

LEESBURG GARDEN CLUB HISTORY

The Leesburg Garden Club was founded in 1915 as a group to read the works of Charles Dickens; Dickens was soon abandoned in favor of plants. Many members lived on farms so emphasis was on vegetables as well as flowers. In 1926, the club became the 14th member of the Garden Club of Virginia.

In 1917, members supplied fresh vegetables to the local hospital from their own gardens and their garden at the hospital. In the early 1940s, the club switched its attention to landscaping at the hospital. Another early project was to help school children plant flowers.

The club's concern led it to work in opposition to the use of billboards. One member, Vinton Pickens, urged the use of zoning to prevent billboards. She attended meetings of the Board of Supervisors until the board agreed to appoint a Planning Commission. Pickens was the Commission's first and longest serving chairman. Through the work of the club, Loudoun County became the first rural county in the country to have a zoning ordinance.

In 1985, the club became embroiled in a conflict with Lyndon LaRouche, an extremist political figure. LaRouche asked for a zoning variance to change the use of his agricultural property. The club joined other citizens in protest and the request was denied. LaRouche targeted those who opposed the variance calling the club members "these clacking busybodies in this Soviet jellyfish front sitting here in Leesburg oozing out their funny little propaganda making nuisances of themselves."

In 1992, Maureen Mercker and June Hambrick, Community Beautification Co-Chairs, began talks with the town about putting up floral hanging baskets. They were successful and the baskets have been put up every year since. The club is a 501(c)(3) organization and has worked with Oatlands Plantation and Dodona Manor in preserving and maintaining these historic properties.

The club gives scholarships for camp and college. In December, members create wreaths and swags to hang on Leesburg's courthouse gates and at other locations. The club monitors the county's sign ordinance.

Members have won statewide awards for their work, including the GCV Massie Medal for saving the Broad Run Bridge and the GCV de Lacy Gray Memorial Medal for Conservation for work to protect the natural resources of the Commonwealth. The club won the GCV Common Wealth Award for donating trees for the Douglass Community Center's "Park for all Ages." Other awards have come to the club for introducing zoning to the county and for horticultural achievement. Recently the club returned to the Douglass Community Center to plant daffodils and build a patio with a bench for visitors. Ten members have won the GCV Horticulture Award of Merit.