

History of St. John's Garden Tour

Our first Garden Tour was organized in 1983 by a small group of our church women sharing their own gardens. After visiting a garden tour in Mendocino, Maribeth Growden had the inspiration and drive to bring the idea to Chico and our church. Maribeth Growden was joined by Carol Brooks, Leona Fisher, Vicky Becker, Betsy Blackstock, Eloise McMath and Robbie Libby. Other names that may be less familiar to some are Kay Rush, Jane Meierdericks, Mary Ann Schols and Dottie Fiorini. These and many other women too numerous to name took the challenge that started the 35-year tradition.

A big factor in our success has been the range and quality of gardens we have been privileged to showcase. Garden selection is a year-round task requiring constant checking in with homeowners who may commit in the fall but occasionally need to drop out later that year. The garden selection has been made by the Chair. In the earlier days the chair was assisted by Besty Blackstock and Carol Brooks. However, for the last 10 years, Becky Thompson has carried the responsibility keeping records year by year of available homeowners. Many thanks to you, Becky, for this job that never ended.

And speaking of Becky, somewhere around 1998, Becky started the Timeline! Each committee was asked to write all the tasks of their work into a timeline starting the fall before GT. We experienced year after year great improvements in our organization thanks to the Timeline.

Lunches initially consisted of tea sandwiches. Then for at least 20 years, members of the congregation and the Garden Tour committee made salads in their own homes, assembling them in the little kitchen off St David's hall, the room we now call the Garden Tour storage room. Later with funds earned from Garden Tour we were able to build a bigger kitchen on the other side of St David's Hall. As our attendance grew, we could no longer ask our members to make so much salad. So we started preparing the salad with our own kitchen crew. Since the kitchen in St David's was too small, we used other church kitchens for several years and rented the Masonic center kitchen for several years. Then in 2014 we at last had our own beautiful kitchen in the PLC which transformed the job of the food committee!

Cookies have always been baked by members of the congregation. For many years, cookie selection was made after a cookie tasting at the January Garden Tour meeting where members of the committee and congregation offered samples and recipes. Later cookie selection became a more pragmatic decision choosing ones based on how easy they were to make, and how they would hold up in the transporting and serving.

Seating for our guests was always a huge challenge for many years. The table arrangements went through many stages. Initially we served our guests on tables on the lawn area between the 2

classroom wings. Rain frequently threatened so other solutions were sought. First, we transitioned to St. David's Hall. But with greater success and need for more seating, we took on the grueling task of completely emptying the sanctuary of all pews and chairs on the Sunday before Garden Tour, converting our space into a lovely tea room, with tables and chairs for 235 people. Our setting was complete with a garden vignette on the altar, raffle items and boutique items in the back of the sanctuary along with many plants in the entry area, also known as the wind tunnel. It was lovely but oh so much work. Ken Edson was the master mind behind the staging of all the steps. First all our tables and chairs had to be moved out from storage in St. David's hall and staged on the lawn. Then the pews and pew chairs were moved from the sanctuary into the back side of St. David's. Then the tables and chairs were set up in a tight pattern to accommodate 235 people in the church. That whole process was reversed on Saturday afternoon to be ready for worship on Sunday morning!

Here's where we came to seek outside help in the form of Mexico mission youth and those associated with Youth and Family. The healthy backs and arms of our younger population made this possible though many of our older members continued lifting and moving pews far too long. You can only appreciate our relief and gratitude to have such a beautiful PLC to host our Garden Tour guests that does not require any of that former heavy lifting! Fulfilling all the volunteer needs of Garden Tour has become an increasingly difficult task that has caused us to look beyond our immediate church membership. A lovely partnership brought us much needed help in the form of the Dancing Ballerinas. The Chico Ballet company dancers served for several years as our wait staff clearing and resetting tables.

Always looking for ways to grow our proceeds, in our first Boutiques we sold only items we made or decorated like stenciled garden hats and gloves. Later plants were purchased for resale from the Chico State spring horticultural sale and later from several local wholesale nurseries. Donated plants from many parishioners' gardens were also sold.

Speaking of proceeds, we owe a big thank you to Quadco Printing for their many years of underwriting our printing needs and supporting us in many other ways. The Quadco truck helped transport plants and lots of other supplies. Dick and Sherry Braak were instrumental in so many ways to the success of Garden Tour.

How did we decide where to allocate our proceeds? Initially proceeds to GT went to pay for expenses for the kitchen and hospitality like coffee hour. Garden Tour funds usually paid for any kitchen improvements in the St David's hall. But all the while, our wise leaders wanted to set aside funds to eventually, one day, help pay for the equipment in our new kitchen. When it came time to buy equipment for the PLC kitchen, over \$20,000 had been saved with which to purchase the best commercial kitchen equipment.

So how have we done in terms of fundraising? Here's some fun facts...

... just since the year 2000 we have sold 17,061 tickets and served 14,527 lunches.

... Over the last 35 years we have raised a total of \$491,000.

In the last 20 years, we became more focused on Outreach and supporting outside organizations that reflect our values. As we became more successful, anywhere between 10 to 30% of our profits were allocated to outreach, both to outside groups and to our own Outreach ministry. In the fall of every year, the ECW would decide what outside organizations would receive a portion of proceeds from GT. The allocation of funds to our own church projects was been decided at the ECW general meeting in May after the GT. Beside supporting our own Outreach, funds also were used to support our music programs, landscaping projects and ongoing facilities improvements.

The lasting impression every Garden Tour leaves us with is the fellowship it brings to our church, the full participation of all our members, all working towards the cause of raising funds for our outreach and church operations.

We are looking at ways to update our event going forward. Please prayerfully consider our future and join us in the coming conversations.

On behalf of our entire Garden Tour committee, we give deep thanks to our committed congregation for supporting this increasingly ambitious endeavor. Thanks to Garden Tour, we have become a stronger community of faith.