

**HISTORY OF THE ARVADA GARDENERS  
AND THE ARVADA COMMUNITY GARDEN**

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The Arvada Gardeners will be celebrating their 50th anniversary in 2017. They began as an all men's club with a children's garden and have grown to become a family club with three community gardens and a community partner with other organizations in the city.

The Arvada Men's Garden Club was organized on February 24, 1967. The first officers included Don Glittenberg as President, Fred Vetting as Vice President, Chuck Barton as Secretary and Don Henke as Treasurer. They held their first meetings at Moore Realty Community Room at 8833 Ralston Road.

After several months of planning, the club began an ambitious project--to create a Children's Garden--in the spring of 1969. The project was designed to teach gardening skills to young people and at the same time to transform a vacant lot into a beautiful garden spot for the entire community to enjoy. The club members were available Monday and Wednesday evenings and Saturday mornings to provide guidance to the young gardeners and their parents.

The first Children's Garden was about an acre in size, fences all around and bordered by petunias. It was located in an empty lot just south of the Pizza Hut on the corner of Field Street and Ralston Road. The land and water were donated by member Frank Veltrie and other donations were solicited from various merchants by Charlie Neale and Forrest Bruere.

The first year there were 88 garden plots sold to boys and girls between eight and fourteen years old and a few more in shaded areas were planted with corn. Each of the available 117 plots measured twelve feet by twenty feet and was marked with special white corner stakes. The plots cost one dollar each to cover expenses and ensure the child's continued interest through harvest time. The culminating events that year included a parade float and entries in the vegetable contest at the Arvada Harvest Festival in September.

Mayor Richard Bartlett and the Arvada City Council gave special recognition to the members of the Arvada's Men's Garden Club and to Frank Veltrie for contributions toward the success of the Children's Community Garden Project. The mayor called it one of the outstanding projects which have been created for young citizens.



### **MEN'S GARDEN CLUB 1969**

These men and forty-two other members of the Arvada Men's Garden Club converted a local vacant lot into a children's community garden. Left to right are Harold Neiswanger, vice president; Charles Neale, president and Vic Kear, treasurer.

In 1972 the Arvada Men's Garden Club was chartered with the national organization, the Men's Garden Clubs of America (MGCA) and went by the name of the Men's Garden Club of Arvada. The club continued its many activities including, the operation of the Children's Garden, sponsoring poster contests, having a Big Pumpkin Contest, sponsoring the Children's Garden and Flower Show at the Arvada Harvest Festival and trying to make the grandiflora pink petunia the official city flower (it failed).

In the spring of 1975 the community garden was relocated to the old Garrison Street Water Filter Plant Settling Pond which had been drained and vacant for several years. The garden was dedicated the following year in the memory of Forrest Bruere, founding member and

past president. This land on the north side of West 57<sup>th</sup> Ave at Garrison Street is provided by the City of Arvada and is fenced in for safety and security. Water from an adjacent ditch is piped underground to a cistern located near the entrance. An electric pump sends water through an underground piping system to the twenty-eight spigots found throughout the garden. Each spigot is outfitted with a length of garden hose. By 1975 the plot fees had risen to four dollars each but included some seeds and plants provided by the club.

Not much is known about the club in the 1980's, but club presidents included Charles Millard and Dean Iden. The Children's Community Garden was operated continuously during the period but it evolved into a community garden for everyone not just children. The club held their monthly meetings on the third Monday of the month at the North Jeffco Senior Center.

In 1990 the club became more active under the leadership of Earl Truitt. He had the shed moved from the hilltop to its current location, had the concrete ditch filled so flowers could be planted and worked with the city to plant many fruit trees around the sides of the garden. During the early 1990's the national organization began allowing women to be admitted as members and changed the name to the Gardeners of America (GOA). The Arvada club then became the Arvada Gardeners of America.

In 1993 Bill Orchard became president and the first newsletter was published and roles were defined for club officers. In 1994 the first Open House was held in August and the first Christmas Party in December. In 1995 the club won the region Traveling Trophy as the most active club and the National Creativity Award for the idea of an Open House. In 1996 the hours were increased to include Monday, Wednesday and Saturday mornings and Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings. Meetings were changed to the second Monday evening of the month.

In 1997 with Liz Kreis as president, the Arvada Gardeners of America were facing some financial concerns. Due to economic reasons that year, the local membership decided to disavow affiliation with the national group and to become independent. They named themselves the Arvada Gardeners. The bylaws were created and adopted on November 10, 1997. The club continued its many activities and members were asked to donate more time to the operation of the garden. The club also began taking the lead on helping put up and take down the holiday decorations in Olde Town Arvada.

In 1999 CC Plummer became president, followed by Bob Black in 2001 and Bill Bowman in 2002. The club added a porta-potty and the annex in the northeast corner was developed to add nine more plots to help replace the fifteen that were lost by the addition of fire and access lanes. A gazebo was built by students at Warren Tech with materials provided by the club. The gazebo was coordinated by the newsletter editor Ray Atkinson and honored Vic Wulf, charter member and long time treasurer. A second pump was installed along with a second run of underground piping to service the east and annex plots more effectively. In 2000 a TroyBilt rototiller was purchased for use by club members at the garden. A fleet of wheelbarrows, shared tools, and new stakes were added the following year.



### **ANNUAL OPEN HOUSE**

The Arvada Gardeners Annual Open House invites the community to share in the harvest. It includes gate prizes, dishes made from garden harvest, garden tours, put-n-take table, gardening advice and drinks and snacks.

Elmer Nygaard became president for three years beginning in 2003. The following year the club worked with the Arvada Historical Society to plant an Arvada Centennial Vegetable Garden at the Flour Mill site in Olde Town and sponsored a booth at the Centennial Celebration on August 24<sup>th</sup>. The club was also asked to become involved with the renovations of the McIlvoy House in that they will help create and maintain a 19<sup>th</sup> century garden on the grounds.

In 2005 in addition to operating the community garden, the club began creating partnerships with other organizations in the city. In June members helped raise funds for Historic Olde Town Arvada by staffing the Pepsi booth at the Annual Gold Strike Festival. In July, they manned booths in Olde Town for Fresh Flavors, an evening farmer's market and street fair; they also started viewing the annual fireworks display from the west bank. In August, they held their 10<sup>th</sup> annual Open House and had record attendance of people from the community. In September, the club also succeeded in bringing back the four-year-absent vegetable contest, now called the Garden Harvest Fair, to the annual Arvada Harvest Festival. In October, they partnered with the Arvada Festivals Commission and Historic Olde Town Arvada to participate in the Festival of the Scarecrows and hold the first Annual Giant Pumpkin Contest. In December, the club participated in the dedication of a new Children's Christmas Tree on the lawn of McIlvoy House at the Lagniappe activities.

In 2006 Midori Krieger was elected president. During her term the club began a mentoring program for new members, started tracking volunteer hours to the club and the community, had open hours on Sunday mornings, began a partnership with the Arvada Food Bank, put in a new larger east pump and had the first inklings of being in a new urban renewal area and the thoughts of having to relocate.

In 2007 the club elected Ralph Futch as its new president. The club faces the news that the community garden may have to relocate due to Urban Renewal. The club gets a roll off at the end of the season for cleanup, builds a new, safer tool rack, updates their website, allows beehives to be put into the garden, has a float in the Harvest Festival parade and celebrates its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a huge celebration at the annual open house.

In 2008 Ralph continues as president and the club takes on the responsibility of care for the Lutheran Hospice gardens, gets a nice article about them in the Denver Post, begins to apply for grants, limits garden plots to Arvada residents, and has the sign at the garden rebuilt.

In 2009 Janice Mulvany is elected president and served two years. The club wrote a Community Garden Master Plan to be used by other entities to startup community gardens, participated for the last time in decorating Olde Town and helping out at the last Gold Strike Festival, helped the Sunday Olde Town Farmers Market get started up, had Arvada Channel 8 do a story on the community garden, brought in a refrigerator to be used for Arvada Food Bank donations, brought in more beehives to the garden, had its first big lightning strike on a cottonwood tree, continued to publically voice their concern about Urban Renewal and the future of the garden, received a twenty-five hundred dollar grant from the Home and Garden Show and had an early fall freeze that damaged pumps and piping.

In 2010 the club helped out the Lost and Found group with their garden, tested paper for the Sunshine Paper Company, partnered with the Delva Family to setup and operate the Delva Community Garden, started helping the city courts by providing safe opportunities for community service clients, looked at community garden opportunities at Beeman Park, Food Bank, Juchem Ditch and Arvada Central Park, created an informal library of reference books in the shed, updated the website, made plans, installed and dedicated four raised bed gardens near

the front gate, and received a ninety-three hundred and eighty dollar grant from the Home and Garden show for next year.

In 2011 the Arvada Gardeners elected Keith Sorci as president. It was a very trying year as the Arvada Urban Renewal Authority began its Outline Development Plan for the Triangle which includes the community garden. The gardeners went to the Planning Commission meeting and the City Council meeting to try to have the garden removed from the plan. They failed but did bring attention to their plight and succeeded in getting special consideration for the garden. With their Home and Garden Show grant they built four more raised bed garden, a new less-steep garden entry pathway and a hand rail along the old path into the garden. The Delva Garden received a city grant and had a new fence installed and erected a small storage building. They continued to support the Arvada Harvest Festival and had a farm wagon for their parade float this year; their Giant Pumpkin Contest at the Festival of Scarecrows continues to gain popularity. An eagle scout project at the garden provided a gathering place, tool rack and benches near the raised beds and the garden was a popular stop on the Arvada Historical Society Annual Garden Tour. They applied for and received a city grant and had a garage built at the site for storage of equipment in the winter and displays, trainings, workshop and shelter during the growing season. Many members assisted in the design and startup of the new Rose Roots Community Garden at 83<sup>rd</sup> and Alkire in northwest Arvada.

In 2012 Keith Sorci continued at President. He brought on another community garden in partnership with the Andres family. The nine-plot garden was filled and had a successful first year. There were changes to the garden rules to improve access for community gardeners and friends. Work on the new barn continued as electrical power and lighting were installed, pegboard was mounted on the walls and a second storage loft was added. The barbed wire on



the fence enclosing the garden was removed on the street side. The Delva Community Garden made some upgrades with grant moneys: permanent pathways with bricks and crusher fines, plot borders and a spigot at each plot. The club was asked to look at a nearby location as a possible relocation place should the garden need to be moved. A new refrigerator was donated to hold food bank donations which amounted to 1899 pounds of produce. The garden was awarded a grant from the city and built a 9' x 12' greenhouse for growing their own seedlings for the community gardeners. The garden began compliance with new regulations regarding community gardening and beekeeping in the city. The garden is also looking at ways to become a 501(c)3 organization to be in a better position to apply for grants and other funding opportunities.

In 2013 Keith Sorci continued as president. In addition to trying to become their own 501(c)3, the club also looked at re-joining the Gardeners of America to become 501(c)3. They started collecting recipes for a future cookbook, used mail in registration for plots, saw the approval to build a new Walmart near the garden, began composting in earnest complete with pallet bins, had the Delva Garden get a grant to build a shade structure, took part in the first Sustain Arvada Festival and gave away tomato plants, used their new greenhouse to grow transplants for the garden, faced water restrictions and issues with the ditch water and then endured mid September flooding, held the 18<sup>th</sup> annual open house, watched as a Bee Village was built at the community garden and donated 1968 pounds of produce to the Arvada Food Bank. They were awarded a grant from the city and built a shade structure at the north end, a small fenced storage for the garden equipment and materials behind the barn, and a large fenced storage for the community gardener equipment in the northwest corner. They also partnered with A Brighter Community for volunteer assistance at the garden. The club is also looking at ways to increase membership and participation in the community garden.

In 2014 Keith Sorci was re-elected president. The big change this year was a trial to open up the garden for access all year dawn to dusk for renters, results to be evaluated in 2015. The club put in a remote monitoring system so the following items could be read from a smart phone or computer: greenhouse, soil and ambient temperatures, rain fall and ditch water indications. A \$5000 grant from the Home and Garden Show was awarded to the garden to put in additional ADA gardening stations. At the garden a second 3hp pump was installed on the cistern, a gourd growing arbor was erected, donated fruit trees were planted around the perimeter, the community garden reference library grew to over 100 volumes, monthly workdays were added to the activities list, an aeroponic demonstration garden was set up at the entrance, and the 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Open House was hosted in August. The sister Delva garden was selected to be on the annual Arvada Historical Society garden tour. A social committee was formed which scheduled activities during the year: square dance barbecue, fireworks viewing and refreshments, and the annual Christmas party. The city built a Safe Route to School trail along the west border of the garden which really beautified that area. The club continued to seek 501(c)3 designation, took 3<sup>rd</sup> place in the Harvest Festival Parade, had a 1292-pound pumpkin at the Festival of Scarecrows, donated 2068 pounds of produce to the food bank, volunteered to manage a new community garden as part of the Clear Creek Valley Park, and grieved the loss of long time gardener Jack Appelhans. A bench and gathering area were installed near the garden entrance in his honor.

In 2015 Keith Sorci continued as president of the Arvada Gardeners. He appointed an equipment manager to watch over all tools and equipment, created committees for marketing and revising membership, secured over 300 plant donations from local garden centers, got a new shredder for the composting efforts, and had a timer installed on the pumps for better control.

The trial of last year on garden hours was abandoned and the schedule reverted to the previous operation. This will be revisited in 2017. Many new things: had monthly garden classes in the barn which were free and open to the public, Gardeners-in-Charge wore vests on duty, completed the gourd arbor, garden calendar was put on Google, gained a presence at the South Pole, plans continue for the Grippa Garden and the garden was acknowledged as a Certified Wildlife Refuge by the National Wildlife Federation. The garden received a \$1000 grant from Corona Tools for the purchase of ADA tools, a \$300 grant from Kitchen Garden for a presentation supplies and an enclosed bulletin board and work on the ADA planters from the Home and Garden grant last year continued. Photos from the community garden were shown in the new book *Therapeutic Gardens*, the Andres garden was featured on the PBS show *Urban Conversion*, the main and Delva Gardens were part of the Arvada Sustainability Tour. The garden participated in the Pinwheel Garden to help the Ralston House charity, donated 2855 pounds of produce to the food bank, had a successful Open House in spite of being snubbed by the ACGA Convention held the same weekend, enjoyed a new wider sidewalk along the south side of the garden, and had their float win first place in the annual Harvest Festival Parade. Planning has begun for the 50-year celebration in 2017.

In 2016 Keith Sorci continued as president of the Arvada Gardeners. He had over 500 donated bulbs planted along the 57<sup>th</sup> Ave sidewalk, created a marketing committee for the garden that in turn created a new logo, promoted the Monarch Larva Monitoring Project, got beehives to return to the garden, considered adding an orchard to the garden, shortened the meeting agenda, supported the city's HEAL campaign, worked to make the gardeners all members for next year, received confirmation from the city that there were no plans to move the garden, and has agreed to work with the Terrace Park neighborhood to get them plots at the community garden. The

Arvada Gardeners became a 501(c)(3) organization, donated 1640 pounds of fresh produce to the Arvada Community Food Bank, opened the garden seven days per week, updated the website, put their calendar on Google, had the first new member lunch and learn, began having social time before each monthly meeting, changed their designation from club to organization, joined the Arvada Chamber of Commerce, added new strainers and gages to the pump system, continued having free evening gardening classes, had a pinwheel garden, ordered member name badges with the new logo, endured three hail storms, began maintenance of the World War I memorial at the Arvada Visitor Center, received a plaque from the food bank for many years of donating vegetables, partnered with other organizations in the city for Trails Day, Harvest Festival parade and Festival of Scarecrows, hosted a Square Dance and Potluck and fireworks viewing at the garden, awarded the golden shovel award to plot #47 Sally Berriman, allowed the Andres Garden to return to private status, and received a Neighborhood Grant from the city to add a dedicated composting area, install a bike rack, install a vegetable washing station, setup a demonstration and vertical garden, buy some new tools and do some fence beautification to the south and west fences. The organization continues with plans for the Jubilee Celebration next year.

### Bibliography

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Personal diary and records of the club members.