

Cumberland County Master Gardeners, Inc.

General Membership Meeting

January 3, 2023

President Mike Barron called the meeting to order at 5:31 p.m. at the Country Store, opening with the Pledge of Allegiance and then grace. We had 27 members and two guests in attendance. After dinner, the business meeting began at 6:04 with Mike's introductions of the other board members: Rhoda Hiller, vice president; Glenda Wisdom, treasurer; Rita Reali, secretary.

President's Comments

Mike said education is a major component of what we do. Members of the community come to us to learn about horticulture. But formal education is only one facet of what makes the program so successful. This past year, tending the Plateau Discovery Gardens, manning booths at festivals and hosting major events (e.g., the FLAG Show and the Fall Gardeners Festival) have all had the side benefit of building fellowship among members and within the community.

Informal education is key to what we do; he cited the birdseed-wreath project and working side by side with other MGs in the gardens as means to foster camaraderie and enhance the "teachable moments" the organization affords members and the public alike. "People come for education, but I think they stay for fellowship," he said

Mike talked about how much he enjoyed going to folks' homes last year and learning how they have implemented (or could implement) the TN SmartYards Program's principles into their landscaping. He invited MGs to come to his home this spring, to walk the property, evaluate what he's done and what he may be doing wrong and offer ideas for improvement. He mentioned doing likewise with other MGs' yards, citing it as an opportunity for members to get to know each other better, to learn and share.

In the past year, CCMG has hosted events that fund the summer-intern program. To keep doing so, we need to generate funds. Since we're not doing the FLAG Show this year, we're considering other fundraising opportunities. Mike said the only way for projects to come to fruition is for volunteers to step up and take ownership: to chair committees and take part in making these efforts successful. He also mentioned wanting to do more of the fun non-gardening activities the group has enjoyed in the past.

After he concluded his preliminary statements, Mike asked for comments from the membership.

- Someone suggested using the printed roster to track attendance.
- Brief discussion of updating the time-logging functionality of the TEMG website to accommodate introduction of new programs and volunteer opportunities.
- Discussion of having daytime meetings during the winter so those members who don't (or prefer not to) drive at night may participate. Mike mentioned taking into consideration those members who work during the day, but conceded far fewer of our members are working full time than are retired.

Gregg said five people were signed up for the intern class, which begins January 31. He addressed adding alternate times for training, and maybe getting some younger folks involved in the program. Extensive discussion of the MG intern program ensued.

Membership Committee

Margo Carroll said how intimidating it can be to be a “newbie” in the program, which led her to want to do outreach to the community, to actively recruit prospective master gardener interns to help the organization grow. She said among organizations, attrition accounts for about a 10 percent drop in membership each year, and she’s seeking ways to boost member retention. “It’s more fun with more people. We want it to be fun,” she said. “The membership committee is going to be about recruiting new members and taking care of the members we have.” She said it doesn’t have to cost money to build engagement and keep people interested – to reach out to folks who can’t or don’t come to meetings anymore, to keep them involved and active.

Mike said 20-plus folks have expressed an interest in the program; he suggested the Membership Committee call those people personally and invite them to sign up. He pointed out followup is key to building membership.

Gregg said past years’ intern classes have had as many as 30 students, but 15 would be an optimal number. He talked about the structure of the class: the first hour being classroom instruction and the second being more of a hands-on learning experience. Lively discussion followed. Julia Wood said perception may be holding some folks back. When she spoke to the Fairfield Glade Garden Club, they had the impression the class was heavy into Latin names, stuffy book learning and lots of tests. She said it’s important to convey the learning is geared toward “the normal homeowner.” Rhoda is their president this year. Gregg suggested she set them straight about that misconception. Ron Drechnik said he thinks the title ‘master gardener’ scares people. “They think we are know-it-alls and they’re scared of the title,” he pointed out. Mike said we need better communication about what the program is – and what it is *not*.

Discussion of how Nancy Christopherson took ownership of the KinderGarden program. Sue Partch said Nancy is in failing health and confined to home, probably permanently, and suggested members might want to send her an email: nancyofgardensandquilts@gmail.com

Rosie volunteered to reach out to members who’ve been away from meetings, to send cards and connect with them individually, in an effort to aid in member retention. She mentioned having quite an array of greeting cards (to which Ron effusively agreed).

Classes in the Garden

Rosie’s committee consists of Ron, Jewell Wilhoite, Julia Wood, Bill Morgan and Gregg. From the requests on past class evaluations, they’ll formulate a list of prospective topics and speakers. The brochure will need to be redesigned to separate formal classes from activity sessions. Target goal for first class is late February or early March, running through October. No decision has been made about charging for classes.

Budget

Glenda, Mike and Alan Baker met to go over the budget, using last year’s budget as a framework. A budget has not been finalized. She expects action to be taken at the board meeting on January 17. She’s accepting dues at the meeting. Dues for 2023 will be \$15.

Secretary's Report

Julia reported. Minutes of the November meeting were distributed via email. Alan Baker moved to accept the minutes as amended. Vicki May seconded. The motion passed unanimously on voice vote. Julia did a happy dance (to great applause) as she concluded her duties as 2022 board secretary.

Question regarding the Umbrella Committee – its description, function and getting minutes thereof distributed to the membership.

Connie Farley is looking into having a CCMG display at the county fair. Gregg said that's a great outreach effort, and mentioned the MGs' participation in past Friday at the Crossroads events. She discussed the Parade of Trees at First National Bank of Tennessee; she lauded the efforts of her committee and said Habitat for Humanity won in the nonprofit category again in 2022.

Breakout Session: Your Best Master Gardener Memory

Attendees broke into small groups to write their responses on sticky notes, then discussed them. Mike collected them and read some of them aloud.

Calendar

- Classes in the Garden Committee meeting – Monday, January 23, 2 p.m., Country Store
- Master Gardener Intern Classes – Tuesdays, starting January 31, 9 a.m. 'til noon, Country Store
- General membership meeting Tuesday, February 7, dinner at 5:30 p.m., Country Store
- Umbrella Committee meeting – Thursday, February 2, 2 p.m., Plateau Discovery Gardens

Door Prizes

Prize winners were Rosie, Marilee Lambie, Elaine Peters, Agnes Bosze, Mike Barron, Sue Partch and Linda Ferris.

Adjournment: Julia Wood moved to adjourn. Janet Russell seconded. The motion passed unanimously on voice vote (accompanied by the scraping sound of chairs being pushed back and footsteps thundering toward the exit). The meeting was adjourned at 7:17 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rita M. Reali, Corporate Secretary