

District VII

Marilyn Ellis, GCI District Director

Anna-Jo Garden Club members maintain the Anna-Jo Garden Park, the Anna City Park, and Anna's Veteran's Home. We planted two trees for Arbor Day and Earth Day, and went on a tour of the All Season Farm, a nearby organic vegetable farm in Cobden. Our spring plant sale was successful and we participated in National Garden Week by delivering bouquets to area businesses that we made from our own flowers. We had a booth at the Annabelle festival in June where we sold our homegrown heritage Annabelle hydrangeas and had children's crafts. At the end of June, we held a garden walk where we had music and food and presented our scholarship winners with their checks. Our park is now considered a Monarch Waystation due to the types of plants we have included and added. In July, we went on a tour of Flamm Orchards, and in August, we awarded the best in show award to the best horticulture entry at the Union County Fair. We had our fall plant sale in September, and this October, we made Morticia's greenhouse as our entry in Pumpkintown in the Anna City Park. During the year, we have had children's activities at both plant sales and at the garden walk. As if that wasn't enough, we also had an entry in the Veteran's Day Parade in Anna.

DuQuoin Garden Club has 23 members. We just hosted Harvest Thyme, an herb centered day for the District VII Fall Semi-Annual Meeting here in DuQuoin. Our speaker was Kim Rohling who knows all about herbs and encouraged us to let some bloom for the pollinators at the end of summer when other flowers are waning. She taught us about the herb blooms that provide high protein and those that are rich in nectar. We met for more than a few days and made popular one-of-a-kind centerpieces that sold well. One of the highlights of the day was the number of state and national awards presented to District VII clubs by Awards Chair Betty Sirles. Another highlight was that we were honored to have Diane Greenawalt, President of The Garden Clubs of Illinois, at our meeting. Of course, we gave her time to speak. Brunch and lunch were catered by Farm Fancy. In 2025, we gained two new members, honored Pam Swallers for 20 years of service, and submitted and received several state and national awards. We held our annual rain or shine plant sale; worked with high school service volunteers to clean and plant the community gardens and local Blue Star Marker landscaping; provided planters to local nursing homes; supported the Shawnee Forest with a collection for Plant-A-Tree, and helped first graders plant their grown-from-seed zinnias. The hot, dry summer was a challenge to our garden maintenance, but we persevered, and our flowers were beautiful. Several members took time to participate in and attend the Kaleidoscope Flower Show and the Gold Star Dedication, both held in Marion. We gained two new members this summer, who joined us at our programs on Earth Day, Herb of the Year, dealing with invasive species, and planting and forcing daffodils. No wonder our club submitted and received several state awards. We really did all of that,

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yet our focus all year seemed to be the planning of the District Meeting. It was a lot of work, but worth it.

Eldorado Garden Study Club has added nine new members this year and has had record attendance at our meetings. The club has enjoyed outings that included a garden tour and visits to a local peony farm and a member's bee farm; presentations from guests and club members; and community involvement with a children's library activity, dedication ceremony to honor first responders, and the annual truckload plant sale. The club celebrated its 79th birthday with another successful year and is looking forward to many more.

Evergreen Garden Club of Carbondale had interesting and informative programs in 2025 on orchids, moths, the American racer snake, and how to prepare artistic design entries and horticulture specimens for our first in a long time District VII Flower Show. Outings included a trip to Lake of Egypt and to club member Adriane Koontz's vegetable farm. Of course, we continue to maintain the urns at Woodlawn Memorial Cemetery and the Japanese garden next to the Carbondale Public Library.

Garden Gate Club of Benton maintains the plants in the pots at Malkovich Park and the pollinator garden located at the Rend Lake Visitor Center. This pollinator garden is maintained in cooperation with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the University of Illinois Extension Master Gardeners. In addition, members participated in two children's activities this year: one was at the back to school block party, and the other was at Halloween in the Reading Garden at the Benton Public Library. Some members of our club attended the GCI Annual State Convention as well as our District VII spring and fall meetings.

Marion Garden Club members enjoyed educational programs in 2025 by members and guest speakers on urban greenspace, tree planting, worm culture, taxonomy, and begonias. Outings included a trip to Gehman's Greenhouse for spring flowers, Taylor Farms for pumpkins, and Dutchman Lake Greenhouse for mums. We honored long-time club members on Arbor Day when we planted a tree at Fosse Park and held our popular youth activities at the library. We still maintain the flower beds at the fairgrounds and local parks, and we had our annual garden tour, a nice fundraiser, open to the public. Lastly, two major events dominated our efforts this year. They were the Kaleidoscope Flower Show and the dedication of a new Gold Star Memorial at the Marion Post of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Both were proud achievements of our club.

Metropolis Garden Club has 22 members who hold meetings with educational speakers and who contribute to beautification at the Metropolis Public Library, Veterans

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Park, the Massac County Courthouse, the landscaping around the I-24 Metropolis exit Rest Stop's Blue Star Marker, and a small pollinator garden at the Cache River Wetlands Center. Last spring, we held our annual plant sale and wrapped trees to distribute to grateful third graders. Outings in 2025 included a field trip to The Bee Barn in Paducah, a trip to Taylor Pumpkin Farm, and a Garden Therapy day of making pinecone feeders with disabled residents at Holland House. In November, we had an interesting program on Lady Slipper Orchids of North America by retired Botanist John Schwegman. We completed our year with our annual Christmas potluck after decorating the historic Elijah P. Curtis House, open to the public for individual or group tours by the Massac County Historical Society's Tour of Homes, always the first Sunday in December from 1 to 4 pm. We will be decorating Valentines for local nursing home residents and making birdhouses from gourds and learning how to propagate plants during the first part of 2026.

Pinckneyville Garden Club planted six trees on Arbor Day, and had our second annual plant sale that raised most of the money to cover the Blue and Gold Star Markers which were dedicated in an impressive ceremony on Veteran's Day 2025. We had a May Day pot or pole decorating contest that people could enter and were judged and awarded ribbons and recognition for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place. That was fun. Speaking of fun, I attended my first GCI state conference and loved it! This was our first time to apply for awards, and our club received state awards...not just one, but four! As a new garden club, we are encouraged. We had our first garden walk tour, open to the public, in June, and we already have host homes planned for next year. We had a garden club member from another club as our guest speaker on photography. And, in September, we were blessed to help honor the ninth annual Gold Star 500 riders who stopped for the night in Pinckneyville. The high school hosted them, the American Legion organized meals, and our garden club provided snacks!

Town and Country Gardeners began 2025 with a trip to the Crab Orchard Wildlife Reserve to see the plants and grasses native to Illinois. We planted another tree in the Benton Community Park for Arbor Day and planted flowers at the Benton Public Library and Capital Park. We had programs on flower arranging, the history of Franklin County, and a demonstration on preparing flowers to enter in the District VII Kaleidoscope Flower Show. For Garden Therapy, we delivered table decorations to the Benton long-term care facility. Other community projects included donating time and money to the Benton Public Library for their annual children's party. Our annual pecan sales, with pecans delivered in November, was again a successful fundraiser.