

Bill's 25th Anniversary Welcome

Good afternoon members and guests, and welcome to the 25-year celebration of our community garden. My name is Bill Herbst, and I am the current president and one of the founding members of the garden.

It is my pleasure to welcome Mayor Brad West to join us, to enjoy some good food and social banter. In a minute, I will invite Mayor West to say a few words.

I would also like to welcome our special guests, garden co-founder Pippa Van Velzen and past president Pat O'Donohue. And I would be remiss if I did not introduce and acknowledge the good work of our garden committee. So, it is my pleasure to introduce Carmen, Gill, Ethel, Andrea, Jerri, and Denise. I want to thank them for organizing this event and the food that you will be enjoying shortly.

And, I would like to thank the City of Port Coquitlam for their support, from supplying us with water connections, infrastructure, and porta potty service over the years, to supplying us with tables and waste containers for our event today.

At this time, I would like to invite Mayor West to say a few words . . .

[Mayor Brad West delivers best wishes from the City of Port Coquitlam; a summary of his speech can be found on his Facebook page.

. . . Bill resumes speaking:]

About 26 or 27 years ago, three of us got together, Anne Pynenburg and myself from the City along with Pippa Van Velzen, then president of the PoCo Garden Club. We felt that with all the redevelopment happening in the downtown core from single family houses to multi-unit buildings, there was a growing need for these residents to have access to land for growing their own food. We wanted to do something about that.

We researched other successful community gardens and urban farming organizations such as City Farmer, and along with the strong support of then Councillor Mike Thompson, who helped us to navigate the process, we eventually got approval through City Hall.

We created the Port Coquitlam Community Garden Society and then went about the task of building the garden. Through efforts from the City, donations from local businesses and charities, and our new members, we built this garden. Native topsoil from the first Hyde Creek renovation was trucked here for our use instead of being hauled away and disposed of.

Along the way, there have been many interesting characters who have been involved with our garden. Right from the start, we had participation and involvement from this town's "Guerilla Gardener" of the day. His name was Lou Cavalleri, and he spent every day in the garden, helping to build it. His nickname came about due to the fact that Lou would cultivate every square inch of public property that he could access. When the old fire hall was located on Maple St and McAllister, Chief Bailie gave Lou permission to plant the back lane with grape vines. Lou continued planting grape vines along the laneway behind his condo complex and also here in the community garden. Reportedly, he was making wine and I say "reportedly" because he never brought any for us to taste.

Now, I don't know if you all recall how much maintenance that five grape vines were causing us in the front bed, but thanks to Lou, we soon had 107 grape vines growing all over the garden!

Our greatest period of growth was during the years that Pat O'Donohue was our president. During his time, he built the trellis structure, complete with flower baskets with their own irrigation system, a greenhouse, and he rebuilt our shed.

When Pat moved away, the garden began to fall into neglect. As with all things, and especially with gardens, if they are not maintained, they quickly become weedy and overgrown. Our lovely greenhouse was taken over by the homeless, who did not want to share the room with our tomatoes, so we had to remove it. In general, the garden became weed filled and run down.

When I rejoined the committee as President, my goal was to make the garden more manageable and easier to maintain. Our mission is to provide public space where members can grow food. Everything else is supplementary.

I think that we have brought the garden back. We still have more work to do, but I believe that we've done well. We have a strong team and I have no doubt that we will all be back in 25 years to celebrate our 50th anniversary!

Thank you all for coming.

Bill Herbst, President, Port Coquitlam Community Garden Society

August 28, 2021