

PG Award for Excellence

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The 2004 Prairie Garden Award for Excellence:

The Memorial Rose Garden in Pilot Mound, Manitoba is the recipient of The 2004 Prairie Garden Award for Excellence. Linda Pearn (far left) presents The 2004 Prairie Garden Award for Excellence to Mona Hughson, Yvonne Kemp and Marie Baron (left to right), three members of the original Memorial Rose Garden Committee, along with the Mayor of Pilot Mound, Keith Braaksma (rear). Presentation was made at a luncheon at Tavern in the Park in Winnipeg, Manitoba on Sept. 14, 2004.

The Memorial Rose Garden, Pilot Mound, Manitoba Recipient of The 2004 Prairie Garden Award for Excellence

A Memorial Rose Garden 2004 Prairie Garden Award for Excellence

by O. Mona Hughson
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The Prairie Garden Committee was pleased to present The Prairie Garden Award for Excellence for 2004 to the Memorial Rose Garden located in Pilot Mound, MB. This is the fifth year this Award has been given for Excellence in Horticulture on the Northern Great Plains.

In south-central Manitoba there stands a mound (elevation 116") that acted as a "Pilot" for settlers coming to the area in 1878/79. It seemed only natural then, that the village, which grew up nearby, should be called Pilot Mound. Pilot Mound could be thought to be just any other small prairie town. Not so! Pilot Mound has a Memorial Rose Garden!

It all began in 1999 when the town was searching for a special way to mark the upcoming millennium year. A decision was made to enter the Communities in Bloom competition. Despite achieving a score of 4 blooms (out of a possible 5) there was

little enthusiasm among residents to continue in 2000. It was then that town council and the local horticulture society chose to act upon a suggestion made by judges for the Communities in Bloom program by establishing a garden in one of our empty spaces.

Three members from the horticultural society were appointed to work in cooperation with the town maintenance staff and work and cooperate is what we did and are still doing! The town built a post and chain fence, installed five water outlets, wheeled in and packed the gravel for the pathways, put the edging along the pathways, cut the grass and pay the hydro bill for lighting and water pumping, etc. Horticultural society members and volunteers dug all the soil out of the pathways, have done all the hands-on time consuming work, i.e., planting, pruning, watering, hoeing and fertilizing - not to mention trimming off dead buds and hips.

A column in the local paper invited persons to purchase a rose in memory of a friend, family member, town founder, etc. Persons could choose any rose from the hardy shrub varieties, including from the Parkland or Explorer series. Our committee would buy the roses and arrange for signs/markers - all at a very reasonable cost of \$20.00 to them. A small grant from the Canadian Wildlife Federation and financial support from the horticultural society gave us a start.

It was simple enough to choose a site visible as one enters town from highway #3. Sod was cleared and broken, soil and 60 yards of rotted manure were added to build up and enrich the planting area. A soil test showed it to be high in all essential elements, but we were not ready to plant just yet. Pathways had to be dug out (by hand), edged, filled with gravel, packed and topped with crushed glass. Once this was done, we were able to measure and mark for rose placement. Each rose was given a space 5'x5' to grow and spread - and we needed space to work around them without being attacked by the next in line. A bit less space would be okay.

It is interesting to note that the garden space was enlarged twice before a single rose was planted. Our original plans for 150 roses didn't quite meet the need. All ground within the fenced area has now been broken and when planted will be home to 400+ roses. The roses are planted staggered in rows so that signs may be read for 2 rows from the pathway. Signs for the roses are made locally of charcoal acrylic base with vinyl lettering in white, excepting the name of the rose that is done in a mauve-pink shade. The little plates 3"x5" are screwed to an aluminum stake. Hopefully, they will last for a good long time.

Besides roses in our garden we have two park benches, a seated arbour, a metal arbour/gate at entrance and a stand to hold the visitors book. These items were all donated in memory. As well there are a small number of suitably placed shrubs, and a beautiful sign designed, painted and installed by a local artist.

Perhaps the greatest challenge we have had is the weather. It has been hot, dry, cold, windy and some years with little or no snow-cover. Some of those poor roses tried three or four times to start growing this spring, before giving up and then, at the beginning of bloom time, we had a visit from some rose weevils (*Curculios*). The challenge we face at present is what type of water feature would be most suitable and easily maintained. Our greatest success would have to be the excellent cooperation between the crew of town workers, horticultural society members and volunteers in general. When a job needs to be done, before you even ask, someone is phoning to offer to help. We have also been very successful when applying for and receiving grants, both local and otherwise.

The rose garden is a lot of both work and pleasure: work that can be therapy, both physical and mental and the pleasure of seeing a job well done. I like to go alone to the garden and tend the plants remembering the contribution each person

(acknowledged), has made to life in our hometown. It surely must be true that: "One is nearer to God in a garden than anywhere else on earth."

If your life is boring, just plant a rose garden in your town and you will be amazed at what can happen!