

Memory Garden Joins Growing Number of Health Care Gardens

When Hospice of The Gorge opened its Hospice Center in 2004, Executive Director Deborah Whiting Jaques was thrilled, but she knew the work was not quite done.

A little more than two years later, on October 13, 2006, Jaques and the rest of the hospice staff celebrated the building's official completion with the grand opening of the Memory Garden, which was built next to the hospice during the summer.

Garden as Therapy

The Memory Garden is open to anyone—whether they are dealing with end-of-life issues or not—as a beautiful and serene retreat in which to contemplate mortality and celebrate life. It is one of a growing number of healing gardens incorporated into health-care settings across the United States and abroad, particularly hospitals.

Teresia Hazen, a registered horticultural therapist and coordinator of therapeutic gardens for the Legacy Health System in Portland, says similar gardens have a measurable impact on Legacy's patients.

"Well-designed therapeutic gardens can serve as powerful restorative tools in coping with daily stressors, and also as we deal with shifts and transitions of life," says Hazen. "The nature experience reminds us all of the cycle of the seasons. Wind, rain, clouds, bird-song, favorite flowers, water sound, blowing grasses ... are the experiences of home, and nurture the human spirit."

Jaques says if a garden could help those who are ill, it could also help those who are terminally ill.

"A number of studies have shown



Hospice of The Gorge Executive Director Deborah Whiting Jaques, seated, and Marion McNew of Mount Hood Gardens. Photos courtesy of Hospice of The Gorge.

that gardens built next to hospitals inspire people to think more positive thoughts and to actually heal faster," says Jaques. "Physical healing may not be realistic for our patients, but the garden can help people to heal emotionally."

To design the garden, Jaques consulted landscape designer Marion McNew of Mount Hood Gardens.

"I really enjoy doing public gardens, especially ones which incorporate the outdoor garden room concept and various garden art," McNew says. "I felt that this particular garden should have contemplative and healing properties, considering that it would be used by people who are experiencing stress and sorrow during a difficult time in their lives. It's meant to give them hope and comfort."

Garden as Metaphor

McNew designed the garden to serve as a metaphor for life's journey. It is divided into four "rooms," each with a character of its own.

The first room—the Rose Garden—features brilliant colors and a bubbling birdbath fountain,

which convey the bright promise of early life. Curved benches provide a place for quiet conversations.

The main feature of the Gallery Garden is a mural that signifies life's options and range of experiences. Tall garden vases bring a sense of grace and balance to the room, and two "moon" windows allow a peek into the room beyond.

The Discovery Garden celebrates the depth and richness of life.

Representing the middle portion of life, this is the longest of the garden rooms. Artist-made tiles, a Japanese-style stone pagoda lantern and a multi level trough fountain delight the senses.

The Zen Garden, symbolic of life's final phase, is designed to be the most serene room. An intimate room with a circular fountain, the Zen Garden encourages quiet contemplation.

"It will alter your mood as you proceed through it," says McNew.

Garden as Community Focus

The Memory Garden, which is supported entirely by donations and separately from the hospice's health care-related funds, is intended as a gift to the community. It includes the efforts of numerous skilled workers and volunteers, as well as the sponsorship of garden features such as benches, fountains—even entire garden rooms.

Long-time Hood River resident and hospice board member Clarice Knoll says she was glad to donate funds for The Zen Garden in memory of her late husband, Ron.

"Hospice of The Gorge took such good care of Ron when he was



dying of cancer,” says Clarice. “As he had a business here, and we earned our living here, I felt that I should give back to the local community. The garden will be a tranquil place where people can go out and meditate.”

Other major sponsors are Providence Hood River Memorial Hospital—the primary sponsor of the Rose Garden—and Maureen Higgins, who sponsored the Discovery Garden in memory of her parents, Kay and Joe Higgins.

Donations for the Memory Garden are still being accepted.

Hospice of The Gorge serves Skamania and Klickitat counties in Washington, and Hood River, Wasco, Sherman, Gilliam and Morrow counties in Oregon. Contact Kristy Athens, community relations coordinator, at (541) 308-2114, or kathens@hospiceofthegorge.org. The Web site is: www.hospiceofthegorge.org. ■



Above, Hospice board member Clarice Knoll donated funds for the Zen Garden in memory of her husband, Ron. Top, the serene garden pathway at the facility.