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## Garden Club Celebrates 68-Years of Resiliency

BY TERRY LANE AND GEORGE CLARKE

PHOTOS BY TERRY LANE, BY WILL PAGE PHOTOGRAPHY, AND  
BY CISSIE BROOKS, WRIGHTSVILLE BEACH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

While the coronavirus' reach has seemingly affected every part of the planet, there's one patch of earth in Wrightsville Beach that the virus apparently hasn't touched.

And each weekend, some of that earth ends up under the fingernails of the members of the Harbor Island Garden Club (HIGC) who find solace from the virus through regular maintenance of their beloved Harbor Way Gardens.

"The virus hasn't stopped us one bit. We're out there every week pulling weeds and planting," said Kathy Gresham, the newly installed president of the garden club. "It did not curb the resilience of the Harbor Island Garden Club at all"

After recovering from Hurricane Florence in 2018, which decimated much of the landscape at Harbor Way Gardens, club members have remained resilient in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic. It's forced them to delay their in-person meetings, opting instead to assemble the club's leadership through the online meeting app "Zoom."

The Harbor Island Garden Club was established in 1952 for women who lived on Harbor Island, which was not part of Wrightsville Beach at the time. During the 1960's Wrightsville Beach annexed Harbor Island, and the club opened up its member for both women and men living on the beach.



From left, President Kathy Gresham, First Vice President Ashley Miller, Second Vice President Susan Snider, Third Vice President Jeanne Thome, Third Vice President Marianne Scanlon, Fourth Vice President Kim Watters, Fourth Vice President Evan Elmore, Treasurer Beth Golder, Corresponding Secretary Wylene McDonald, Recording Secretary Nan Spainhour. Not pictured, Second Vice President Patti Jacaruso.

On a bright September morning, over 30 club members gathered outside to induct their new officers and to celebrate 68 years of club history amidst the natural splendor of Harbor Way Gardens.

Kathy Gresham was inducted as the club's president along with first vice president Ashley Miller, a HIGC member for the past 13 years. "I've held various other roles in the club, but I really wanted to be there to support Kathy," said Miller.

Pati Jacaruso and Susan Snider were elected second vice presidents. Third vice presidents included Jeanne Thome and Marianne Scanlon, while Kim Watters and Eva Elmore were elected fourth vice presidents and assumed the roles of overseeing the club's junior garden club. Club member Beth Golder, will serve as the treasure, while Nan Spainhour is the recording secretary and Wylene Booth McDonald is the Harbor Island Garden Club's corresponding secretary.

President Kathy Gresham explained that challenges the club is facing due to the Covid-19, prompted HIGC members to establish an overarching theme in 2020 -to honor close to seven decades of club history.

"We'll be honoring the past and the women who were so instrumental in the club and in taking care of the island, especially after hurricanes," Gresham said. "Our seasoned club members appreciate that we're taking a look at where we came from."

In a letter to the club published in its annual yearbook, HIGC president Gresham wrote "the club's history stirs thoughts of the resiliency of the island and the club's members."

"Our resiliency, our leadership, our friendship and our love of coastal treasure weaves a permanent thread through the island's history that promises an enduring beauty," she wrote. "In this unique and challenging time, I hope to honor the Southern strength, charm, elegance and wistfulness of the Harbor Island Garden Club women who preceded us as we look towards a transformational future."

"One thing we can count on," said Gresham, "Every year, the women of the Harbor Island Garden Club show up with inspiration, determination, creativity, enthusiasm, and a renewed appreciation for the beautiful place we are fortunate enough to call home."

This year the HIGC will continue to promote their "Yard of the Month" activities that showcase the gardens of homeowners on Wrightsville Beach and encourage residents to beautify their neighborhoods on the island.

HIGC past president, Elise Running, a senior member, and 2019 "Beauty Spot Award" recipient awarded by the Cape Fear Garden Club is in charge of garden maintenance. Running said the club also runs a junior garden club at Wrightsville Beach Elementary School, called the "Rooty Rascals."

Another important project that club members will undertake is preparing Harbor Way Gardens for the 2021 Azalea Garden Tour. The club had been invited to be on the 2020 tour, but with the emerging coronavirus pandemic lockdowns, the North Carolina Azalea Festival was cancelled. This year, the club will also be adding a new project with its Blue Star Program, which will seek funds to apply and install the first Blue Star Memorial Highway in the Cape Fear area.. The Blue Star Memorials Program honors men and women that serve in the U.S. Armed Forces.



The HIGC welcomed five new members at the Sept. 11th meeting: (L-R) Heide Lee, Lisa Beller, Renee James, Becky Romulus and Debbie Linett.

"I'm looking forward to getting involved in the community," said new member, Heidi Lee. "Wrightsville Beach is a small little town, so it's a great opportunity to get to know each other fairly quickly."

Another of the projects that Heidi is eagerly anticipating working on is the Junior Garden Club Committee, to help fifth grade



Fiona Sakowski, WB Elementary (2018)



Hudson Patterson, WB Elementary (2018)

students at Wrightsville Beach Elementary make colorful and fun signs that educate and encourage visitors to the South End of the beach to avoid disturbing the shorebird nesting colony.

"If you've ever been kayaking behind Wrightsville Beach Elementary and seen all the plants and the birds, it's amazing, but I don't know what half of it is," Heidi said. "I'm really looking forward to learning more about the local habitat and educating others, especially the children. That's very interesting to me." ~

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