

The 2012 Prairie Garden Award for Excellence

was awarded to
Renata Klassen
(Saskatoon, SK) at a luncheon at the Travelodge in Winnipeg on Wednesday, September 5th, 2012.

*by Colleen Zacharias and
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Sandy Venton

Renata Klassen

The Prairie Garden Award for Excellence is awarded annually to an individual or group making a significant contribution to the advancement and/or promotion of horticulture on the Northern Great Plains. This is the thirteenth year that The Prairie Garden committee has presented this award.

Renata, a dynamic and energetic woman, is a retired school teacher who has lived in Saskatoon all of her life and whose first experiences with gardening began at the age of five when her parents gave her a small garden plot to tend on their family farm located in the Eastview area of Saskatoon.

In 2008, when she and her husband, Allen, sold their farm, Renata became interested in the idea of creating a community garden in Eastview. With the help and support of her husband, Allen, a retired University professor, Renata began by assessing the needs of the community and how they could best be met. This included meeting with representatives from Childhood Hunger and Education Programs

(CHEP). Dana Krushel, former community gardening coordinator with CHEP, recalls that, “Renata was the ideal person to work with on a community project as she has a lot of energy and vision. She was a great bridge with resources that CHEP had to offer.”

Renata enlisted the support of the Eastview Community Association to assist in organizing and managing the garden. Together they began negotiations with the City of Saskatoon and have enjoyed a productive working relationship with Karen Farmer, Community Consultant, Community Development Branch. Renata successfully negotiated with the City for available land and resources and then she, together with her team of determined vol-

unteers, set to work on preparing the soil for a community garden as well as ensuring an adequate water supply. Sherry Buller, a member of the Eastview Community Association's Board of Directors, applauds Renata's efforts in negotiating an arrangement for water with a neighbouring apartment complex.

By Spring of 2009, Eastview's first community garden on city owned property opened on Louise Street, located on the East side of the South Saskatchewan River.

Inspired by the great success of this initial garden, Renata worked closely with the Saskatoon Public School Board, spearheading the landmark opening of a garden on school-owned property behind John Dolan School, a school for children with disabilities and special needs. Today Renata continues as the registrar in charge of assigning plots and together with the volunteer gardening committee, engages the school children in growing food and flowers.

Renata's leadership skills combined with her caring, generous spirit, persistence and creativity has earned the respect and admiration of many, inspiring them to lend their assistance.

Two community gardens soon became three and currently three local schools - Alvin Buckwold, John Dolan and Pope John Paul II - have plots which are available for use by neighbourhood residents, including the many residents of senior complexes and apartments in the area. Immi-

grant families from Africa, Asia and South America enjoy the opportunity to grow fresh vegetables and together with their neighbours, participate in building their community.

The gardens have contributed to a unique educational experience for many members of the community. Novice gardeners wishing to become involved must first learn gardening basics and Renata has shared her expertise through workshops, writing articles and working alongside families in the gardens. Renata and Allen have also created raised beds to enable gardeners with physical disabilities to participate, creatively salvaging old garbage bins discarded by the City and filling them with soil.

Community gardens have the power to transform a neighbourhood and on behalf of the residents of Eastview, the Eastview Community Association proudly awarded Renata with "A Citizen of the Year" Award in recognition of her contribution to building community through establishing the gardens. Karen Farmer adds, "The community gardens that Renata has helped create and sustain have been tremendously positive places for dozens of families, adults and children, and for her community as a whole".

Congratulations, Renata, on winning The Prairie Garden Award for Excellence for 2012. 🌱

More information about the award and previous winners can be seen at: www.theprairiegarden.ca/award.html