

The Memory Gardens at Monroe Community Hospital

Background

The Alzheimer's Association, in partnership with Monroe Community Hospital (MCH), a county residential facility, developed the Memory Gardens. The American Society of Landscape Architects was instrumental in the original design of the Gardens as part of their 100 Parks / 100 Years initiative, aimed at renovating green spaces for community life throughout the country. The Alzheimer's Association was selected as one of these nationally recognized gardens with development commencing in April 1999. Over the last eight years the Gardens have benefited hundreds of visitors from throughout the community.

The Gardens feature design elements are meant to address specific individual limitations experienced from Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. The emphasis on healing is to provide a sanctuary that cultivates outdoor experiences and activities that contribute to enhancing the quality of life of those who participate. The Memory Gardens offer a gentle oasis to ease the pain and instill a sense of peace to those suffering from Alzheimer's and their loved ones.

The Gardens are experienced year round, but especially between the months of April and November of each year. Residents of MCH as well as doctors, nurses and staff frequent the Gardens in addition to visitors from the community at large. The Gardens provide both residents and families a place to find peace and healing in quiet and safe outdoor surroundings as well as promoting public awareness regarding Alzheimer's disease and the programs and services of the Alzheimer's Association.

Multiple partnerships have been established to aid in successful building and maintenance of the Gardens. These include local boy scouts, caregivers, garden clubs, individuals with developmental disabilities and community residents. A variety of local businesses have generously donated supplies, plant materials, and time for the upkeep and enhancement of the Gardens.

The Alzheimer's Association has been the recipient of several awards recognizing the significance of the Memory Gardens. In 2004 the organization received the Community Partnership Award from the Mutual of America Foundation for establishing the Memory Gardens through community partnerships with the American Society of Landscape Architects and Monroe Community Hospital. The purpose of this award was to recognize the important contributions that nonprofit organizations, in partnership with public, private and other social sector organizations, make to society.

The many formal and informal partnerships that have been formed since the inception of these Gardens continue to demonstrate the immense value of such partnerships as they relate to the ongoing development and maintenance of the Gardens.

In October 2004, a presentation was made to the International Alzheimer's Congress in Kyoto, Japan regarding the concept, construction and utilization of the Memory Gardens and their intrinsic value to our community.

On September 20, 2007 (World Alzheimer's Eve) a press conference was held to announce the local launch of the Champions Campaign to engage our community to "use their voice". In addition to the campaign announcement we will be having a ceremonial time capsule burial in the Alzheimer's Association Memory Gardens at Monroe Community Hospital. Materials were gathered and included in the time capsule from people with Alzheimer's disease, caregivers, board members, staff and local officials.

Specific Gardens Areas

Circle of Hope

Through the generosity of a grant from the *Rochester Garden Club* this Garden was significantly upgraded in 2004. It consists of a circular brick walkway (60 ft. in diameter), shrubbery, perennials and decorative rocks.

Garden of Valor

This was the first Garden to be completed, and consists of a huge, circular brick compass bordered by the pavilion, Rhododendron and shade gardens, the Rose garden, and teak benches. We gratefully acknowledge the Richard B. Schleyer family for their generosity in making this garden possible.

Garden of Peace

A large serpentine Garden welcomes visitors to a quiet, peaceful section of the Gardens. The perimeter of this Garden is edged with engraved bricks commemorating loved ones. Max and Marian Farash graciously supported the development of this garden.

Volunteers

Since the Garden's inception, hundreds of volunteers assisted in the construction and ongoing maintenance of the 1.5 acre gardens on Hospital grounds. Community participation, collaboration and partnership have been fundamental to our success.

Goals

The features and design elements of the Gardens promote the following goals:

- 1) Increase sensory awareness, strengthen individuals' connection with nature and provide a calming effect for those experiencing Alzheimer's disease, their caregivers as well as the community at large.
- 2) Raise community awareness of the Alzheimer's Association and the programs and services offered.
- 3) Demonstrate and promote the value of community partnerships.

Gardens Features

The very existence of these Gardens, on the easily accessible grounds of a public hospital, have significantly raised the public's awareness of the Alzheimer's Association.

- Sixteen large shade trees
- Bench areas for resting and relaxing (both shade & sun)
- Wide walkways to allow for casual strolling & wheelchairs
- Walls and fences screened by a variety of shrubs and perennials
- Covered Pavilion
- Colored brick to reduce glare
- Garden of Hope circular brick walkway which has a calming effect

Design Elements

- Traffic flow that allows easy access for those in wheelchairs because of wide level walkways, and a large open paved area
- Private areas with teak benches for sharing in a relaxed, quiet outdoor setting
- Perimeter hedge, antique fence, and serpentine wall provide a safe, calming effect that also helps to block noise and distracting elements
- Circular brick path of the "Circle of Hope" Garden permits clients walking without the worry of getting lost
- Plethora of flowers (perennials & annuals) provide interest, contrast and color
- Pavilion, with picnic tables, for eating and shelter from rain and sun
- Shade trees(existing) provide much appreciated cool summertime shade on portions of the walkways and bench areas
- Teak benches & chairs all have arms for easy wheelchair transfers
- Automatic Irrigation keeps the Gardens hydrated throughout the growing months of the year.