

## Installation Acceptance Speech

May 29, 2011

JW Marriott Hotel, Washington, DC

Thank you, Barbara, for a lovely installation ceremony. Deen, Lois and Kitty, I appreciate your participation and friendship and respect each of you, along with Barbara and Renee, for the excellent leadership you've provided for National Garden Clubs. Renee, you've been most helpful, keeping me informed on important issues, providing many laughs and going out of your way to ensure a smooth transition. Unlike outgoing US Presidents, you will not leave Washington in Air Force I or II and head back to your Texas ranch, as you have graciously agreed to serve as Permanent Home and Endowment Director, and we are grateful.

With me this evening are eleven family members, whom I'd like you to meet. At the top of the list is my husband Frank, the smartest person I know and my best friend. Frank's sister Dorothy is here from Connecticut. Our daughter Karen Baldwin and her husband Ed traveled from Rhode Island with Haley and John. Our son Keith and his wife Sara have come from Cape Cod, Massachusetts with Kevin, Heather and William.

Several fellow 1997-1999 NGC State Presidents are present too: Debbie Hinchey (AK), Elva Davidson (DE); Sandra Ford (ID), Gerry Ford (IL), Jean Moran (MI); Barbara Mikkelson (MN), Lee Pearn (NV), Mary Ann Moreno (NM), Jeanne Nelson (NY), Phoebe Kirkman (NC), Judy Vehse, (PA) and Barbara Wesley (WI). At the conclusion of the 1997 Convention, State Presidents flew to Washington for the launching of Babs Barnette's and Deen's project, a Butterfly Garden within the National Garden at the US Botanic Garden. Thank you, Deen and artist Lynwood Hall for so beautifully portraying the Butterfly Garden as a backdrop for this occasion.

As most of you know, the path that leads one to this position is a long one. I became a member of NGC's Executive Committee in 2001, representing the Central Atlantic Region as its Director. Ten years later, I stand here as your 42<sup>nd</sup> President, most appreciative of the honor and challenges you have bestowed upon me this evening. With your help, I look forward to a productive and enjoyable two years as we promote the theme "NGC: Proudly Serving our Members and Communities".

Just as the path to this position was a long one, so was the path to becoming a member of my local Tanta-Cove Garden Club. After several years on a waiting list, I was finally inducted, thanks to my sponsor Irene Robb, who gave up her garden club membership to pursue historic preservation and writing interests. Irene now lives in Delaware, and had

hoped to be with us tonight. Who knows-without her action, I might have become a low handicap golfer, rather than an NGC officer.

Over the years, membership in Tanta-Cove Garden Club has been a source of learning, friendships, pride and fun. I greatly appreciate the support of club members, especially Poss Tarpley, who ably produced a revised NGC 2011-2013 Directory, a feat which took many months and endless email address changes to complete. Members of Fergie's Gardeners, my newer, more casual evening garden club have been supportive too, and are responsible for one of the workshops held this week. Members of Fergie's Gardeners all belong to the Alice Ferguson Foundation, which supports the concept of "No child Left Inside" with its unusual classroom-a working organic farm, wetlands, woodlands, gardens and the Potomac River. Other local support has come from bridge and Swinger (as in golf) friends.

The spark that ignited my venture beyond a local garden club came when a Landscape Design Consultant (then a Critic) from Tanta-Cove, invited me to help her judge my county's Beautification Contest. Hearing her apply the principles of design to gardens piqued my interest. That next spring Landscape Design School was part of my agenda and the road to 5 star status was paved. Again, just one person reaching out to another had a lasting influence.

At the state level, National Capital Area Garden Clubs has given me leadership training, learning opportunities and life-long friends. I thank all of our members for their encouragement through the years. Although the concept of a 51<sup>st</sup> State Garden Club is confusing to many of you, there is a simple explanation for its existence. In the early fifties when what is now National Capital Area Garden Clubs was formed, a decision was made to base the boundary jurisdictions on the Washington, DC phone book. Back then, the surrounding suburbs were included in that phone book.

Two years ago in her acceptance speech, Renee noted that we live in difficult times. We still live in difficult times- and thus, the theme "NGC Serving our Members and Communities" has been chosen. If we are to succeed as an organization, our members must feel that we provide them with value in return for their dues and support. Regions without prior non-profit IRS status will now file their 990 forms through National Garden Clubs. We will help State Garden Clubs facilitate IRS compliance for their local clubs. We will also continue to simplify and streamline the methods by which we maintain school records and apply for awards. Our website team will update educational material provided by our NGC committee members on a monthly basis. The new professionally produced PR video, available to local clubs, districts, states and regions, will showcase the merits of our organization. As always, our Executive Director Michelle Smith and Headquarters staff

members Michelle Chapman, Katie Roth, Kathy Romine, Bill Trapp and Teri Virga will do their very best to serve our members.

A campaign will be relaunched to have *Keeping in Touch* electronically reach local garden club members, not just club presidents; a buddy system will be encouraged at the local club level to give those without email hard copies. Providing a means for local club members to see and appreciate the big picture is a much needed service in our attempt to grow and cultivate new leaders. *Keeping in Touch* will also be used to encourage subscriptions to our superb, information packed periodical *The National Gardener*, edited by Susan Davidson, which NGC subsidizes for the benefit of its readers.

To have a viable existence, every garden club must serve its community in addition to serving its members. The 2011-2013 initiative Plantings for Public and Special Places is intentionally broad so that existing projects can be enlarged, past projects can be refurbished and new projects can be created. There are 3 suggested categories for participation, all of which can be suited to the preferences, financial resources and energy levels of club members. These categories are: Gardens with Edibles, Container Gardens and Trees and Shrubs. All NGC clubs and International Affiliates are invited to participate and to document projects with a before and after digital photograph and the completion of an interactive form on our website.

Several of our successful continuing outreach projects, such as Blue Star Memorial Markers, Habitat for Humanity Gardens, Penny Pines, Plant it Pink, and Sage and Roses, dovetail nicely with Plantings for Public and Special Places.

Protecting Aquatic Ecosystems, our environmental emphasis this term, encourages US and IA clubs at all levels to adopt and plan strategies to safeguard at least one area aquatic ecosystem. Participation can be through educational presentations for both adults and youth, partnering with other organizations to be more pro-active, sponsoring trash pick-ups, establishing rain gardens or creating buffer zones by planting trees and shrubs. Again, documentation will be through a simple interactive reporting form.

Your Recent NGC Presidents and Vice-Presidents made a decision to work as team to provide continuity from one administration to another. Thus, Photo Archiving of Accomplishments was launched during the second half of the 2009-2011 administration and will continue, enabling clubs and International Affiliates to establish visual records and sharing of their achievements through a flick'r© account. The adage that a picture is worth a thousand words certainly applies to much of what we accomplish.

Our focus on youth will continue to be emphasized, as it is fond memories of childhood experiences that are responsible for many of us being so involved with National Garden Clubs today. My personal experiences include a lucid babbling brook, hundreds of pink

lady slippers, as well as skunk cabbage each spring, and a father who hybridized rhododendrons as a hobby and spoke of plants with their Latin names. My husband's family, which was located in Queens, New York, had a 2 ½ acre "farm" in Greenlawn, 26 miles away. His memories include vegetable and fruit gardening and his mother's roses. Today, he is Farmer Frank-and prunes our rose bushes. Please make personal time to provide some fond childhood gardening memories for the next generation. Your influence may be greater than you ever imagined.

Our Smokey Bear/Woody Owl Poster Contest will continue, as will our High School Essay Contest and environmentally focused Youth Sculpture Contest. The Poetry Contest has a new category, which enables a grandparent to use her/his garden club as the sponsoring garden club for a grandchild's poem. For those of us with grandchildren living in faraway places, this is a welcome addition.

Difficult times also create opportunities for new ways of thinking, especially when it comes to membership. Many of today's potential new members have a different mindset concerning volunteer organizations because careers are, or have been, a priority. Those in the work force, who may be raising a family too, are time-strapped. To attract them as members, we must make it easy for them to participate by having short education-packed meetings at convenient times. Perhaps we can also find a way to use the internet for interactive lunch time meetings or provide CDs which can be listened to during commutes. The 7-10,000 Baby Boomers retiring each day are potential assets to our organization and we need to reach out to them. These are talented, experienced people who can make a great contribution to their communities as garden clubs provide them organized ways to do so. With the help of the NGC Membership Committee, I'm asking that each club, district, state and region adopt a multi-year plan with step by step actions and time-specific objectives for increasing our numbers. As we all know, "A goal without a plan is simply a wish."

Vita-Sackville-West stated that, "The most noteworthy thing about gardeners is that they are always optimistic, always enterprising, and never satisfied. They always look forward to doing better than they have ever done before." Please join me with this inspirational outlook as together we Proudly Serve our Members and Communities. Thank you.

