

Garden Club history centers around friendships, flowers

BY JOHN HUBBARD
STAFF WRITER

When Marion Hickey can't garden, she dreams about it. In the months when the ground is too hard to plant, she and other members of the Farmington Garden Club meet to talk about what they can't wait to do again.

"If you've been bitten, you've got it," Hickey said.

A member for more years than she can remember, Hickey said joining the Garden Club was "the best thing I ever did." Her long-time partners in grime agree — the club has been not only a source of information, but of friendship and inspiration for the past 30 years.

"It's great friends, great knowledge and great entertainment," Hickey said.

Peg Moore, who served as president from 1981-83, inspired her daughter, Barbara Denton, to become a member. Denton also took a turn as president, from 1985-87. The club turned into a real family affair for Sue Phillips as well; she used to bring her daughter to board meetings.

"I found something I really liked to do when I joined the Garden Club," Phillips said. "It's

been my main entertainment in all seasons. It's just an interest I think I'll always have."

Gardening was something she "coerced" her daughter into doing years ago, she admitted. "Now, she's just as interested as I am."

However, Phillips added, "I'm planting so I'm better at giving directions than I am at gardening."

Club meetings feature a guest speaker; many times these are club members who excel in a particular aspect of gardening. Some like horticulture or the actual growing of plants, some prefer the art of flower arranging, but there's definitely a link between the two.

"What I enjoy most is flower arranging," said member Jan Dolan, who has been with the club since 1966, "and you have to grow them to arrange them."

She belongs to groups that consist of those who grow flowers and often travels to other states to learn more.

Several Garden Club members are master gardeners, while two — Charlotte Dashner and Rose Smith — have photos of their gardens in the National Council of State Garden Clubs' 2004 calendar.

Kay Blakeney joined in 1973. She said club people are "spe-

cial," but they're also dwindling in numbers.

"We've gotten up to a hundred, but we've dropped back," she said. "I think many women are working and can't come during the day."

There are plenty of projects to keep everyone busy. The club planted and maintains gardens at the Gov. Warner Mansion in downtown Farmington and The Longacre House community center in Farmington Hills, as well as the Spicer Garden at the Heritage Park Vagnozzi Visitors Center.

But what they do is not nearly as important for members as the friendships they've grown and nurtured over the years.

"Gardening friendships last forever," Moore said.

"It's group therapy," Dolan added. "They understand."

"Our whole house changes when you belong to a garden club," said Ann Audette, a member of 30 years. She joined because of the herb group, which centered around growing and cooking with herbs. Now she maintains a raised garden, where she grows vegetables.

Marjorie Perry has learned a great deal she wishes she had known before she started putting things in the ground around her long-time



Jan Dolan, Kay Blakeney, Marjorie Perry, Marion Hickey, Ann Audette, Sue Phillips and Peg Moore gathered at the Longacre House for a club meeting.

Farmington Hills home — because she and her husband ended up moving some things and taking others out completely.

She also gets a great feeling when she drives around the community and sees evidence of the club's contributions.

"When you're driving around you can still see crab apple trees... we used to sell those trees," she said. "They're still going strong. It just gives you a feeling of belonging."

The best gardening advice offered by the most senior members of the club? Well... it

might not be what you'd expect.

"Marry a man who likes it, too," Peg Moore said.

"And knows the difference between a weed and a plant," Marjorie Perry added.

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That stray dog you saw might actually be a coyote

So you think you saw a stray dog in your neighborhood. Don't be sure, it could be a coyote.

The average adult coyote stands about 20 inches at the shoulder and weighs roughly 35 pounds. A coyote has the general appearance of a skinny German Shepherd, having a narrow muzzle, large pointed ears and yellowish eyes. Coyotes are nocturnal creatures typically venturing out between 11:00 p.m. and 5:00 a.m.; however, it is not uncommon to see them during the day.

I spend a lot of time trapping and relocating nuisance animals, such as raccoons, opossum, skunks, rats, mice and coyotes from property in the

Farmington/Farmington Hills and surrounding areas. Concerned callers inquiring about the trapping and removal of coyotes have increased sharply for us from a year ago.

The latest DNR estimates are that there are about 200 coyotes in Oakland County. I honestly believe there are a lot more coyotes than they credit, prowling our neighborhoods.

For the most part, you may never see a coyote, however coyote sightings are increasing and the likelihood of you seeing one in the future is very possible. The coyote is one of the most adaptable creatures in the world. They are common in most rural areas, but because of their secretive nature, few are seen. Efforts to control the coyote seem to have produced an animal that is extremely alert and wary, enabling it to survive in every county of the United States.

Coyotes are very useful and

necessary animals and should be treated with the respect due a wild predator. They are very effective at controlling the populations of many other varmint species such as: ground hogs, rabbits, squirrels, skunks and mice. The coyote becomes a problem when household pets are added to their diet. Dogs that are not contained may approach a coyote to investigate or attempt to chase it from its territory only to find it either outmatched or outnumbered.

I was recently contracted to remove a problem coyote from a property in Farmington Hills because one of their dogs was attacked and killed. By obeying the leash law this incident could have been prevented. Unfortunately, the homeowners didn't realize the danger for their pet until it was too late.

CONSIDER PRECAUTIONS

There are a few things to

consider when coyotes are known to be in the area:

- 1) Do not keep pet food outdoors.
- 2) Keep trashcan lids on tight and store in your garage.
- 3) Keep household pets inside at night. Coyotes will prey on cats and small dogs.
- 4) Pick ripe fruit from trees and pick up fallen fruit.
- 5) Clean up areas around bird feeders.
- 6) Never try to feed a coyote.
- 7) Inform your neighbors and

recommend that they follow the same precautions.

From the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (Michigan DNR):

"If you see a coyote while you are outside, never try to run away from it. If the coyote approaches you, throw rocks or sticks to frighten it. The best thing for all wildlife, including coyotes, is for them to remain their instinctive fear of people."

Ultimately, I recommend using a professional trapper, one with large animal experience.

If you decide to have a professional come out and review

your situation, make sure he or she is insured and licensed with the Department of Natural Resources.

There are a number of companies that will take care of trapping and removing small animals, make sure they are qualified and have experience trapping coyotes.

Do your homework and make sure you know what are all of the costs associated with the services and whether there are any guarantees.

Ron Baker is a professional trapper and owner of Trapper Ron's Animal Removal & Relocation Services. He can be reached at (248) 478-7649.



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