



## WELLINGTON GARDEN CLUB HELPS MAKE THE COMMUNITY A MORE BEAUTIFUL PLACE

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“Gardening Makes a World of Difference” is the motto of the Wellington Garden Club, which has been helping to make the community a more beautiful place for nearly four decades.

Founded in October 1981 by a few local women who held meetings in one another’s living rooms, the club began with lots of good ideas and a few bylaws. Yet the women had the foresight to become part of something bigger, joining the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs just a few months later.

Founding members of the club included President Mary Clark, Vice President Mary Rowe, Treasurer Inge Parrish, Recording Secretary Paula Giambrone, Corresponding Secretary Judy Frank, and members Melinda Beasley, Connie Diforio, Marilyn Elliot, Mary Giovanetti, Phyllis Greenberg, Isabel Johnson, Grace Rocket, Alberta Weldon and Lily Wiggan.

“The club’s original scrapbook is interesting to look through,” said Jan Seagrave, the group’s current president. “The women used to do a bazaar; did landscaping for Habitat for Humanity homes; created little handmade programs; and typed up pages for a yearbook that we have professionally printed today. They did a lot of flower-arranging classes where now we have flower show judges and master gardeners as members, and the judges sometimes do arrangement classes.”

Over the past 40 years, the club has grown quite a bit, and with that growth came changes.

“We have added to what our mission statement and motto are, we’ve added activities, and we meet at the Wellington Community Center now,” Seagrave said. “There’s so much to what we do. The club has evolved over the years from that group of wonderful ladies who got it started to a club with more of a sense of community than we had before.”

Some of its original charter members remain on the roster, linking the past to the present. “It’s about how far we’ve come with the club and what we’ve learned in the past to bring forth to give to the community,” Seagrave explained.

The group continues to invite informative guest speakers to its meetings and hosts a biannual Garden Walk tour of members' gardens, but it also established a butterfly garden at the Wellington Dog Park, currently maintained by the Boy Scouts; sends kids to ecology camp; offers scholarships to high school students interested in the earth sciences; and even honors the military.

This upcoming Memorial Day, the Wellington Garden Club will unveil a Gold Star plaque at the Wellington Veterans Memorial to honor family members of servicemen who died in the line of duty. This marker joins the Blue Star marker currently in place at the memorial, also donated by the Wellington Garden Club. The Blue Star marker was the result of a club fundraising effort, while the Gold Star marker was underwritten by a club member and her veteran husband.

"The markers are part of a national initiative," Seagrave said. "We also partnered with the Village of Wellington. They gave us a place to put the marker, they allow us to have our ceremony there and they maintain it — and the beautiful landscaping around it."

It was incoming President Maria Wolfe who led the marker charge.

"Being the daughter of a World War II and Korean War veteran, and spouse of a Vietnam veteran, honoring our servicemembers is very important to me," she said. "When I found out that the National Garden Clubs had this program and the village didn't have even one marker, I took it upon myself to do it. The Blue Star marker was dedicated on Veterans Day 2019."

Wolfe spoke at the ceremony when the marker was unveiled. "We had 50 club members in the parade — everybody was just so excited to be a part of it and support it," she said. "And now, as the pandemic slowly recedes, we felt like it was time to put in the Gold Star marker, and we'd like to invite all Gold Star families to attend the dedication, this time on Memorial Day."

Twig Morris has been a member of the Wellington Garden Club for 15 years, joining just two years after she moved to Wellington.

"The club's membership grew a lot after I joined. There were so many new communities opening up, and also the club was trying to get into as many local publications as possible," Morris said. "We attracted new members during our garden tour and the plant sales we held at the Wellington Community Center. People bought plants and found out about the club."

The Wellington Garden Club also began focusing more on the youth of the area, forming junior garden clubs and establishing a children's community garden behind the Neil S. Hirsch Family Boys & Girls Club in Wellington together with the Young Professionals of Wellington. "We meet every Tuesday at 3 p.m. with the kids," Seagrave said. "We weed, trim, cut, plant — but mainly it's the education, from planting the seed to reaping the harvest. A lot of these kids think that fruits and vegetables only come from Publix."

Teaching local gardening is a key focus of the club today.

"We want our youth to learn about gardening, to love gardening and to respect the environment," Morris said. "Our scholarship committee does a lot of fundraising. We donate \$5,000 in scholarships to local students pursuing a degree in environmental sciences. We send kids to the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs' SEEK [Save the Earth's Environment through Knowledge] summer camp. We sponsored one young

man for two years, and he was so inspired by the program that he went on to Duke University to study environmental law. That makes us proud.”

The club also provides enough funding to send seven to nine campers to Wekiva Youth Camp, a sleepaway camp near Apopka that is sponsored by the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs and is certified by the American Camping Association.

And although club bylaws prohibit political activity, e-mail blasts do go out informing members about meetings they may choose to attend as interested citizens. A recent Village of Wellington meeting where the future of a wetlands preserve was on the agenda was one such example.

“We are about education in the environmental and ecological areas,” Seagrave said. “As president, I want to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the club in 2021 and then, in 2022, the 40th anniversary of our joining the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs.”

People and plants — both are important to Wellington Garden Club members. “A lot of club presidents aren’t as lucky as I am,” Wolfe said. “They have so much paperwork to do. My therapy is to get in there and get my hands dirty — plop things in the ground and watch them grow.”

Learn more about the club at [www.wellingtongardenclub.org](http://www.wellingtongardenclub.org).