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**CAWTHRON MARLBOROUGH
ENVIRONMENT
AWARDS
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JUDGES' REPORT COMMUNITY INNOVATION GARDEN MARLBOROUGH

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INTRODUCTION

Garden Marlborough has been part of the Marlborough events scene for 23 years with its flagship event being the Nelmac (previously Hunter's) Garden Marlborough event in the first week of November each year. This features four days of garden tours, workshops, a garden party and the Fete in Seymour Square.

A charity auction raises funds for Garden Marlborough's Arborbank' Inc which gift funds to gardening and planting community projects and a NMIT horticultural student scholarship.



There are also awards for the 'Best Streets' as well as for edible gardens at schools and seniors gardens in local rest homes.

The event is designed to promote and celebrate gardening and the Marlborough landscape, including appreciation, protection and support of the native environment. Its wide range of activities involves all age groups and many sectors within the local community.

The Garden Marlborough committee has an underlying commitment to gardening as a pathway to educating people to care for biodiversity and the environment, and to engaging with the community to become involved. This is demonstrated through the direct support contributed back to the local community through local plantings and the scholarship.

Garden Marlborough attracts 3,000 participants each year with around 1,500 of these coming from outside the Marlborough region including Australia, US and UK. Therefore, while the event entertains and educates those that attend, it also generates regional economic and social benefits.

GENERAL INFORMATION

For over twenty years Garden Marlborough has sustained interest in Marlborough and attracted people to the region. Tim and Keren were among the founding committee and were recently invited to come back onto the committee as Garden Marlborough was looking to refresh. The organisation has a voluntary committee of 12 and two paid staff. Tim and Keren see the refreshing process as:



- Building on enormous voluntary support that have in the community.
- Reinstating some of activities that inspired neighbourhoods to get involved in gardening – in particular the Best Gardens Awards.
- Supporting landscape and garden initiatives not only through the Garden Marlborough event and other activities such as public plantings.
- Supporting talent with the NMIT scholarship and garden awards.

The committee has a close working relationship with their sponsors, local businesses and voluntary organisations including: Lion Clubs of Marlborough, Rotary Clubs, Marlborough Cancer Society, Marlborough Volunteer Fire Service, Marlborough Kindergartens, Hospice Marlborough, numerous school fundraising groups, Marlborough Marching Band, Marlborough Boys College, Marlborough Scouts, Blenheim Round Table, Vanuatu Seasonal Workers Band and Marlborough Brass Band.

Tim estimates that around 200 volunteers contribute about 3,000 hours each year.

Gardens involved in the Garden Marlborough event are spread over the entire region and provide diverse experiences for participants.

The Garden Marlborough event is the primary activity. The workshops are the main mechanism through which new ideas are explored. The workshops incorporated in Garden Marlborough are often directly concerned with improving soils, maintaining biodiversity, and supporting participation including among children. As Tim says, "it's all about bringing people into the environment and working with it."

Some specific examples of workshops contributing to community involvement in good environmental outcomes include topics such as: Edible/vegetable gardening, composting with worms, planting with NZ natives, Bugz 4 Kidz, bee keeping, foraging, pickling & preserving, solar & alternative energies, wetland restoration, gardening in dry/windy conditions, seed saver, propagation of NZ native plants, Te Rongoa Maori/Maori medicine, natural remedies and resources, native grasses.

In addition to the main Garden Marlborough event there is a strong reciprocal relationship with a number of voluntary groups and community projects in return for contributions to all the background work (assembling registration packs, registration, tour guides and workshop hosts, bus wardens, hospitality, fete management, art auction, catering, car parking, Best Garden Award judging etc.). Every year, profits raised via the charity auction at the



Saturday night garden party are channelled back into local community projects to help achieve the organisation's vision to promote the pleasures and benefits of gardening and to enhance Marlborough's environment. Funding has been used to:

- Assist with establishing an edible garden and shade trees in several local schools
- Provide trees and help plant in public spaces including Shep's Park
- Build a stonewall a local "daffodil dell"
- Donate of outdoor artwork to Wairau Hospital and gardening equipment for patient rehabilitation
- Replant the Wither Hills after the Boxing Day fire
- Restoration plantings at Blind Creek Tua Marina
- Plantings at Marlborough Airport and Art Gallery
- Funding for the Tui to Town project (encouraging tuis back into the suburbs of Marlborough by restoring native plantings)
- Developing the garden at Marlborough Hospice
- Provide a Scholarship to support students studying for Horticulture Level 4 course at the Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology.

Since its inception, the Garden Marlborough event has become a highly regarded and popular event. This long term success has been achieved by the variety of workshop subjects and the diverse garden tours. Also the personal hosting provided to the attendees and speakers and the extensive community support provided by volunteers and sponsors. Many attendees return regularly wanting to see progress and change within the gardens.

The event depends on the keen and volunteer committee that have a wide range of skills, expertise and community connections. They aim to keep a good balance of members and are actively seeking some younger people to join the committee.

They also recognise there has been a significant change in community knowledge and engagement in caring for the environment with many other community based organisations now operating. Tim suggested that Marlborough's A&P show could be rebranded the Marlborough Show and be broadened to providing an opportunity to showcase more widely what is happening in Marlborough's natural environment.

PROBLEMS/CHALLENGES AND HOW THEY HAVE BEEN TACKLED

Both Tim and Keren believe one of the challenges for Garden Marlborough is keeping the event focused on people, gardens and the environment. They note the risks of businesses using Garden Marlborough to increase prices for accommodation and other services.

The new committee has re-instated the Best Garden Awards which, while time-consuming and not income-generating are nevertheless important to people who might not go to workshops or tours and promote local involvement and camaraderie between neighbours.

There were challenges with providing bus tour transport this year as the event coincided with a cruise ship visit to the region. The organisers were determined to maintain the public transport-based orientation of the event and commissioned buses from as far afield as Motueka.

Maintaining the diversity of workshops is recognised as critical to their mission and the committee is aware of the need to engage young and old in the Garden Marlborough event. They have been making special initiatives with young people and children through the scholarship with NMIT but also through planting days and a school-based edible gardens competition.

SUMMARY

Garden Marlborough is an organisation that has become part of the fabric of Marlborough and may risk being "taken-for-granted" because of this. The judges were impressed by:

- The diverse range of activities that make up the event and how the committee extends funds and support to the other community planting and gardening projects.
- The commitment to gardening as a pathway to educating people to care for biodiversity and the environment as well as its' ability to attract world-class expertise for the event workshops.
- The huge volunteer support that has been maintained for over two decades.
- The committee's willingness to refresh and embrace new challenges. Examples include:
 - engaging with Māori which has been challenging but rewarding and has brought another layer of understanding on the unique resource of NZ native plants.
 - the reintroduction of the Best Garden Awards.

- The way in which revenue is fed back into the community.
- The focus on education through the event workshops but also through work with schools and the scholarship programme.
- Awareness of managing the environmental footprint of the event by using mass transport (buses) rather than private cars.



- Ability to engage and partner with a range of voluntary groups with reciprocal assistance between many local organisations and Garden Marlborough.
- Event management logistics - there is a huge amount of behind the scenes work to ensure an event of this size and quality runs smoothly.
- Local Best Garden Awards which allow the whole community to be involved and promote pride in the local urban and commercial environment.

SUGGESTIONS

- The garden and environment message could be broadened to people who might not get easy access to the event tours and workshops – is there an opportunity for increasing the engagement of disabled people in gardens?
- Promote and recognise the value of local community gardens such as those in Blenheim and Havelock be promoted or recognised?
- Continue the association with local Māori in developing and evolving the programme over time. This is improving cultural understanding and wider engagement by the community.
- Keep linked in with the Marlborough District Council biodiversity programmes and staff to utilise local information resources (ecosourcing guidelines and locations, guidelines for converting pine plantations to native vegetation, etc)
- An animal pest control workshop could be included as part of an 'urban garden' biodiversity workshop programme. Link with Picton Dawn Chorus group.
- A farm forestry workshop and/or tour.