

The Countryside Garden Club was first organized in 1949 by Mrs. Marge Rom and Mrs. Marie Dahl and other like-minded gardeners. These ladies lived in the Crystal Vista subdivision on the west side of the lake which included Briarwood Road south of Route 176 to the hamlet of Ridgefield and the junction of Crystal Lake. It is believed the name "Countryside" was chosen as the name for the club because of the open area and farm land found in this part of Crystal Lake. Many early members resided in this vicinity. We know Marie Dahls home was located along the west side of the lake on Edgewater Drive and interestingly her gardens are still being tended to this day by a current member of our garden club, Jeanie Saha, who purchased the property from the Dahl family. Marge Rom served as the clubs' first president from 1949 to 1951 and Marie Dahl served as the next president. They formed the club with the objectives to promote horticulture, assist in the promotion of civic beauty and home grounds, stimulate an interest in cooperative gardening, exterminate noxious weeds, aid in the protection of wildlife, and work for the improvement of roadways.

The club became a member of the National Garden Clubs and the Garden Clubs of Illinois, Central Region District I. They established bylaws according to the Illinois State Garden Club for membership, officers, committees, elections, and meetings. The clubs' meeting day initially was the third Wednesday of the month at one o'clock with dessert but was later established in 1964 to be the second Wednesday of each month at 11:30 when lunches were added. Throughout the years meetings were held in members' homes until recently when some community venues such as the Nunda Township Building or the Philanthropy Center have been used. The first Vice President, otherwise known as the Program chair, organized a garden related program each month for the members, followed by a business meeting. Membership was limited to 30 members and they paid yearly dues of \$2.50 in the early years. Current dues are \$25.00. Members' dues, along with ways and means projects, account for how the treasury is funded. Club officers were elected every two years.

On a whimsical note, when incoming president Helen Hague was taking office in 1985, she was handed her gavel and an amusing gift, an urn! This "joke" became known as the Presidents urn and is still handed down to each new president. It should be noted, In the early decades, husbands were invited to the summer picnic and to husband nights which were held in March with a pot luck dinner. Throughout the years many husbands helped with heavy lifting jobs at the triangle garden. At the time Countryside Garden Club was established, it was one of four garden clubs in Crystal Lake, the others being Crystal Lake Garden Club, Home Garden Club, and Green Twig Garden Club. In 1960 Countryside was instrumental in sponsoring ten ladies in establishing a fifth Crystal Lake Garden club, The Garden Gate Club. Presently only two clubs remain, Countryside Garden Club and a blending of Green Twig and Garden Gate Clubs called Green Gate Garden Club. The members of the five clubs worked together on many community projects such as an annual plant sale, Arbor Day plantings, Crystal Lake children's library bouquets, Blue Star Memorial, and public garden maintenance. In addition, the clubs held an Annual Joint Garden Club Meeting and many Standard Flower Shows from the 1960's to the 1980's. The flower shows gave all club members the chance to competitively enter their floral creations, being careful to fulfill all the criteria of the design class. Some of the early day show names were "Open Door Magic" (1967), "Holiday Happenings" (1971), "Symbols of the Season" (1974), "Spring, Crystal Lake Style" (1980) and the "The Last Song of Summer" (1982). Show names from more recent years were "A Good Place to Grow" (1986), "Progression of Floral Art Through The Years" (1993), and "Flights of Fancy" (2003). In honor of our 50th club anniversary in 1999, Countryside Garden Club presented a standard flower show called "50 Years Young and Still Growing".

Countryside Garden Club's members have been recognized with awards both individually and together as a club for their commitment to excellence. Beginning in the 1960's our club was awarded twice the "Blue Ribbon Club Award" for being the best club in the district. The Garden Clubs of Illinois awarded three awards over the years

for our flower shows, The President's Award for best district show, the Illinois Judges Council Flower Show Schedule Award and Show of Exceptional Merit Award.

Countryside Garden Club had several influential members who inspired our members and helped our club grow. Mary Walker joined the club in 1953 and remained a lifelong member. She was most notably a master gardener, an accredited flower show judge and a teacher of flower arrangement design to students aspiring to become flower show judges. She gave design classes to club members to prepare for the flower shows. She planted new and unusual species of lilies to test their adaptability to our area. Because lilies were her favorite flower, a lily garden was planted in her honor at the triangle garden. "The Silver Bowl" and the "Mary Walker Sweepstakes Award" were flower show awards instituted in her honor. Brenda Schindelar was another influential member having joined the club in 1981 and remaining a lifelong member as well. A nationally accredited flower show judge and a member of the Avante Garde Club of Flower Show Judges, she had a talent for creating beautiful floral arrangements. Members recall her Christmas Angel floral design over the mantle at the Dole Mansion for our clubs Christmas party. Brenda hosted lovely ways and means luncheons at her home, inspiring everyone with her beautiful table settings and creative floral designs.

A Countryside Garden Club sign overlooks the Triangle Garden downtown Crystal Lake, a garden our members have tilled and worked since 1984. This island of land is formed by Brink and Minnie Streets and Walkup Avenue and was referred to as Hales Corners after the pioneer Hale family, who lived across the street from the park. Mr. Hale donated a boulder, trees, shrubbery, and money to buy flowers; Countryside Garden Club agreed to take on the development and maintenance of this spot as our civic beautification project. Each year improvements are made to the soil, plant material and presentation of the garden.

A "little lending library" was constructed near the garden in 2021 to honor former member Judy Thornton, another extraordinary garden club member. The annual spring perennial plant sale has always been the clubs' primary ways and means project. In the early years the joint garden clubs held the sale together. Beginning in 1995 Countryside Garden Club organized their own sale at the downtown train depot, then at the Main Beach and later at Veteran Acres Park, finally finding a long- time location at the home of member Judy Wiedenfeld. Members dig plants from their own gardens, donating twelve plants originally and then 20 plants more recently. The proceeds are used to fund two \$1000.00 scholarships each year for horticulture students attending McHenry County College. In 2024 Countryside Garden Club will celebrate its 75th anniversary. Over the years hundreds of gardeners have been an important part of the clubs' success by contributing their talents, expertise, and hard work. As our organization moves forward, we encourage new members who are lovers of nature to join in the education, fun and co-operative gardening Countryside Garden Club has to offer.