

WEED IT & REAP

Old West End's community park for a quarter century

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Architectural artifacts salvaged from neighborhood homes and businesses adorn a bed at the Agnes Reynolds Jackson Arboretum.

The Blade seeks gardeners for Weed It & Reap who are as varied as what they grow and who dig in gardens large, small, or with unusual content. In a sentence, tell us what is unique about you or your garden. Contact Tahree Lane at tlane@theblade.com or 419-724-6075.

Name: The Agnes Reynolds Jackson Arboretum, lovingly tended for 25 years by people living in Toledo's Historic Old West End.

Garden specs: Two acres of verdant parkland, bounded by Delaware, Robinwood, and Glenwood avenues.

When did you start gardening? In 1986, on the site of the original St. Luke's Hospital. The old hospital had been bulldozed but much of the foundation remained in ruins. Three determined neighbors (David Neuendorff, Barb Brundage, and Peggy O'Neil), spent several years combatting what had become an eyesore and eventually were able to get the city property donated to the Old West End Association and the Women of the Old West End. Another resident, Robert Jackson, offered funding to launch the project, asking that the park be named in memory of his wife, Agnes, who loved gardening. We had a commercial-grade sewer system and an irrigation system built, had the land graded, added tons of topsoil, laid paths with crushed gravel. Neighbor Liz Katabian designed the landscape. A group formed a committee to oversee the property, and we meet monthly.

What do you grow? Among our trees are lace leaf weeping Japanese maple, Lavelle hawthorne, June Bride linden, London plane tree, star magnolia, white and pink dogwoods, and a pink hydrangea tree. Our shrubs include early amethyst beautyberry, burning bush, red twig dogwood, spirea, hydrangea, juniper, peony, and holly.

In addition, there are three main beds. The sunniest has daylilies, chrysanthemums, ornamental grasses, and annuals, and we redesign it every year. Then there's the sculpture gardens, outlined with red geraniums and containing architectural artifacts from the Old West End: cornice pieces that fell off the Bartley Mansion on Collingwood Blvd.; a curved header-stone from the long gone State Theater; two spires donated when Rosary Cathedral was being renovated, and a sandstone walk, given by one neighbor and installed by another. Our third is a shade garden of hostas, ferns, dicentra (bleeding heart), heuchera, astilbe, and impatiens.

Favorite plant: Our trees and shrubs have been gifts, planted in honor or memory of someone. A peaceful stand of river birch trees were given in memory of



Judy Winder and Mike Wagner weed a garden bed at the Agnes Jackson Arboretum in the Old West End. May 21 is the monthly work day for volunteers who tend to this two-acre park.

Murray Wightman. A row of crab apples along one of the paths was a gift from the nurses of St. Luke. A family that dedicated a tree to a loved one come out and decorate it at Christmas, Easter, and other occasions. An ornamental bench is dedicated to Elston and Marietta Hubbard, who were devoted to our neighborhood. And when we won the city's Urban Landscape Award in 2000, we received an American yellowwood tree.

A gardening tip: To create an effective space of this size, it's imperative to start out with a plan. And we've seen the value of mixing textures such as the rough look of large gray-green hostas with lighter, airier plants such as ferns, tiarella, and dicentra.

Hours spent gardening: About a dozen of us each pitch in three to 12 hours a month from April to October. We take turns providing breakfast on a Saturday morning, then attack a list of projects. At other times, people weed. And if the grass gets ragged between lawn-service visits, one neighbor mows it. Many hands make light work!

Annual expenses: \$6,800 for annuals, tree trimming, water, electricity, lawn care, and taxes. We raise money in two ways: by selling a truckload of about 150 flats to neighbors every May, and in December, we bake more than 5,000 cookies that are sold during the Tours de Noel home tours.

Challenges: We want to make this a destination for all Old West End residents. Our free outdoor jazz and blues concerts have been a big hit and we recently decided to build a 16-foot-diameter gazebo. People bring food, beverages, children, and dogs. Our first concert will be at 6 p.m. June 19 with Kentucky Chrome, and other concerts will be at 6 p.m. July 17, Aug. 21, and Sept. 11, when we'll have a festival to celebrate the arboretum's 25th anniversary.

We're proud of our volunteers who get their hands dirty keeping the park looking its best, and our board. Led by Kent Illenden, it includes David Clawson, Tami Ernst, Jason Finn, Marlon Harris, Tom Kornacki, Dennis Lange, Susan Postal, Jack Rogers, Dan Schmitt, Mike Wagner, and Judy Winder.

What we've learned gardening: That neighbors working together can create a park of such peace and quiet for the whole community amidst all the hustle and bustle of the city.

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