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SPOTLIGHT FEATURED

## A century of beauty

By CONNIE CONNOLLY [cconnolly@chespub.com](mailto:cconnolly@chespub.com) Apr 2, 2017



The current and past presidents of the Talbot County Garden Club gathered for a photo during the organization's centennial celebration on March 22. From left are Peggy Hegwood, Bobbie Brittingham, Trish Reynolds, Mary Griffin, Joan Kittredge, Mary Frances Packard, Pat Lewers, Virginia Sappington, Caroline Benson, Nancy Hickey and Mary Louise Maechling, TCGC's current president.

PHOTO BY LAURA CARNEY

**EASTON** — Dressed in floral prints and spring pastels, nearly 80 ladies entered a milestone celebration beneath a bower of posies decorated with the years 1917 and 2017 emblazoned in gold.

Members of the Talbot County Garden Club were joined by state and regional garden club leaders in a room bedecked with flowers and mementoes from a century of service to this Mid-Shore county already known for its beauty.

The atmosphere was festive as smiling friends mingled, posed for photos and leafed through nine scrapbooks of clippings and photographs displayed for the club's centennial luncheon celebration at the Talbot Country Club on March 22.

"This is fabulous," Caroline Benson, who has been a member for 46 years, said. "This is the best group of people you could ever work with." Benson and fellow member Trish Reynolds coordinated the centennial celebration.

And work they do. Despite their elegant attire at the celebration, these women said they love to get dirt under their manicured nails and do the heavy lifting and digging behind the scenes that have resulted in beautiful landscapes and gardens throughout the county. The club has 101 active, associate and

honorary members.

“It’s such an honor, really, to be president (during the club’s centennial),” said Oxford resident and current TCGC President Mary Louise Maechling, who has been a member since 2004. “It’s something I never imagined in my life.”

The club was recognized as one of the most industrious and successful in the state, and indeed in the country, during its first century.

The club’s mission is “to enrich the natural beauty of the environment by sharing knowledge of gardening, fostering the art of flower arranging, maintaining civic projects, supporting projects that benefit Talbot County and encouraging the conservation of natural resources,” according to the club’s Facebook page.

One of the club’s first major projects was the elimination of billboards along U.S. Route 50. The 14-year effort resulted in the elimination of 21,000 signs and unobstructed views while driving through the county, according to a statement by the club.

“I think it’s incredible,” said Anne Foss of Queenstown. Foss is the District I director of the Federated Garden Clubs of Maryland, representing 11 clubs on the Eastern Shore. “When you look at this (artifact) collection and the impact this club has had, it’s truly extraordinary.”

Beautification projects continue today. To commemorate its centennial, club members planted 13,000 daffodil bulbs at Moton Park along Easton Parkway this past fall. The yellow blooms made their appearance in early March.

Additionally, the club claims credit as the impetus for the annual Maryland House and Garden Pilgrimage. During the past 70 years, the pilgrimage has grown to a nearly statewide event, with the gardens in Talbot County being among the most popular. Proceeds from the pilgrimage have been used for projects throughout the county, including the design and building of the Talbot Historical Society Garden.

Nicki Schwab, president of the Federated Garden Clubs of Maryland in Baltimore, said, “It’s such an amazing celebration. The Talbot club has given back to the community so much for so long.

“The members really demonstrate a true love of gardening and a commitment to a happier and healthier environment,” Schwab said.

Talbot County Garden Club is a member of the Garden Clubs of America (Zone VI) and the Federated Garden Clubs of Maryland District I, which is part of the National Garden Club. There are 13 zones in GCA and five districts in the Federated Garden Clubs of Maryland.

Talbot County Garden Club also has contributed to many other projects around the county during the years. In Easton, the Fountain Garden at Five Corners and the Frances Plate Memorial Children’s Garden at Idlewild Park continue to be maintained by members of the club. The club has been recognized by several national organizations for its work in beautifying Talbot County.

The spring blooms that welcomed the members as they arrived to the centennial event were designed and arranged by club member Christie Hamilton. A floral display designed by former TCGC President Bobbie Brittingham, using a variety of flowers and featuring gardening tools, occupied a table in the reception area. Brittingham began her affiliation with the club when she was around 10 or 11 as a Junior Garden Club member, she said. Her mother was a member of the club, as well.

“I started doing designs a long time ago,” Brittingham said.

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Brittingham continues to work with the Young Gardeners Club, in partnership with the Talbot County Free Library in Easton. One of the young club’s recent projects included planting tulip and daffodil bulbs at the library.

Cordy Tucker leads the committee that designs about 10 projects for the Young Gardeners program. In 2016, the club won the Marguerite Willey Bowl for its gardening projects. The silver bowl is presented to a District I club that promotes one of the state or national objectives of the Federated Garden Clubs of Maryland.

The Young Gardeners are not junior members of the club, but comprise about 15 first- through third-graders, which includes several boys, from Easton and St. Michaels elementary schools and home schools.

Following the welcome reception, TCGC members filed into the banquet room for a luncheon. Maechling provided the introduction by wishing the club a happy birthday.

“Happy birthday, Talbot County Garden Club ... We’re here to celebrate 100 years of volunteerism,” she said.

Dignitaries and past members were recognized and welcomed, and Benson offered a prayer and a “garden meditation” composed by the Rev. Max Coots, which compared friendship and gardening.

After dignitaries and past members were recognized, and after attendees enjoyed a meal, citations from Gov. Larry Hogan; Sen. Addie Eckardt, R-37-Mid-Shore; and Del. Johnny Mautz, R-37B-Talbot, were read to the club. Talbot County Council President Jennifer Williams presented a citation from the council, and Reynolds read Easton Mayor Robert Willey’s citation.

Maechling read a citations from Anne Copenhaver, president of the Garden Club of America, and incoming Zone VI President Didi Petri.

The GCA made a donation to the club’s endowment fund during the luncheon, as well.

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