Sandra, have been doing just that! Since 1990 they have been planning and planting this 77.7-acre parcel of land, transforming it into an unusual garden to be enjoyed by all. Now the Garden Park of Holly is ready for your visit.

So much has been done: Thousands of trees and tons of earth have been moved, mounded and graded; large boulders, weighing thousands of pounds, have been set in place; ponds, lakes and streams have been dug and innumerable plants have been set into the ground.

Last year, during the summer season, 15 weddings took place in the outdoor walled "Secret Garden," and many conferences were in the specially designed building. Wedding guests sit around the perimeter of the colorful garden, which is intersected with walkways to allow a closeup look at the plants. Statuary and water features add to the ambience of this lovely place.

Historic look

The building adjacent to this garden was designed by Hilty and Raskin and is reminiscent of Tuscany in style. The pale green stucco walls and the care

taken with details inside and out led three building inspectors to think it was an old structure.

This building contains a large conference room, library, reception hall and much more. Furnishings include a 19th century handwoven Chinese rug, English cathedral choir chairs, a 17th century tapestry and many other museum-quality antiques.

The conference room is dedicated to Frederick Hill Meserve, who saved a great number of photographic images on glass plates, many of Lincoln. These, along with hundreds of photos of Lincoln and all the generals of the Civil War, and other displays will be rotated in this room for an ongoing educational series. This is an excellent facility for off-site meetings and is equipped with audio-visual and other amenities. Paneling in the rooms came from a 19th century Ohio bank; many other architectural details have been recycled from other landmarks.

Dinners and lunches are catered by the Holly Hotel.

"Dinners can be very formal with many courses," Hilty said. "Two hundred fifty can be served in comfort."

Evelyn Raskin, an artist, has painted wonderful murals on two walls of the building that form an alcove from the garden, imbuing it with a romantic Italian look.

Fifty dogwood trees planted near the



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Magnificent mural: Artist Evelyn Raskin has painted murals on two walls of the conference center at the Garden Park of Holly. She is shown here with Jim Hilty.

building are in full bloom each spring and many Michigan wildflowers have been moved into a section of this large acreage. Another section is comprised of a hardwood forest, including a Wye Oak, hickories and other trees.

Gardens

Now to the gardens. As you approach the building, a series of ponds cascades from an underground spring and against one wall of the Secret Garden, a large, 25-year-old espaliered apple tree 22-1/2 feet wide that has been transplanted from Oregon. Iron gates lead into the walled garden.

At the present time several gardens are under construction. An Italian Follies garden, filled with oversized animals, mythical beasts and gods, will consist of a couple of acres.

"A two-layer amphitheater will be built up through the follies garden to enable visitors to see the actors on a stage that will be behind one of the garden walls."

This will be the site of a youth theater.

Nearby a miniature forest of black oak, white oak and wild Michigan cherry will be kept to a height of six to eight feet and will serve as a transition between the follies garden and a Japanese moss garden.

Cherry poles will hold up the black pine trees because, as Hilty said, "The Japanese use cherry and we're trying to maintain the spirit of it." Petrified wood has been found that Hilty said "must be 3 million years old." A little pool of water will be constructed nearby and the wood will be placed so that the lengthening afternoon shadows of the forest will grow toward the Japanese garden.

Plans

Eighteen varieties of mosses have been identified and grow on the property. Most were found beneath native trees where they thrive in their natural location. A wooden walkway will be elevated above the mosses to encourage visitors to view them without damage.

Another future project is a domed-over butterfly garden where these ephemeral creatures will fly freely and feed on tropical plants. Nearby an over-

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