

Gardens feature: Ted Ensley Gardens

When Dave Bartels started working in Ted Ensley Gardens 27 years ago, the gardens consisted of mulched-in rectangular plots of roses. Today, the gardens, the arboretum and a planned natural area encompass 37.5 acres on the west side of Lake Shawnee.

The Ted Ensley Gardens are considered world class by tourism experts. The gardens alone encompass 9.5 acres and are a daily routine for local walkers, a side stop for bicyclists and runners, a must-see for bus tours and a draw for residents across the state of Kansas.

The gardens are named for long-time parks and recreation director Ted Ensley who has spearheaded efforts to raise money to continually grow and improve the gardens. A concert is held annually in the Pagoda at the gardens to raise money and recruit new volunteers for Friends of Ted Ensley Gardens.

As beautiful as the gardens are, they also hold a number of secrets. Bartels knows them all. He created them.

Anyone who has visited the gardens recognizes the wooden bridge, the pagoda, the gazebo, the pergola and other features. But ...

- Did you know that there is an underground room in the gardens?
- Can you find the stone flowers in the gardens and arboretum?
- Did you know that sections of the gardens and arboretum are composed of old city streets?

Bartels shares these secrets and more in a slide show he offers to the public.

Bartels has studied architecture, horticulture, psychology and public administration. All are evident in the gardens today.

- Each garden plot is carefully planned to mix color and height and to draw a visitor's eye to the next plot. Colors overlap from one plot to another. Green spaces in between serve the same purpose as pauses in music.
- The pergola, by design, directs your view from in between trees and out to the lake. The structure is also designed so that in mid-July, 75 percent of the area beneath it is shaded from the sun. Features such as the trellis in the arboretum beckon visitors down a path.
- A glance through the rafters of the trailhead shelter at the northeast corner of 29th street focuses your view across the lake to the old stone gazebo up on the hillside.
- Next to the newer gazebo in Ted Ensley Gardens, there are two opposing benches. One bench is named "hope" because it faces the sunrise. The other is called "reflection" because it faces the sunset. Both benches are available as naming opportunities for memorial benches.

Now, move to the entrance to the gardens. The wooden bridge, the water feature beneath it, the pagoda, the fountain and the surrounding plantings were a parking lot when Bartels started. Today, Bartels can stand at a specific point on the pathway through the garden and point to where the corner of the parking lot once reached.

A little time with Bartels introduces you to an ornery kid with an artistic eye, big ideas, and just enough understanding of organizational and public governmental process to see things through to fruition.

For example, Bartels first conceived of the garden's Pagoda as a tea house. Although no one believed he could gain the support to build it, Bartels was so sure he could that he designed and had constructed the first of the decorative metal side panels of the pagoda before he had permission to begin the project. Bartels designed all of the decorative panels.

"When I come up with these concepts, some people think I'm deranged," he says, "but, when it comes to fruition, they think it's pretty cool!"

Not to be overlooked is the arboretum across from the gardens. When nearby resident Frank Sabatini offered to donate money to plant some trees on the lake grounds across from his home, Bartels said, "It's close enough to the garden, let's put in an arboretum!"

In the fall of 1993 and spring of 1994, 450 trees were planted. They included 87 varieties, some rare to Kansas. For example, there is a zelkova which will grow 100 feet tall. There are buckeyes, which are not particularly common to Kansas.

Bartels reasoned at the time of building an arboretum, "Let's give people an idea of what their tree will look like [before] they go to buy it at the nursery."

Features within the arboretum include a trellis designed to draw visitors down a pathway to where they will find a stone patio inlaid with lighter and darker stones. The latter actually form the shape of flowers. There are more brick areas salvaged from old city streets. They mark the beginnings and ends of paths that have yet to be finished.

There are more features of the gardens including:

- An ADA compliant composite deck from which visitors in wheelchairs tell Bartels they find great peace sitting on the deck listening to the water run through the garden's water features back into the lake.
- The gardens are designed to appeal to the different senses. Some areas are designed for smell, sight and sound.

Now, Bartels doesn't take credit for beauty of the gardens himself. A hard-working horticulture crew and a bevy of volunteers are responsible for the plantings and day-to-day and season-to-season look of the gardens. These groups helped plant 55,000 tulip bulbs for the 2016 Tulip Time.

There is always more to know because Bartels, his staff and the Friends of Ted Ensley Gardens always have more planned. To request a presentation of Bartels' slide show, call 785-251-2617. To join Friends of Ted Ensley Gardens or to make a donation, visit www.scprfoundation/foteg or call 7850251-2600.

Did you know? 20,000 gallons of water runs through the waterfall at Ted Ensley Gardens. The water runs back into the lake and is then pumped back through the gardens.

Did you know? 45,000 gallons of water per hour is pumped from Lake Shawnee into the Gazebo pond through the water features in Ted Ensley Gardens and back into the lake.

Extra:

Ted Ensley Gardens are open year-round to the public, free of charge, and are wheelchair accessible. Hours are 6 a.m. to 11 p.m. daily.

- Garden tours available upon request.
- The Pergola, Pagoda and Gazebo can be rented for weddings and other special occasions.
- The Garden House is available for rent. It features heating and air-conditioning, a fireplace, caterer's kitchen, restrooms, seating for more than 50 and a shaded deck.

Possible break-out of gardens feature:

- Lead-in paragraph explaining that this is the first of three features on SCP+R's major gardens
- Box on horticulture staff that plants and cares for Ted Ensley Gardens? (Staff deserve recognition but naming them can get political – if you name some, what about the others?)
- Box on Friends of Ted Ensley Gardens, their contribution to the beauty of the gardens, an invitation to join and a list of giving levels
- Box on the SCPR Foundation's role in supporting the gardens and list giving levels for Friends of Ted Ensley Gardens and fundraisers such as the Tulip Festival April 17 and the Concert in the Garden Sept. 18.