



# Keystone Gardener

*Official Publication of the Garden Club Federation of Pennsylvania*

**2025-2027 National Garden Club  
President, Donna Donnelly**

**THEME**  
“Plant America...for the next 100 years”

**2025-2027 CAR-SGC, Inc.  
Director, Beverly Kazickas**

**THEME**  
“Plant America: Gardening for a  
Healthy Mind, Body and Soul”

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**DEADLINES FOR ALL COPY**

The printed Keystone Gardener  
will be published three times per  
term, a directory issue and two  
convention issues.

Next Printed Convention Issue  
Deadline  
November 1, 2026

**ONLINE NEWSLETTER EDITOR**

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Next deadline is April 15 for  
a May 1 edition.

The editor reserves the right to edit  
copy for clarity, accuracy, or space  
requirements.

[www.pagardenclubs.org](http://www.pagardenclubs.org)

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This includes any changes in  
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phone, or change of  
membership status.



## President's Message



Dear Members,

What a pleasure it will be to gather once again – this time along the sparkling shores of Lake Erie for our state convention, “MystERIE by the Bay.” The name alone hints at all that awaits us: stories of the past, natural wonders, and perhaps a few delightful surprises along the way.

From legends that swirl through Erie’s rich history to the breathtaking beauty of Presque Isle, this convention promises a memorable blend of learning, laughter, and fellowship. Add to that our wonderful lineup of workshops, tours, and programs – all set in a lovely hotel right on the bay – and you can see why this convention promises to be something truly special.

I look forward to celebrating with you in Erie – where nature, friendship, and a touch of mystery come together to make this an unforgettable convention.

Warmly,

Pat Wolanski

President  
The Garden Club Federation of Pennsylvania

**The Members and Clubs of GCFP's District VIII  
Invite All Members and Guests to the  
96<sup>th</sup> GCFP Convention  
April 26-28, 2026**



Register **EARLY** to attend your first-choice events.

All events require advance registration.

A \$5.00 registration fee is required of all attendees, including volunteers.

**REGISTRATION DEADLINE IS MARCH 20, 2026**

A \$30 LATE FEE applies when postmarked between

March 20 and March 27, 2026

No registrations or refunds after March 27, 2026

**SUNDAY EVENTS**

Bus Tour to Drake Well Museum and Park

“The Valley that Changed the World”

Presentation: Celebrity Shorebirds by Mary Birdsong

Executive Board Meeting by Invitation

Dinner Speakers, Ken and Peggy Butler of PAFF

**MONDAY EVENTS**

Official Opening of the 96<sup>th</sup> GCFP Convention

Bayside Vendors & Exhibits

Morning and Afternoon Presentations

Luncheon with Neal Sanders, “Gardening is Murder”

District and Club Officers meet with President Pat

Cocktails and Dinner with Dr. Joshua Searle-White

**TUESDAY EVENTS**

Bayside Vendors & Exhibits

Morning Presentations

Judges Council Luncheon with Tim Farrell

Invitation to Convention 2027

## HOTEL RESERVATION INFORMATION



**THE SHERATON ERIE BAYFRONT HOTEL  
55 West Bay Drive, Erie, PA 16507  
814-454-2005**

**Check In at 4 PM  
Check Out at 11 AM**

**GCFP Room Rate \$140 plus 13% tax per room (\$158.20)  
Our Block Covers Sunday, April 26<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday, April 28<sup>th</sup>**

**FREE Parking**

**Deadline for the Group Rate Reservation is  
March 26, 2026  
Phone (814) 454-2005  
Mention Garden Club Federation**



## 2026 CONVENTION SCHEDULE

### SATURDAY, APRIL 25, 2026

3:00 PM - 5:00 PM Early Registration for Sunday Tour Participants at Sheraton  
6:30 PM - 8:30 PM Private Dinner by Invitation

### SUNDAY, APRIL 26, 2026

**ALL EVENTS ON SUNDAY WILL BE AT THE SHERATON HOTEL**

8:00 AM Priority Registration for Tour Participants 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
9:00 AM – 5:00 PM Registration 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor

9:00 AM – 2:00 PM Tour: Drake Well Museum and Park  
Meet in the Hotel Lobby

1:00 PM – 2:00 PM **Presentation A: Safe Harbor Room 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor**  
*Celebrity Shorebirds, The Piping Plovers at Presque Isle State Park, by Mary Birdsong*  
Sheraton Hotel, Safe Harbor Room 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor

4:00 PM – 5:00 PM Executive Board Meeting (invitation only)  
Safe Harbor Room 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor

5:30 PM – 6:30 PM Social Hour/Cash Bar, Harlequin Foyer

6:30 PM – 9:00 PM **Dinner, Harlequin Ballroom**  
Honoring Life Members, Youth Awards, and Scholarship Winners  
*The Dark Side of Fireflies* program, by Ken and Peggy Butler

**THE CONVENTION CENTER WILL BE OPEN ON SUNDAY FROM  
12:00 PM to 5:00 PM ONLY for VENDOR SET-UP, TRASH TO  
TREASURE ENTRIES, AND SPECIAL EXHIBITS SET-UP**



## MONDAY, APRIL 27, 2026

### **ALL EVENTS WILL BE AT THE BAYFRONT CONVENTION CENTER**

7:30 AM – 12:00 PM      Registration

8:00 AM – 6:30 PM      Shopping at the Bayview Market

8:30 AM – 10:30 AM      Official Opening of the 96<sup>th</sup> GCFP Convention  
**Room 140**

10:45 AM – 11:45 AM      **Presentations B: Rooms 160 A, B, & C**  
B1 *The Tiny Forest at Mercyhurst University*  
B2 *The Ups and Downs of Vertical  
Gardening*  
B3 *Good Bugs/Bad Bugs/Ugly Bugs*

12:00 PM – 2:00 PM      **Luncheon, West Ballroom**  
*Gardening is Murder* by Neal Sanders

3:00 PM – 4:00 PM      **Presentations C: Rooms 160 A & B**  
C1 *Nurturing through Nature*  
C2 *The MystERIEs of Maple Syrup*  
C3 *Floral Designs for Entertaining* **Room 170**

3:00 PM – 4:15 PM

4:30 PM – 5:30 PM      GCFP President and Vice Presidents meet  
with District Directors, Assistant Directors, and  
Club Officers, **Room 140**

5:30 PM – 6:30 PM      Social Hour/Cash Bar, **Harlequin Foyer**

6:30 PM – 9:00 PM      **Dinner, West Ballroom**  
*The Invasive Species Living Next Door*  
by Dr. Joshua Searle-White



**TUESDAY, APRIL 28, 2026**

**ALL EVENTS TO REMAIN AT BAYFRONT CONVENTION CENTER**

8:00 AM – 11:00 AM	Registration
8:00 AM – 8:30 AM	GCFP Judges Council Executive Board <b><u>Rooms 140 A, B, &amp; C</u></b>
8:30 AM – 9:30 AM	GCFP Judges Council Annual Meeting <b><u>Rooms 140 A, B, &amp; C</u></b>
9:00 AM – 2:00 PM	Shopping at the Bayview Market
9:30 AM – 10:30 AM	<b>Presentations D: Rooms 160 A, B, &amp; C</b> D1 <i>It's OK to be a Square in Square Foot Gardening</i> D2 <i>Are YOU canning safely?</i> D3 <i>The Wooly Adelgid and our State Tree</i>
11:00 AM – 2:00 PM	<b>Luncheon, West Ballroom</b> Judges Council Program <i>It's Elementary My Dear</i> by Tim Farrell



**April 26, 2026, Sunday Morning**  
**TOUR TO DRAKE WELL MUSEUM AND PARK**  
**“The Valley that Changed the World”**  
**9:00 AM – 2:30 PM**  
**A Box Lunch will be served**



Drake Well Museum and Park is administered by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and is actively supported by Friends of Drake Well, Inc., a non-profit, community-based organization. The museum serves as the historical heart of Pennsylvania's Oil Region National Heritage Area and is one of 23 historic sites and museums that make up the Pennsylvania Trails of History.

For over 90 years, Drake Well Museum and Park has preserved and interpreted the site of the Drake Well, chronicling the birth and development of the petroleum industry in Pennsylvania as well as its growth into a global enterprise. Visitors to the museum's 240-acre site enjoy a board-for-board replica of Drake's engine house built around the National Historic Landmark well, an operating central power oil lease, a standard drilling rig, 12,000 square feet of interior exhibits, and the largest artifact and archival collection focused on the birth of the modern petroleum industry. Drake Well Museum and Park also offers an abundance of year-round recreational opportunities, including paved bike trails, delayed harvest fly fishing in Oil Creek, modern picnic facilities, hiking trails, and a neighboring 9,000-acre state park.



## PROGRAMS AT MEALS AND THEIR PRESENTERS

**April 26, 2026, Sunday Dinner at the Sheraton**  
**6:30 – 9:00 PM**

### **THE DARK SIDE OF FIREFLIES: A STORY OF SEX, POISON, DECEIT & MURDER**

**Ken R. and Peggy S. Butler**



Fireflies (often called lightning bugs) are some of the most beloved and revered insects in the natural world. People often think of them fondly as part of a childhood memory, or romanticize them as magical & peaceful fairylike creatures. While they don't sting or bite humans, or infest and destroy our gardens and vegetation, they do have a dark side that many will find surprising.

This presentation will expose the dark (but glowing) underside of lightning bugs. Why do they glow? Who is good and who is evil? Who can you trust? Who is stalking and preying upon fireflies?

In 2012, through an amazing set of circumstances, Ken and Peggy Butler found themselves immersed in the world of fireflies. The discovery of Synchronous Fireflies at their home in Kellettsville in the Allegheny National Forest, inspired them to share this wonder of nature with others. They are the co-founders of the PA Firefly Festival Inc. with a mission to educate both children and adults about environmental change and the emerging threats to all firefly habitats.

The Butlers are avid conservationists, love to flyfish, bird watch, and promote and protect the beauty and wildness of Forest County. They are now committed to serving as citizen scientists through conservation and protection of firefly and pollinator habitat including the dark sky environment.



**April 27, 2026, Monday Luncheon at the Convention Center  
12:00 PM – 2:45 PM**

### **GARDENING IS MURDER – Neal Sanders**



This is a 'husband's point of view' of gardening. It is filled with humor and insight from someone who gardens less from an abiding love of horticulture than for the love of a spouse. Good horticultural advice is dispensed; bad advice is debunked. You will leave with a better appreciation of what is going on in the mind of your helpmates. The talk is adapted from my widely read blog, 'The Principal Undergardener.'

Some of the topics covered will include:

- Why it is impossible to do just one thing in the garden
- Why so much gardening information on the internet is awful
- Why you should *never* compute the value of your labor in gardening
- Evidence that the wildlife in your garden have never seen a Disney film
- Why it requires digging three holes to plant something
- And much more...

Back in 2005, I helped sell the company that had been my long-time employer. When the sale was done, I had two 'sensible' offers that would have kept me in the corporate world. To make a long story short, neither option appealed.

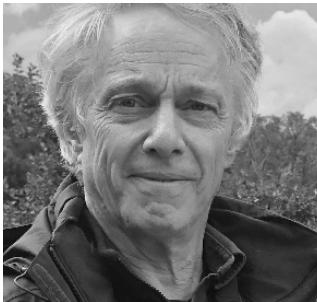
There was something else I wanted to do, something that had been on my mind for a couple of decades: I wanted to see if I could write fiction. Not the Great American Novel. Not poetry. Not some thinly disguised autobiographical cathartic work. I wanted to see if I could tell a rousing good story using believable characters people would root for. I wanted to write stories with satisfying conclusions that sprinkled enough clues about the outcome throughout the story to make a reader say, 'Why didn't I see that coming?' Oh, and I wanted to write stuff that people would actually go out and buy. In short, I wanted to write mysteries, suspense, and thrillers.

Since then, I've published 15 books. Apart from being mysteries, what they all have in common is that their central characters are strong, independent women. Some of these women solve crimes. Some commit them. But they're all memorable.



**April 27, 2026, Monday Dinner at the Convention Center  
6:30 PM – 9:00 PM**

**THE INVASIVE SPECIES LIVING NEXT DOOR**  
**Dr. Joshua Searle-White**



On Monday evening, Dr. Joshua Searle-White, Professor Emeritus from Allegheny College, will discuss his recent research on invasive species. His team has recently identified, for the first time, a virulent plant-borne pathogen that produces unusual effects in humans. His never-before-seen presentation will challenge the preconceptions of even the most educated gardeners and will, he hopes, spread his passion for ridding the world (at least in his neighborhood) of invasive plants and animals.

In addition to teaching for over 30 years at Allegheny College in Meadville, Pennsylvania, Dr Searle-White has been active in the community, sharing his interests and hobbies. He is an accomplished musician playing bass guitar with various popular bands over the years. In addition, he is an author of children's stories and a playwright. He is currently president of the Meadville Community Theater and on the boards of several Meadville non-profits.

His horticultural study of invasive plants has led him and his team on travels throughout Western Pennsylvania and beyond. His discovery has attracted widespread interest, the results of which will be presented here for the first time. It is a not-to-be-missed program.



*Save  
the  
Date*

2027 GCFP Convention

CELEBRATING PENNSYLVANIA  
READY, SET, BLOOM  
April 19-21, 2027  
Hosted by District IV

**April 28, 2026, Judges Council Luncheon and Program  
At the Convention Center  
11:00 AM – 2:00 PM**

**IT'S ELEMENTARY MY DEAR!  
TAKING THE MYSTERY OUT OF THE ELEMENTS OF FLORAL  
DESIGN**

**Tim Farrell**



In this program, Tim Farrell, AIFD, PFCI, AAF, will bring to you bits of knowledge from his world travels as a floral designer to help you better understand the elements of floral design. Tim will share terminology, design theory and design techniques in his informative and entertaining presentation.

Tim has been a floral designer for 44 years. His craft has taken him around the world designing for other florists, people of all cultures, Presidents, Popes...and even Hollywood celebrities have experienced his beautiful creations at the Oscars.

Tim was the floral designer to represent the USA in an international competition in Tokyo, Japan. And was invited to be the keynote speaker and featured floral designer for the World Flower Council at its Summit Meeting in Kenya. In 2022 Tim was honored to create floral designs for Pope Francis in the Sistine Chapel. In May 2025 he was honored again to create floral designs for the personal residence of Pope Leo XIV on the day of his installation.

In 2017 Tim was presented with the AIFD Award for Distinguished Service to the Floral Industry. In 2023 he was honored with the Award of Distinguished Service to AIFD and the Tommy Bright Award for Floral Presentations by the Society of American Florists. Tim has taught floral design in 49 of the 50 states in the US and on 6 of the 7 continents, and is thrilled to share his creations with you!



## REGISTRATION for 96<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL CONVENTION April 26 –28, 2026 (Sunday – Tuesday)

Please legibly complete both pages of separate registration forms for you and your guest(s). The form is also available at  
[www.pagardenclubs.org](http://www.pagardenclubs.org).

**Make check(s) payable to: "GCFP 2026 Convention."**

Mail to: Dorothy Yard, 2026 Convention Registrar,  
1117 Old Wattsburg Road, Waterford, PA 16441-4601

Contact: [dotyard@verizon.net](mailto:dotyard@verizon.net) 814-796-4131

Confirmation will be sent to your email address  
OR send a self-addressed stamped envelope.

**NO REGISTRATIONS OR REFUNDS AFTER MARCH 20, 2026**

Last Name \_\_\_\_\_ First Name \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Garden Club(s) \_\_\_\_\_ District(s) \_\_\_\_\_

**SPECIAL DIETARY NEED** \_\_\_\_\_

**Advanced registration is required for all events.**

**Early registration is advised. See next page (2/2).**

**Check all that apply:**

<input type="checkbox"/> NGC President	<input type="checkbox"/> District Director	<input type="checkbox"/> Flower Show Judge
<input type="checkbox"/> Former NGC President	<input type="checkbox"/> Asst. District Director	CONSULTANTS::
<input type="checkbox"/> NGC Board Member	<input type="checkbox"/> Current Club President	<input type="checkbox"/> Gardening
<input type="checkbox"/> CAR-SGC Director	<input type="checkbox"/> Garden Club Member	<input type="checkbox"/> Environmental
<input type="checkbox"/> Former CAR-SGC Dir.	<input type="checkbox"/> NGC Life Member	<input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Design
<input type="checkbox"/> GCFP (State) President	<input type="checkbox"/> CAR-SGC Life Member	
<input type="checkbox"/> Former GCFP President	<input type="checkbox"/> GCFP Life Member	<input type="checkbox"/> Guest / Spouse
Current GCFP Officer or Board Member Position:		
Current CAR-SGC Officer or Board Member Position:		
Current NGC Officer or Board Member Position:		

2026 Convention Registration, page 1 of 2

## REGISTRATION for 96<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL CONVENTION (continued)

Page 2/2: Specify & prioritize your choices. Calculate TOTAL due.

**Note: To attend ANY presentations, ONE HOTEL MEAL MUST BE SELECTED.**

**Full Conference Rate includes:** Sunday Dinner and Program, Monday Lunch, Dinner and Programs, and Presentations A-D. It does not include the Drake Well Tour prior to Sunday dinner or the Judges Council Luncheon and Program on Tuesday.

Enter the price of selected events in the right column.

	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Enter \$</b>
<b>Registration fee applicable to all attendees, including volunteers, spouses and guests</b>	\$5.00	\$ 5.00
<b>Save \$35.00. Full Conference Rate</b>	<b>\$275.00</b>	\$ _____
Late fee if Registration is postmarked between March 20-March 27, 2026	\$30.00	\$ _____

**INDIVIDUAL EVENTS – Advanced registration is required for all events**

<b>Sunday, April 26</b>		
<b>9:00 – 2:00</b> Tour to Drake Well Museum and Park	\$40.00	\$ _____
<b>1:00 – 2:00 Presentation A</b>		
<b>A1:</b> Celebrity Shorebirds: The Piping Plovers, Mary Birdsong	\$30.00	\$ _____
<b>5:30 – 9:00 Social Hour, Dinner, and Program</b>	\$65.00	\$ _____
<b>The Dark Side of Fireflies, Ken &amp; Peggy Butler</b>		
<b>Monday, April 27</b>		
<b>10:45 – 11:45 Presentations B</b>	Prioritize: 1-3	\$25.00 \$ _____
<b>B1:</b> The Mercyhurst Tiny Forest, Chris Dolanc		
<b>B2:</b> The Ups & Downs of Vertical Gardens, David Olson		
<b>B3:</b> Good, Bad and Ugly Bugs, Ruth Benner		

12:00 – 2:45	<b>Luncheon and Program: Gardening is Murder, Neal Sanders</b>		\$55.00	\$ _____
3:00 – 4:00	<b>Presentations C</b>	Prioritize: 1-3	\$25.00	\$ _____
C1:	Nurturing through Nature, Matt Szczesny			
C2:	The MysterIES of Maple Syrup in Northwest PA, Jan Woods and Theresa Gamble			
3:00 – 4:15				
C3:	Flower Designs for Entertaining, Tom Huston			
5:30 – 9:00	<b>Social Hour, Dinner, and Program: The Invasive Species Living Next Door, Dr. Joshua Searle-White</b>		\$85.00	\$ _____
<b>Tuesday, April 28</b>				
9:30 – 10:30	<b>Presentations D</b>	Prioritize: 1-3	\$25.00	\$ _____
D1:	It's OK to be a Square in Square Foot Gardening Debbie Bernardin			
D2:	Are YOU canning safely? Marcy Cunkelman			
D3:	The Hemlock Woolly Adelgid: A Tiny Pest, A Huge Problem Stephen Laskowski			
11:00 – 2:00	<b>Judges Council Luncheon and Program: It's Elementary My Dear! Taking the Mystery out of Design, Tim Farrell</b> Six designs to be raffled		\$65.00	\$ _____
<b>Make check for Total payable to "GCFP 2026 Convention"</b>				
				<b>TOTAL</b>

## PRESENTATIONS AND THEIR PRESENTERS

**April 26, 2026**

**Sunday 1:00 – 2:00 PM, Sheraton Hotel  
Safe Harbor Room, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor**

### **A: CELEBRITY SHOREBIRDS: THE PIPING PLOVERS**

**Mary Birdsong**



After a 60-year absence, Piping Plovers are now, once again, calling Gull Point at Presque Isle State Park their summer home. Nesting there since 2017, they have provided moments of deep sadness as well as sublime joy. Birdsong will provide an overview of Erie Bird Observatory programs and information about the Great Lakes population of Piping Plovers.

Mary Birdsong is co-founder and Lead Shorebird Monitor for the Erie Bird Observatory. She has been monitoring shorebirds since 2013. She is also a freelance writer and artist. She and husband Mike have three cats and she is the proud “Busia” to four grandchildren.

**April 27, 2026**

**Monday 10:45 – 11:45 AM, Room 160 A**

### **B1: THE MERCYHURST TINY FOREST: ITS HISTORY AND WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED SO FAR**

**Chris Dolanc**



The Mercyhurst Tiny Forest was planted in 2017 with over 600 trees. The first of its kind in NWPA. Our tiny forest garnered the interest of many organizations and gave the university notoriety as a green campus, winning an award from the Sierra Club for being an environmental steward in its community. Students use the tiny forest for classes, recreation and as a peaceful escape from the stress of typical college life.

Chris Dolanc holds a Bachelor's degree in Biology, a Master's in Botany and a PhD in Ecology. He is currently a Professor in the Biology Department at Mercyhurst University. He teaches plant ecology and environmental science. Chris is from a musical family and has a degree in Music with a concentration in cello. He and his wife, a violinist and viola Professor at Mercyhurst and Allegheny College, often perform together.

**April 27, 2026**  
**Monday 10:45 – 11:45 AM, Room 160 B**

**B2: THE UPS & DOWNS OF VERTICAL GARDENING**  
**David Olson**



Do you have a small garden, yet want more produce? Are you tired of bending over picking peas, beans, squash and so forth? Vertical Gardens might be your solution. See the benefits, structures, and tips in this new “rage” of gardening and learn how to send your garden to new heights.

David Olson has been gardening for the past 60 years and has been a Master Gardener for nine years. One of his passions is growing dahlias. David enjoys trying new gardening techniques and ideas, but sadly, some have been big failures! However, at least he continues to learn. David, a former educator, has the great fortune of giving presentations on a variety of topics, including Dahlias 101, Indoor Plants, Pruning Ornamentals, Seed Saving/Starting Winter Sowing, and much more. During the convention, David will go to new heights by talking about Vertical Gardening.

**April 27, 2026**  
**Monday 10:45 – 11:45 AM, Room 160 C**

**B3: GOOD, BAD, AND UGLY BUGS**  
**Ruth Benner**



Insects are an inevitable part of every gardener's experience. Some harm our plants, some help defend our plants and others provide pollination services. This presentation will explore pests and natural enemies commonly found on fruits, herbs, vegetables and flowers in our Pennsylvania gardens and landscapes.

Ruth Benner is a Penn State Extension Educator based in Erie County. Ruth has served as a horticulture educator in NWPA since 2007. She provides educational programs about plant health, horticulture, and entomology training for the Master Gardeners and youth; her focus is the approved integrated pest management strategy. Ruth has a BS degree in Horticulture from PSU, and an MS degree in Entomology from the University of Florida. Ruth is a Certified Arborist and a PA-certified Public Pesticide Applicator.

**April 27, 2026**

**Monday 3:00 – 4:00 PM, Room 160A**

**C1: NURTURING THROUGH NATURE**

**Matt Szczesny**



“Nurturing Through Nature” is a brief overview of recent scientific research indicating how spending time in nature leads to positive mental states and improved physical health and how we can begin to incorporate nature into our daily lives. Nature, a low-cost intervention, offers easy benefits with no unwanted side effects.

Matt has been employed in the Penn State Behrend Counseling Center since 2005 and worked in community mental health for 15 years prior. He is a certified meditation teacher and Ayurvedic lifestyle consultant. Matt loves spending time with family, music, art, and photography. He has also been teaching Intro to Buddhism at Penn State Behrend since 2013.

**April 27, 2026**

**Monday 3:00 – 4:00 PM, Room 160 B**

**C2: THE MYSTERIES OF MAPLE SYRUP IN NWPA**

**Jan Woods**



Jan and Theresa will present the Hurry Hill “story” and its transition into a tourist destination. This historic sugar house serves as a museum with an interpretive walking trail and demonstrations of maple sugar making. The museum was designed to preserve social, cultural, and natural experiences of pure maple syrup production.

Janet M. Woods, owner and sugar maker at Hurry Hill, is a retired school administrator and a lifelong maple syrup producer.

**Theresa Gamble**



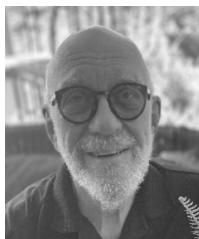
Theresa Gamble, Project Manager at Hurry Hill, is a hobby sugar maker and has a degree in Museum Studies. She has held several professional certifications in archives, records management, and compliance.

**April 27, 2026**

**Monday 3:00 – 4:15 PM, Room 170 A & B**

**C3: FLOWER DESIGNS FOR ENTERTAINING**

**Tom Huston**



During our time together in this presentation, we will explore creative ideas for flowers, party themes and holiday ideas that will, hopefully, jumpstart your thinking about entertaining and how to organize family times, garden club events, church gatherings, and dinner parties! We will have lots of fun and a few giveaways as well. Come join the fun!

Tom has been a member of the Oil City Garden Club for many years and served as president three times. He is a Master Flower Show Judge and is active with the Erie Area Judges Council. Tom is a retired Art teacher and Elementary School Principal. Tom and his wife of 47 years, Margo, have three grown sons and two grandchildren. He holds three part-time jobs: he is a designer at the Woods, and creates window displays for two ladies' shops, Sassy's and Amy's Closet.

**April 28 2026**

**Tuesday 9:30 – 10:30 AM, Room 160 A**

**D1: IT'S OK TO BE A SQUARE IN SQUARE FOOT  
GARDENING**

**Debbie Bernardini**



Debbie will explain the benefits and ease of management of Square Foot Gardening. Learn how this is a perfect solution for smaller yards. The best practice for success is to develop good garden soil and weed prevention to grow your favorite veggies or flowers for the most beneficial payout.

Debbie Bernardini was introduced to gardening by her father and grandmother while growing up in Bradford, PA. Debbie holds an MS in Early Childhood Education and taught both Middle and Elementary School children in Erie for 22 years. She has been a member of Lawrence Park Garden Club since 2016, served as president, and chaired many committees. She has been a very active Penn State Master Gardener since 2016. She lives with her husband, Rick, has two daughters, one son, and four grandchildren who keep her busy teaching them the best gardening practices.

**April 28, 2026**  
**Tuesday 9:30 – 10:30 AM, Room 160 B**

**D2: ARE YOU CANNING SAFELY?**  
**Marcy Cunkelman**



Marcy Cunkelman, Penn State Master Food Preserver, will share the new, updated, tested information from the websites she uses to preserve safely. Recipes have been changing through the years. What you see on the internet is NOT what you should be using as recipes. She will show you the canning equipment she uses to preserve low- and high-acidic foods and explain how to can safely.

Marcy is a member and past president of the Evergreen Garden Club, District VI Director in 2002-04 and 2018-20. She is the GCFP and District VI Birds & Butterflies Chairman, past *Keystone Gardener* editor and advertising manager for 14 years, and a Penn State Food Preserver in Indiana County since 1991. Marcy and husband Dan, with their total-care adult daughter, live on *Cunkelman's Safe Haven* with their two rescue dogs.

**April 28, 2026**  
**Tuesday 9:30 – 10:30 AM, Room 160 C**

**D3: THE HEMLOCK WOOLLY ADELGID: A TINY PEST**  
**Stephen Laskowski**



This program will introduce you to HWA, signs and symptoms of infestation, and the ecological consequences of hemlock loss. Eastern Hemlocks are one of Pennsylvania's most important trees, providing year-round shade for cold water streams, wildlife habitat, and a defining character of our forests. Pennsylvania faces a serious threat from the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA) – a small invasive insect that causes tree decline and mortality.

Stephen Laskowski is a Service Forester with Pennsylvania DCNR Bureau of Forestry in Erie County. He offers information and advice to private landowners and managers of rural and community forests in the practice of sustainable forest management. He has a BS in Forest Management from Penn State University and 14 years of horticultural experience. A life-long resident of Erie County, he resides in Waterford, PA, with his wife, four children, and a chocolate lab.

# TRASH TO TREASURE at the CONVENTION

Chair Carol McConnell, Uwchlan Garden Club, I

## MystERIE by the Bay -- "A Boat for Your Book"

Lake Erie often offers a peaceful, sometimes mysterious, beautiful setting—so when the opportunity arises, hop on a boat, relax, and make the most of the day. Bring along a great book—perhaps a mystery set in a garden—and enjoy some quiet reading time on the water.

### Your Challenge:

Build a boat using all types of recycled/repurposed materials, dried flowers, glass, stones, wood or metal.

### Specifications:

Dimensions: No larger than 15" by 15" mounting surface. Height no taller than 18".

Weight: Less than 20 pounds including mounting surface.

Materials: Any type of repurposed material (plastic, wood, metal, glass and stone) may be used. As much as 20% of the design may be paint and glue, and remember to use dried flowers, not fresh.

Each entry should include a 3" x 5" card.

Front: Title of entry and list of materials.

Back: District, Garden Club, designer(s) name(s), and mailing address.

Entry may be the work of more than one person.

### Only One Entry from Each District

Selection method is determined by the District.

District entries must be submitted at the convention by Sunday, April 26, from 1-5 p.m. Judging is at 5:15 p.m.

Not to be judged under the same standards as a flower show.

### SCALE OF POINTS FOR JUDGING

Conformance (height, width, weight) .....	20 points
Artistic Concept (creative use of recycled materials) ...	50 points
Expression (interpretation of theme) .....	20 points
Execution (workmanship) .....	10 points
<b>TOTAL .....</b>	<b>100 points</b>



## Sprouts and Seedlings

The Sprouts and Seedlings youth activity is really growing! Nine Garden Clubs are signed on and aligned with a youth group. Lots of fun ideas and projects are happening or are being planned.

Fall into winter is a peaceful time in a garden and in most of our lives after the holidays. This is a time for reflection on what worked well over the last seasons and a time to plan what you'd like to try with your young gardeners in the new year. Some ideas include: pollinator plants, small garden area or raised bed, combination of vegetables and flowers in pots or fabric containers. Involving our youth creates opportunity and education for the next generation of gardeners.

For those clubs that want to join in on the fun, an application form is available at [pagardenclubs.org](http://pagardenclubs.org) > FORMS LIBRARY > Sprouts and Seedlings Registration Form 7-6-25 (pdf). Submit your form and \$2 to register. Send to the address listed on the application. You will receive \$50 from GCFP as a start up for your youth program, along with guidance and suggestions on how to get started.

Future reports will include progress and activities from the Sprouts and Seedlings groups and ideas for future activities, as well as available resources.

If your Garden Club is already on board, please send me something in writing that I can share with other clubs.

Thank you for educating and mentoring our PA Youth Gardeners.

Cheryl Brumbaugh,

Sprouts and Seedlings Chair

[smsschoolgarden@gmail.com](mailto:smsschoolgarden@gmail.com)



## NEW PROGRAM RESOURCE

Program Resource Reporting is underway and has been going well. Several clubs are sending me their excellent program recommendations via email. I'm in the process of compiling them into the existing Excel spreadsheet. Once it is complete, I will send it to Vina, our webmaster, so it can be shared on the website for all members to view. This document is password-protected, so you will need to enter our GCFP password to view the document.

Reminder to all club presidents to share their programs with me so that they will be included in the updated 2026 Program Resource. This is a wonderful opportunity for program chairs at all our clubs to view the document and gain program ideas for the new year. The original program resource document has also been updated to include GCFP members who are also speakers.

Thank you to the GCFP Leadership team, Keystone Gardener, KG Online, Vina, and all the Club presidents for spreading the word about this valuable resource.

Diane Quinn

GCFP Program Chair

An exceptional way to honor a special person – for a retiring Club officer, a birthday, anniversary, holiday gift or just you



**New Life Membership**



**CAR – SGC Life Membership**

**Pat Wolanski, Norristown Garden Club, District XI**

Also available, GCFP Life Membership and NGC Life Membership  
Chair: Jan Olsen, District IV



## PENNSYLVANIA KNOWS HOW TO PARTY!

by Nancy Cuttic, PA Garden Party Chair

GCFP proudly presents President Pat Wolanski's PA Garden Party Statewide Tour scheduled for Saturdays June 20 and June 27, 2026. Fifteen Host Clubs will showcase 90 gardens celebrating the unique beauty and rich history of our "gemstone" state.

### Host Garden Clubs

**District I:** Bala Cynwyd/Villanova, Spade and Trowel, Springfield, Uwchlan

**District IV:** Penn-Cumberland, Town and Country of Lancaster

**District VII:** Burrellton/Pucketos

**District VIII:** Wildflower

**District X:** Great Meadows, Martha Washington

**District XI:** Countryside Gardeners, Norristown, Old York Road

### Tickets

- \$25 includes a two-day pass to all gardens plus a full-color tour book that will be mailed
- The tour book serves as the entry ticket
- On sale from March 1 – June 6, 2026, via check or credit card at [pagardenclubs.org](http://pagardenclubs.org)
- After June 6: Tickets will be available the day of the tour for \$30.

To save on postage costs and resources, please consider purchasing your tickets at the GCFP Convention in Erie.

There will be a table for ticket sales at MystERIE by the Bay from April 28 – 30.

All information about the PA statewide garden tour is available on the GCFP website ([pagardens.org](http://pagardens.org)) under the GCFP 2026 Garden Party. Visit gardens on both days and cross county lines to keep the party going!



## CELEBRATING AMERICA'S 250<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY with THEME GARDENS

Fall is not only a time for planting but also a time to plan next year's garden. To celebrate our 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary, consider a garden with a specific theme.

A. Red, White, and Blue Garden: red celosia with blue and white ageratum or blue and white salvia with red geranium

B. A Sensory Garden: Select plants that stimulate our senses

Sight – Brightly colored flowers – marigolds, petunias, zinnias, sunflowers

Smell – Fragrant plants, many herbs – lavender, mints, thyme, etc.

Touch – Plants with a distinct feel – lambs ears, ferns, yarrow, sage

Sound – Plants that rustle and move – grasses, seed pods

Taste – Edible plants – herbs, nasturtiums, pansies

In addition to these theme gardens, consider a pollinator garden or a children's garden. Let your imagination guide you in planning and planting a theme garden.

Marge Eberz, Co-chair of Community Theme Gardens

## GCFP READS – Share Your Stories and Ideas!

As we turn the page into a new year, let's keep our statewide reading momentum growing! The **GCFP READS** initiative is all about inspiring our members to explore books and activities that deepen our appreciation for gardening, nature, and the environment.

Now we'd love to hear from **you**, your **club**, and your **district**!

Please share:

- **Book Recommendations** – your favorite gardening, environmental, or nature titles
- **Club and Youth Activities** – how you're connecting reading with nature
- **Book Clubs** – titles your members are reading and discussing
- **Photos** – show us your readers and events in action!

Our goal is to gather and showcase these ideas on the **GCFP website**, so members across the state can learn from and celebrate each other's efforts.

**Send your submissions to [sharonrichardson22@gmail.com](mailto:sharonrichardson22@gmail.com) by March 1st to be included, and all who participate will be recognized at the April GCFP Convention!**

Let's make 2025 a year of reading, sharing, and growing together through **GCFP READS!**



# GCFP HEALING ART PROGRAM

Barbara Campbell, Parkland Garden Club, II/III

**Healing Art is part of President Wolanski's Seeds of Service Award**

Donate nature-inspired original artwork or photography in the name of the Garden Club Federation of Pennsylvania to medical facilities or schools to provide comfort to patients or visitors.

An art donation would be a meaningful and thoughtful gesture, aligning beautifully with the Federation's focus on Celebrating Nature.

It could serve as both a gift to the community and a reflection of the Federation's values, reinforcing the idea of gardens as places of healing and growth.

Possible Art Donations -- Minimum size 12" x 16" or larger:

1. framing and donating personal photographs of gardens, flowers, or any other nature scenes.
2. creating and donating nature-inspired original artwork, paintings, pressed flower art, or illustrations.



A label will be provided to you to include with your donation.



Contact Barbara Campbell  
(barbarac45@aol.com) for more information  
about how to donate.

NOTE: Anyone donating personal photographs or original artwork must submit a Proprietary Release Form on the GCFP website under Forms Library > scroll down > Release of Information.

If artwork is not a personal original, the label will note that it is donated by the club.

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Return this form to  
Barbara Campbell, 1139 Hillview Dr., Allentown, PA 18103  
barbarac45@aol.com

Name of Person Donating Art \_\_\_\_\_

Club \_\_\_\_\_ Is Artwork a Personal Original? \_\_\_\_\_

Facility Receiving Donation \_\_\_\_\_

**PLEASE PROVIDE A CLEAR, STRAIGHT-ON PHOTO OF YOUR ARTWORK  
(digital only)**





# SAVE THE DATE!

## GCFP TRI-REFRESHER

September 13-14, 2026

Brandywine Valley, Pennsylvania

Get ready for a refreshing garden adventure  
in one of the most beautiful  
corners of our state!

This exciting two-day event will feature  
three premier attractions as part of the  
official Tri-Refresher, including a visit  
to the spectacular Longwood Gardens.

### Make it a getaway!

The Brandywine Valley boasts 12 enchanting  
gardens and cultural treasures  
perfect for planning a mini-vacation  
around your Tri-Refresher experience.  
Watch for registration in the coming year.



You are invited to honor someone  
with a donation to the GCFP  
Book of Recognition

A donation form can be found on  
the GCFP website  
[www.pagardenclubs.org](http://www.pagardenclubs.org)  
Under "More" then "Form Library"





Do you have a sharp eye for color, creativity and design?

Are you passionate about flowers and/or plants?

Then it's time to step into the spotlight as a Flower Show Judge!

#### Why Become a Judge?

Learn the art of floral judging

Sharpen your observation and design skills

Help promote Floral Design creativity and Horticulture

Inspire young gardeners, artists and your club members

#### Who Can Attend?

GCFP Garden Club members

Anyone who loves flowers

#### What You Will Learn

Floral Design Principles and Elements

Judging standards and criteria

How to give positive, constructive feedback

Point scoring and more

No prior experience needed! You will receive training from experienced instructors of the National Garden Club, Inc., along with hands-on practice. Grow your skills and cultivate confidence.

Sign up today and join us at the next:

Flower Show School Course III

13 – 15 April 2026

Gettysburg, PA

The Course III brochure can be found on the GCFP website  
[www.pagardenclubs.org](http://www.pagardenclubs.org)